

Breaking the Bias Coaching for Equity in New Zealand

Strategies for HR Leaders to Deliver
Business Performance & Belonging



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For over two decades we've been working in the talent space in New Zealand. It's a dynamic, and mature talent market, with a strong base of awareness around respect and equity at the workplace. NZ is world-class in coaching for inclusion.



The report details how coaching is being purposefully embedded as a development catalyst – through one-on-one executive coaching, team/group coaching, manager-as-coach training, and coaching integrated into cutting-edge leadership curricula, to continue breaking down bias across the NZ talent market. Success stories showcase how innovative organisations are leveraging coaching for diverse and dexterous leaders.

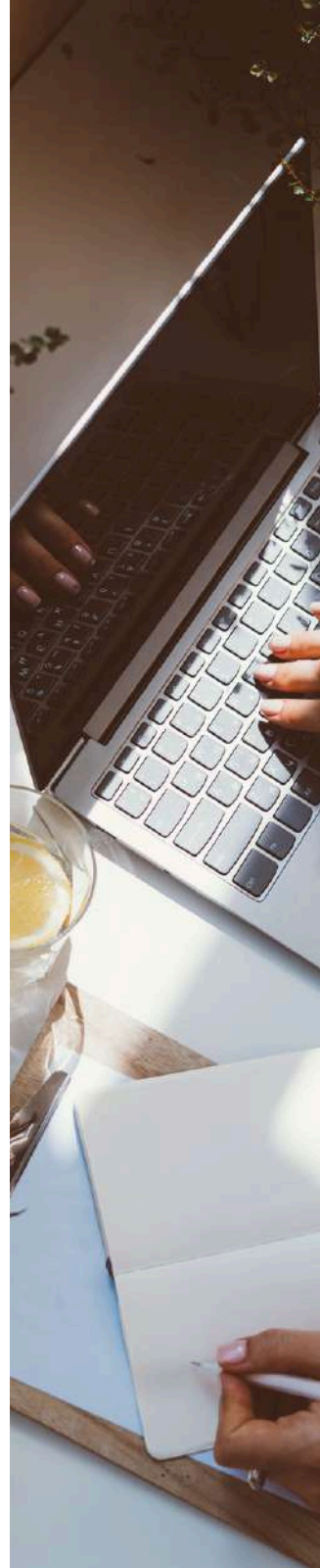
Effective diversity coaching not only fosters a more inclusive environment but also drives innovation, enhances problem-solving capabilities, and improves employee engagement. In an era where social responsibility and corporate values are under intense scrutiny, the ripple effects of such efforts extend beyond the workplace, contributing to a more equitable and harmonious society at large.

We thank our clients in this market for your partnership, and look forward to continuing to work shoulder to shoulder with you into the next chapter of the New Zealand talent story.

ALEXANDRA LAMB
Founder & CEO
BOLDLY

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The Impact of Workplace Bias in New Zealand

In an ideal world, every employee would be evaluated and rewarded solely on the quality of their work, the strength of their skills, and the value they create for their organisation. However, in reality, pervasive biases are still present in today's workplaces in New Zealand.

The impacts of workplace bias extend to both individual employees and companies. As Jone & Priola pointed out in their 2018 research, bias can manifest as overt harassment, being passed over for promotions, social exclusion by colleagues, or constantly having to monitor one's behaviour to avoid discrimination.

- ✔ A 2021 [Survey on Workplace Discrimination](#) by the [New Zealand Human Rights Commission](#) revealed that 16% of respondents had experienced racial discrimination, harassment or bullying at work. The rates were higher for certain ethnic groups, such as 28% for Asian employees.
- ✔ An earlier 2018 study by the same commission found that 34% of Māori workers and 30% of Pasifika workers reported experiencing discrimination, harassment, or bullying at work in the prior 5 years. For respondents over 55 years, the rates were even higher at 51% and 47% respectively, indicating a concerning trend of age and ethnic-based discrimination.
- ✔ The 2020 [New Zealand Disability Survey](#) reported that 42% of disabled employees felt they had been treated unfairly at work because of their disability.
- ✔ [Research from the University of Auckland](#) found that 23% of [LGBTQ employees in New Zealand](#) have encountered discrimination or negative treatment at work due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Tan et al., 2019).



