

## SPECIAL REPORT

# How to make an office work

A great salary and enviable perks aren't the only things employees want, writes **Keeli Cambourne**.

**R**ealistic sustainability and environmental policies are a must if companies want to entice and keep valuable employees.

Sustainable businesses are not only profitable but help to create a good work balance and high employee satisfaction, according to a recent survey by IPSOS Mori.

More than 80 per cent of respondents said they would rather work for a company with good environmental credentials.

The survey also found workers wanted their companies to take environmental initiatives – from introducing simple things such as recycling programs, to more complex issues to do with reducing the business carbon footprint by reviewing travel policies and work-from-home initiatives.

The report says employees are more concerned with working for an environmentally conscious company than they are about buying products from one, which suggests they feel a sense of responsibility and association with their employer's actions concerning the environment.

"The impact on organisations' recruitment and retention, and the need to demonstrate green qualities to prospective employees as a key criterion to attract the best talent, should not be underestimated," the survey found.

Studies have also shown that when a building is sustainable, tenants are more forgiving of common problems involving heating, cooling and lighting.

The executive chairman of the Stable Properties Group, Ed Horton, owns a ground-breaking building on Sydney's northern beaches that has set the benchmark for sustainable building practices and employee and tenant satisfaction.

In a recent in-house survey, the building achieved a 100 per cent satisfaction rating among its generation Y employees.

"An independent survey was undertaken, with the objective of better understanding what level of importance employees, and in particular the gen Y group, place on certain

aspects of the workplace within the Lifestyle Working building, and in particular characteristics of a sustainable nature," Horton says.

"The results of the survey were both pleasing and insightful.

"What was evident was a sense of satisfaction in relation to the positive commitment of the building to harvest water and solar energy but also to encourage collaboration and flexibility within the building.

"The results suggested those surveyed had certain expectations probably aligned to a traditional building; however, they could have an influence on retention once people have experienced working in an environment which has been designed with the user in mind as well as promoting sustainable living and working."

Horton says the evidence suggests the companies that have moved into the Lifestyle Working building have better retention of staff because of the sustainability and environmental considerations they are now incorporating into their business model.

"We understand that one accountancy firm within the building had an average staff turnover of two people per month in its old premises and since moving into Lifestyle Working, the retention rate jumped to 100 per cent per month," he says.

"The overwhelming positive sentiment by both employers and staff is testimony to the building that was effectively designed and created around the needs of people to support sustainable, productive behaviour, in a responsible and flexible manner."

Horton sees a correlation between staff attraction and retention and a responsible workplace. "We are seeing evidence of companies making particular references to those in their decision to relocate to Lifestyle Working because of the sustainable initiatives defining much of the building's unique character. Staff opinion and indeed expectations are unquestionably being considered as primary in relation to companies' decisions to move to Lifestyle Working."



Staying power ... Ed Horton says sustainable workplaces improve staff retention. Photo: Fiona Morris