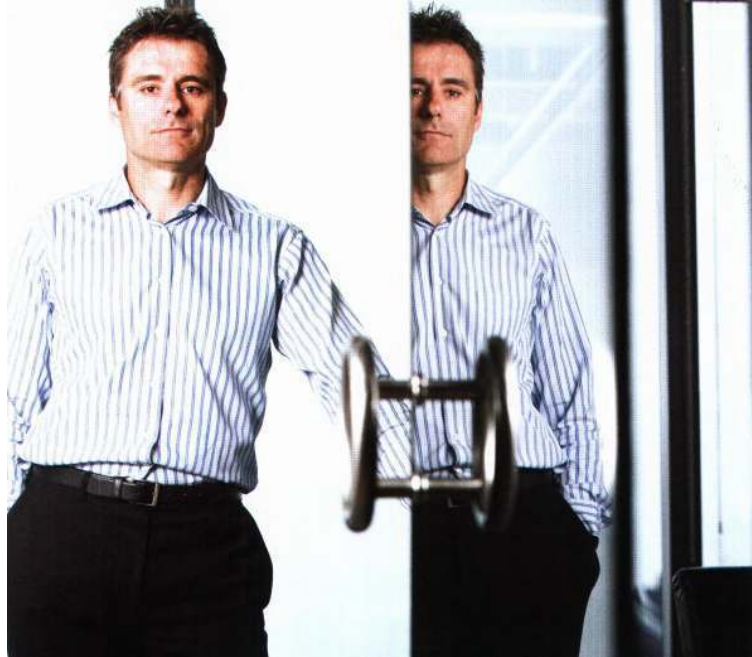




Working IT

Simon Tong is CEO of Paymark, which processes 75% of our electronic transactions. Think of him next time you pull out your card – or your cash. As Tong tells **Chris Keall**, his execs get fined \$10 for tardiness



I WOULD not take on a role that did not provide for a reasonable work-life balance. As a family man I see no benefit in working yourself into the ground, or asking other people to do so. There was a piece of legislation that says you have to offer flexible working. We've embraced that. With a few exceptions, like our call centre, sitting at your desk between nine and five is not necessary. It's about output. We trust you to do a good job.

I encourage people to take half a day a week to work from home (using Cisco VPN software), to give things a little focus and get away from meetings. I'm not following people all the time. It's a bit risky, but so far it has not caused us any trouble. Many people enjoy the

opportunity to take the kids to school or pick them up.

When I first had kids ten years ago, finding time to be with them and their mother really brought home to me the need to get organised, and what's important. Since then I've really changed my views on how you drive people. I still have high standards, but I think it's about making room for people to be able to organise themselves. You've got to believe that people come to work to do a good job, and that there can be some degree of self-management out on the floor.

When I arrived here three years ago, a few things were crazy. Some people had 10,000 messages in their inbox. People were quite



comfortable wandering late into meetings. If you put yourself in a position where you're in back-to-back meetings, making you late, that's rubbish. So is using your BlackBerry to check your email while someone else is talking. You just need to get yourself organised.

Now my executive team have to be on time or it's a \$10 fine. It's by my watch – there's no other time. The money goes into a jar, which now has about \$400. It almost got to the point where I was going to put in a portable Eftpos machine and get the money off people as they arrived (of course, they were quick to get me if I was late). But it worked quite effectively, because people don't like paying \$10, and now we rarely have a meeting where people are late.

So, we still have traditional meetings, but we've reduced the number of meeting rooms in favour of collaboration tables in shared work areas. Now people have a quick chat over coffee and then you get on with it, rather than meetings taking the traditional hour out of your diary. Once a meeting room's booked for an hour, people always use the full hour, so it's made a difference.

People's ability to organise their own day used to get taken for granted. But now we're in the process of putting most of our staff through the Personal Efficiency Program (PEP), which I came across when I was at HP.

PEP provides a great framework for making sure you're working on the important things, or

"big rocks", while ignoring all the white noise. We're training people to block out chunks of their diary time to deal with big rocks, and to realise that if they're not spending the majority of their time on those big items in any given week, then they're not being effective. It helps us put customers first, and focus on big projects, like our current upgrade of 90,000 terminals to broadband connections.

We've set a number of ground rules. For example, people should pick up the telephone if they want an instant answer, not send an email. One guy here only checks his email two times a day, at 9am and 5pm. Following PEP principles, I'm brutal about deleting, and what I respond to. All CC'd mail goes to a separate box which I rarely, if ever, review. It doesn't seem to make any difference to business, but saves me an enormous amount of time.

This team here at Paymark have been together and unified for a long time, and I've learned that's easier to achieve at a smaller organisation. During my very early days as a manager at [US multinational] Compaq, I'd go down to the software development centre in Christchurch, which became part of the company when Compaq bought Digital. Later I learned they'd take down the Digital signs before I arrived, put up Compaq ones, then put the Digital signage back after I left. They were a good bunch of people, but they just didn't want to be part of Compaq at the time.