Over the past decade I've witnessed more visionary HR leaders delivering sophisticated DE&I initiatives with the power of coaching in New Zealand. It's a world-class market where coaching has been used for the benefit of all.

SARA KING, MD ANZ, BOLDLY



The statistics above reflect the stories and lived experiences of marginalised individuals in the New Zealand workplace. Recent research has highlighted coaching as a powerful tool to aid individuals in overcoming the specific biases and obstacles they face. Through partnerships with experienced coaches, employees from diverse backgrounds can build resilience against bias, develop critical skills, boost their confidence, and craft strategies for shattering perceived limitations.

This e-book will explore the transformative impact skilled coaching can wield in addressing bias in New Zealand workplaces. The benefits of equitable coaching extend far beyond just creating more inclusive environments, though that is undoubtedly a moral and ethical imperative in itself. When organisations prioritise coaching initiatives aimed at elevating talent across all backgrounds, they gain a powerful competitive advantage.

- They position themselves as **employers of choice** able to attract exceptional hires from all demographic groups.
- They fuel **higher engagement and retention** of their current diverse employees.
- They unlock the **true cognitive diversity** that drives teams toward innovative breakthroughs.

The road ahead requires sustained dedication, empathy, and a willingness to bravely confront bias in all its forms. We're pleased to be a part of that future through the powerful catalyst of coaching.

Chapter 1: What is Coaching?

Coaching is a developmental approach aimed at enhancing an individual's skills, performance, and personal growth through guided conversations and structured interventions. It involves a professional relationship between a coach and a coachee, where the coach facilitates self-discovery, goal-setting, and problem-solving. Unlike traditional training or mentoring, coaching is highly personalised and focuses on unlocking the coachee's potential by encouraging them to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

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With a BOLDLY coach, the process is always driven by the coachee's needs and goals, with the coach providing support, feedback, and accountability.

Amanda OOI, Co-Founder, BOLDLY

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For staff experiencing bias in the workplace, coaching can be a highly effective intervention. Bias, whether conscious or unconscious, can undermine an individual's confidence, hinder career progression, and create a hostile work environment. Coaching helps individuals recognise and navigate these challenges by fostering greater self-awareness and resilience.

Through coaching, employees can develop strategies to address bias, build coping mechanisms, and enhance their interpersonal skills. Moreover, coaching provides a safe and confidential space for employees to discuss their experiences and feelings, which can be particularly empowering for those who feel marginalised or unheard.

Additionally, coaching can support organisational efforts to combat bias by promoting inclusive behaviours and attitudes among employees.



Coaches can work with staff to identify and challenge their own biases, fostering a more inclusive mindset. They can also help leaders and managers develop more equitable practices and communication styles, contributing to a culture of inclusion and respect.

**ALISA SUKDHOE, HEAD OF PRODUCT, BOLDLY,
NEW PLYMOUTH**



By addressing both the individual and systemic aspects of bias, coaching can play a crucial role in creating a more equitable and supportive workplace environment. The following chapters outline how coaching can be used to overcome both individual obstacles in career development, as well as systemic bias experienced by LGBTQ, Maori, Neurodivergent Professionals, and Female Leaders experiencing discrimination specifically.



Chapter 2: Coaching for LGBTQ Equity

The impacts of marginalisation of LGBTQ employees are far-reaching, leading to higher stress levels, lower job satisfaction, and worse mental health outcomes (Barclay & Ledger, 2021). At an organisational level, this bias results in lost productivity, increased turnover costs, and failure to retain top LGBTQ talent.

Research increasingly shows coaching can be a powerful intervention for addressing LGBTQ workplace bias at both the individual and organisational level:



A 2019 study of over 1,000 LGBTQ professionals published in the **Journal of Vocational Behavior** found those who received LGBTQ-tailored coaching reported a 35% increase in workplace self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and reduced burnout compared to a control group (Winter, 2019).



Researchers analyzed the impact coaching designed for LGBTQ staff at a Canadian bank. Participants showed significant increases in self-confidence, self-advocacy skills, comfort being out at work, and ability to effectively respond to microaggressions after just 6 months of coaching (Sarkar & Darnon, 2022).



