



ANDREW HAMILTON

Andrew is the founding CEO of The ICEHOUSE, a business growth centre based in Auckland that works with entrepreneurs and business owners to enable their growth. In 2010, The ICEHOUSE was recognised as one of the top 10 technology incubators in the world by Forbes.com, the only such group outside of the USA.

1. In the context of your professional background, what does 'talent' mean to you?

Obviously it's about people. I don't look at it as anything that is uniform, other than in areas like attitude, and then you start to get into areas of competence. So talent for me means first and foremost attitude, and second it will be talent for the purpose or the task that's at hand.

2. Are you aware of any talent gaps that exist or might arise within the next ten years?

Business is not static at any one point in time. We are always on this precipice of 'Do we have the right talent for what we're trying to do now?' and 'What do we know is coming up in the future?' Sometimes you need really good people to go and create a market and then you need some people to put systems in place. For us, we absolutely have some shortages at the moment, probably around more systems, processes, discipline. All that is important when you're growing a business.

It's a bit like entering these tornado loops, where you grow and you hit a wall because either there are too many customers or not enough customers. You just keep spinning. When you get it right, you move to the next level.

3. How do successful organisations attract, keep and grow talent?

Attracting talent is more about the why of the business than the what. What you stand for and what you do is an easy way to attract talent. But it's a lot more difficult to keep that talent with you over time. Also allowing some people who are really good at starting up to move on, while the next group of people come in who are really good at scaling the business. It's very interesting – if you get a great environment with a good organisation and a great team, people will come there because they like the environment, as opposed to just what they get paid.

It's about how you can develop people, get them mentors, help them go on courses and get offshore. A lot of what we do is to try and get some of our younger people offshore, get them to

spend three or four weeks up there to find an internship or secondment and experience what that different culture is like. You've got to give them different opportunities to learn, and also you've got to allow them to make mistakes, because you learn more from when you screw up than when you're a hero.

4. Think about talent hubs around the world, what is cool and why?

I think there's talent everywhere, to be honest. When you really think about it, wherever you go, talent's there. Does it all coalesce into one place? In some places like Silicon Valley it feels very concentrated. But in others, talent's just there, you just need to go look and find it.

Where you see these vibrant talent communities repeated is often around accelerators, incubators, universities and co-working spaces. These days, there is a lot of co-working around the world – often a university, venture capital, angel investment and maybe some large corporate. A lot of technology web businesses are housed together and it is a really nice community buzz. In

New Zealand, we have BizDojo, which is a co-working space in Auckland and Wellington as well as our house in Auckland. The hubs around those are really vibrant. People are there, they like working together, so that creates a lot of energy.

5. Can you assess New Zealand's performance in attracting talent on a global scale?

A lot of people around the world like the idea of living and working in New Zealand. What has changed is, ten years ago, they liked living here but they never thought there would be much work. Now in the innovation space, you can do that. There are starting to be bigger companies like Orion Health, Xero, that have good jobs so people who really like coming to New Zealand now see business opportunities here.

Part of our challenge as a country is how you harness that talent to succeed offshore, to create more valuable companies. How can we get offshore talent to join our teams or our companies as we grow those companies offshore? Because culturally, you don't win in America by being a Kiwi; you win in America by being an American company. It might be made up of Kiwis, but it would be by their rules. You don't go into China and say I'm a Kiwi, I'm here to take over your country. You've got to play by the rules and then you've got a chance, so that's one of our big challenges.

6. What does New Zealand need to do in order to attract, keep and grow talent?

We need to build bigger companies. At the bottom end, the smaller companies, I think things are pretty good in terms of starting a business. What we've got to see is some of those businesses

getting really big on a global scale. I would like to see more foreign direct investment out from New Zealand companies offshore, meaning more of our brand in offshore markets. We need to see ten or twenty Xero's. The more that happens, the more we'll get a vibrant share market, we'll get more people wanting to work with our companies. We need to find ways so we don't just develop the intellectual property and let other people take it to the market; we just don't extract enough value by doing that.

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For those of us in our 40s, 50s or 60s, our job is just to help young people find a path here in New Zealand and offshore, build that expertise up, build that knowledge around how to succeed. We need more of those stories of people going and creating ventures too, because that's how you create wealth.

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

You've got to find your path. Everyone's different. Your life is ultimately a number of pieces of the puzzle. And once you work out whether you want to be scientist, a businessperson or an entrepreneur, whatever, you then need to think about what bits do you need to put on the board. For me, it's when you sit back in 20 years and say I didn't do one thing, I did a number of things that prepared me for this day.

I think that's a really important thing for young people – to get a range of experiences culturally, geographically and functionally to enable you to have the choices. A good example is the only reason why you work at a corporate is to learn discipline, and how the big guys do it. Have some fun, get out there – I would love a lot more Kiwis to go to Asia, because Asia has massive opportunities and potential for us – but only once we really embrace those countries and cultures, how they're different, and how we respect that to enable us to sell more products and grow more business.

Interviewed by Darren Zhang at The ICEHOUSE in Auckland, on 28 June 2013. Photograph provided by The ICEHOUSE.