A joint ICF & HRC Foundation study of over 300 global organisations found companies that provided leadership coaching tailored for LGBTQ staff had 30% higher rates of disclosure and psychological safety scores among their LGBTQ workforce (ICF & HRC, 2021).



Spark launched targeted coaching in 2017 for LGBTQ staff across New Zealand. Within 3 years, employee engagement scores increased by 22% and the company saw a 47% increase in self-identified LGBTQ employees feeling respected and valued (Spark NZ, 2021).

Coaching helps LGBTQ individuals reframe internalised negative stereotypes, build confidence and resilience against bias, develop self-advocacy abilities, and create strong support systems (King et al., 2008). BOLDLY has found that for organisations collaborating on coaching initiatives for LGBTQ staff, investment signals commitment beyond policies alone, fostering cultures of belonging that allow all employees to flourish.

At global tech firm Xero, an internal LGBTQ employee resource group launched a pilot coaching program in 2020 to support queer and trans staff in New Zealand and Australia. Participants reported the coaching helped them build confidence in sharing their identity more openly at work, negotiate situations where they faced bias or microaggressions, and ultimately feel more empowered and authentic in the workplace.



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Through coaching, we have observed that LGBTQ professionals gain important tools to approach bias proactively rather than reactively. They find ways to bring their full selves to the workplace. Time and again, by working with a BOLDLY coach we have seen professionals demonstrate higher engagement, retention, and innovation

Alex LAMB, CEO BOLDLY

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Chapter 3: Coaching to Elevate Multicultural Talent to Leadership

New Zealand's workforce is increasingly diverse, reflecting the country's changing demographics. This section of our report explores how companies can use coaching strategies to develop and promote multicultural talent into leadership positions, addressing the challenges and leveraging the benefits of a diverse workforce.

According to Statistics New Zealand (2018 Census), New Zealand's population is characterized by growing diversity, including Māori (16.5% of the population), Pacific Peoples (8.1%), Asian heritage (15.1%) and European and Other (70.2%). A study by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2019) reported that the top source countries for recent immigrants were:



China
(approx 13%)



Philippines
(approx 8%)



India
(approx 15%)



South Africa
(approx 5%)



United Kingdom
(approx 7%)

Top source countries of immigrant talent to New Zealand, 2019.



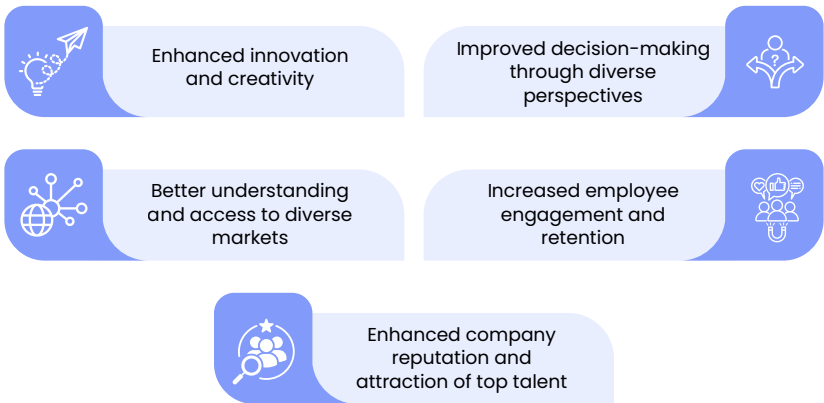
Professionals entering the New Zealand work economy from these countries bring a wealth of skills and experience to benefit the market. However they enter a dynamic landscape, where Maori leadership and Western styles of leadership are both recognised and

prominent, creating a unique leadership context. In addition, as New Zealand has an aging workplace, leaders are also experiencing generational shifts in how leadership is expressed. This creates a complex environment for new immigrant talent to establish their strengths and contributions. However for companies who are able to unlock success from this diverse talent pool, the benefits are real.

Challenges in the Talent Landscape:

The increasing diversity poses several challenges, as identified by Diversity Works New Zealand (2020). These include cultural differences in communication styles and work expectations; unconscious bias in recruitment and promotion processes; language barriers; underrepresentation of minorities in leadership roles; and integration of different cultural perspectives into organisational culture to name a few.

However the benefits of multicultural talent in leadership is real, when companies can proactively create the conditions for talent to thrive. Hunt et al. (2018) highlighted the following in their McKinsey report:



These benefits sound like common sense, but getting to true optimal performance in a multicultural team takes intentionality and skill.

BOLDLY has worked with several companies across the NZ market on the following initiatives to make real impact and skills development to enable teams and individuals to perform. Research by Ely and Thomas (2020) in the Harvard Business Review supports the effectiveness of these approaches in developing multicultural leadership.

BOLDLY's Group Coaching to Building Multicultural Skills:

- **Cross-Cultural Communication Workshops:** focused on active listening and non-verbal cues, and facilitated practice for participants in giving and receiving feedback across cultures. See our resource on building cross-cultural agility in leaders here: <https://boldly.app/blog/cross-cultural-coaching>
- **Leadership Development Programs:** tailored to address specific challenges faced by multicultural professionals. Our solutions often include mentoring from successful diverse leaders. See our resource on transformational leadership here: <https://boldly.app/blog/the-power-of-transformational-leadership>
- **Collaborative Problem-Solving Sessions:** BOLDLY's coaches work with diverse groups to tackle business challenges in real-time. Through this process they can encourage sharing of unique cultural insights.

Implementation Recommendations

Based on best practices outlined by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2019), organisations should assess current diversity levels in leadership positions; set clear diversity and inclusion goals; establish a dedicated budget for multicultural leadership development; create accountability measures for progress; and regularly evaluate and refine coaching programs.

By implementing targeted coaching strategies, New Zealand companies can effectively develop and promote multicultural talent to leadership positions. This approach not only addresses the challenges posed by a diverse workforce but also leverages its strengths to drive organizational success in an increasingly globalized business environment.



Chapter 4: Coaching for Neurodivergent Professionals to Thrive

While employers are increasingly recognising the value of neurodiversity in the workplace, a 2020 study revealed that 60% of neurodivergent employees in New Zealand have encountered discrimination, negative attitudes or lack of accommodation from employers (Diversity Works NZ, 2021). This bias stems from a lack of awareness, outdated stereotypes, and systemic barriers.

Neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other neurocognitive variations, often have unique strengths like out-of-the-box thinking, hyper-focus, and attention to detail which are immensely valuable if cultivated. However, they often face challenges in traditional job processes like interviewing, adjusting to new environments, and fitting social norms. If not accommodated or supported, neurodivergent employees may mask or camouflage their authentic selves, suppressing traits like sensory needs, stimming, or communication styles. This "camouflaging" takes a major toll on mental health and depletes energy that could otherwise go toward productive work (Weinstein, 2020).

Coaching can be invaluable in supporting neurodivergent employees to navigate these workplace challenges. BOLDLY coaches assist with practicing disclosure, deciding whether to request accommodations, and developing strategies to manage potentially overwhelming workplace stimuli and social expectations.

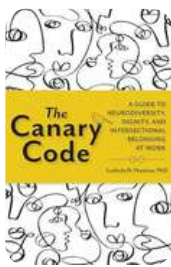
For organisations, neurodiversity coaching creates a competitive advantage by unlocking the talents of this frequently overlooked talent pool. Specialised coaching helps managers better understand and appreciate the neurodivergent employees on their teams. It equips leaders with tools for clear communication, effective delegation, feedback techniques, and environmental modifications to allow neurodivergent staff to optimally contribute.

Neurodivergent-led coaching models aid individuals in building self-advocacy skills, pursuing career goals, attaining leadership positions, and guiding organisations in creating authentically inclusive cultures. An analysis of a coaching program using these methods found that neurodivergent employees who engaged in coaching saw a 35% increase in workplace self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Minded, 2022).

As Dr. Brittany Kusumawidjaja, a leading neurodivergent workplace coach, explains: "Coaching empowers neurodivergent professionals to embrace their neurological differences as strengths rather than deficits. It equips them to navigate workspace challenges while bringing their full, innovative selves to their roles" (Kusumawidjaja, 2022).

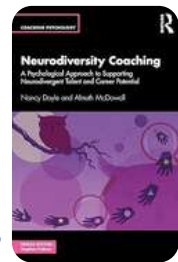
For organisations, investing in neurodiversity coaching amplifies their ability to attract, hire and retain this massively talented segment of the workforce. It creates a competitive advantage through diversity of thought and problem-solving approaches. By building authentic cultures of inclusion, employers can unlock the full innovative potential within their neurodivergent employees.

Whenever BOLDLY works with organisations on coaching for neurodivergent staff, whether this be 1:1, group coaching or business-wide initiatives, we encourage the coach pool and stakeholders to review these resources:



[The Canary Code: A Guide to Neurodiversity, Dignity, and Intersectional Belonging at Work](#)

[Neurodiversity Coaching \(Coaching Psychology\)](#)



Chapter 5: Coaching Women Leaders Through the Menopause Transition

Despite menopause being a normal biological process, bias and stigma around this life stage remain deeply ingrained societal and workplace issues. According to a 2021 survey by the New Zealand Menopause Society, 70% of women have experienced at least one symptom of menopause that has impacted their work, yet 90% did not feel comfortable discussing it with their employer.

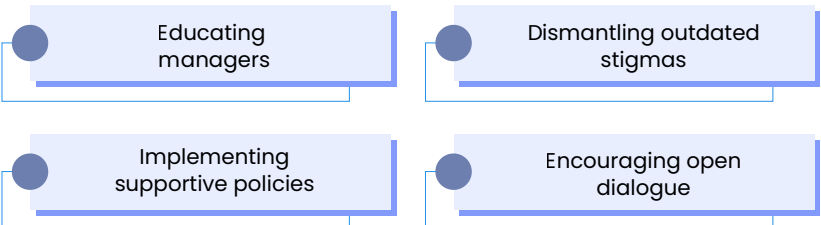
This lack of open dialogue can exacerbate menopausal symptoms and side effects, and perpetuates misperceptions about menopausal women's competence, memory, emotional stability and commitment to their careers. Research by Atkinson et al. (2018) revealed that even when aware of menopause as the cause, managers frequently underestimated and discounted the extent of challenges their employees faced.



This silence and lack of support during menopause perpetuates lingering misperceptions about women's competence and commitment during this transition. Many women report feeling a lack of confidence, concentration issues, and excessive fatigue. If not accommodated, menopause can derail careers and leadership trajectories for accomplished women at the peak of their expertise, compounding the gender pay gap into retirement and impacting long term financial resilience.

BOLDLY has collaborated with several organisations to deliver structured coaching journeys that have had a profoundly positive impact in supporting women leaders to manage their menopause experience while thriving in their roles. Our experienced coaches provide a safe, judgement-free space to process the emotional, physical and mental impacts of this transition. Together, they work with evidence-based coping techniques for symptom management, mindset strategies, and self-advocacy skills for requesting reasonable accommodations and adjustments.

Individual coaching is complemented by organisational coaching aimed at fostering menopause-inclusive cultures. These initiatives focus on:



Educating managers

Dismantling outdated stigmas

Implementing supportive policies

Encouraging open dialogue

This holistic approach positions companies to better attract, retain and promote women into senior leadership ranks rather than losing valuable talent and experience. See BOLDLY's resource on coaching female leaders through menopause here:

<https://boldly.app/blog/coaching-female-leaders-experiencing-menopause>

At Bank of New Zealand (BNZ), over 100 women leaders have participated in a menopause-specific coaching program since it launched in 2019. The initiative provides one-on-one coaching, group workshops, and resource guides to help women navigate the physical and emotional challenges of menopause while continuing to thrive in their careers.

Participants receive coaching on coping strategies for managing menopause symptoms like hot flashes, sleep issues, and brain fog. They work on mindset techniques to combat confidence dips or burnout, as well as communication skills for advocating their needs to managers (BNZ, 2020).

The program has been a resounding success, with 92% of participants reporting increased ability to manage their menopause experience and 85% feeling more supported and understood by BNZ. Women have expressed feeling empowered to have open conversations, request accommodations like flexible hours when needed, and maintain their career momentum through this transition (BNZ, 2022).

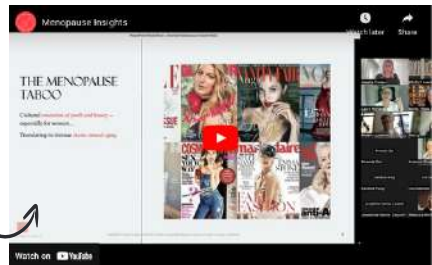
BNZ's broader menopause support initiatives, guided by coaching, include:

- Mandatory training for people leaders on creating menopause-inclusive environments
- Updated policies allowing reasonable workplace adjustments and leave for severe menopause symptoms
- Raising awareness and reducing stigma through events, employee resource groups, and communications

By proactively supporting their talented women through menopause, BNZ aims to continue developing a robust pipeline of experienced senior leaders. The coaching program's success has inspired several other large New Zealand companies to follow suit (YWCA, 2023).

See BOLDLY's webinar with Dr Laura McHale on Coaching Female Leaders through Menopause here:

<https://boldly.app/knowledge-hub/menopause-insights>



Breaking Down The Bias In Your Organisation

BOLDLY works with organisations globally to re-imagine their approach to combating workplace bias through coaching. Here are some specific coaching initiatives organisations should consider to help break down various forms of workplace bias:

1:1 Coaching for Key Employees:

- Offer confidential 1-on-1 coaching engagements tailored to employees' intersectional identities and experiences
- Coaching to build resilience against microaggressions and discrimination
- Develop self-advocacy skills for navigating bias and barriers
- Address internalized biases/stereotypes and reframe limiting beliefs
- Coaching for members of underrepresented/marginalized groups to accelerate leadership development

Group Coaching & Coaching Circles

- Facilitated group coaching sessions to share experiences and strategize around bias
- Intersectional coaching circles based on multiple identities (e.g. LGBTQ Māori leaders)
- Early career group coaching for individuals from marginalized backgrounds
- Leadership coaching cohorts for employees underrepresented in senior roles

Formalized Mentor & Sponsor Coaching

- Coaching to equip mentors/sponsors on effective allyship
- Matching program with mentors/sponsors for marginalized talent
- Reverse mentoring for coaching leaders to deepen awareness and empathy

Manager & Leader Coaching

- Required coaching for all people leaders at the point of promotion
- Coaching executives/senior leaders as ambassadors and role models for inclusion
- Group coaching for managers to cultivate psychological safety and belonging across teams

The key to shifting the bias systemically is providing coaching across all levels - from supporting marginalized individuals, to equipping leaders and educating the workforce, to facilitating organisation-wide culture change. A holistic approach embeds inclusion into core values and behaviors.

Customized to each organisation's needs, BOLDLY's approach to coaching can equip employees to show up authentically, accelerate advancement of underrepresented talent, cultivate true psychological safety, and dismantle institutional biases. BOLDLY's integrated approach to leadership development and coaching, helps clients leverage an international pool of qualified coaches, who can help leaders build capabilities to overcome workplace bias.

Download [BOLDLY Key Service Moments](#) document [here!](#)



Conclusion

While the road ahead is undoubtedly challenging, this e-book shows the catalysing impact coaching initiatives can have in addressing workplace bias in New Zealand. From empowering LGBTQ professionals to thrive as their authentic selves, to elevating multicultural voices into leadership roles at greater rates, to unlocking the unique talents of neurodivergent individuals, and supporting women leaders through the often overlooked menopause transition - BOLDLY's approach to coaching represents a powerful unlock for cultivating truly equitable organisations.



The advantages of prioritising such coaching extend far beyond simply checking a box for diversity and inclusion. When companies invest in shattering systemic barriers and biases, they gain an unparalleled competitive advantage. They attract and retain exceptional talent from across all demographic groups. They fuel higher engagement, innovation, and agility. And most importantly, they position themselves as catalysts for positive societal change that upholds New Zealand's deeply-held values of fairness, inclusion, and equal opportunities for all people.

By embracing coaching as a strategic imperative, New Zealand's leading organisations can help forge a future of work where every individual feels empowered to soar unencumbered by biases related to their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, neurological make-up or other traits. It is a future where diverse teams boldly collaborate in solving humanity's greatest challenges. And it is a future that must start today - one coach, one employee, one workplace at a time. The path will require sustained dedication, empathy and a willingness to bravely confront bias. But the potential rewards for companies, individuals and society are immense and inspiring. An equitable, innovative, and thriving future workforce and nation is waiting to be unlocked.

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We acknowledge Aboriginal people's custodianship of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing seasonal, cultural connection with landscapes, waterways and the sky world. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging today.

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