



ANNE BARNETT

Anne is the Senior Commercialisation Manager at Viclink, a company focused on commercialising research and technology generated at Victoria University of Wellington. Trained as a physical scientist, she has transitioned to marketing and business development roles and to offer consultancy to the high-tech sector. She has a passion for bringing science, society and technology together.

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

Talent is about way more than just IQ. Talent comes from the experience of knowing when to act and being able to see opportunities. It is also quite inclusive. A talented person is someone who has a very strong awareness of what they are good and not good at, somebody who might have strengths but can acknowledge where their weaknesses are. That's where people who are truly talented lie because they build teams around themselves of people who can fill the gaps, or they become a part of the team recognising where those strengths and weaknesses are and look to do something bigger than themselves.

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

One gap I see in New Zealand, is a scarcity of strong, positive leadership and good people management. There are very few people out there trying to build something big or who are really

prepared to take things on and build opportunities. You actually have to generate opportunities for people to come into them.

We don't have enough people who have the skills or confidence to step up and lead, have a go and generate those opportunities. Those people who do, they tend to get cut down, or not publicly acknowledged. It's not really a skills shortage exactly: I think there's a maturity around an attitude to success that we don't have well developed in New Zealand yet. There are a lot of very talented people around in New Zealand but what Paul [Callaghan] was saying about 'creating a place where talent wants to live', it's actually about being able to generate opportunities for yourself and others. I've seen a lot of really talented people with a lot of experience come back to New Zealand and struggle because people aren't prepared to allow them to have a go.

If there's a lack in New Zealand it's a lack of leadership and it's an absence of a culture to support people who really want to get stuck in and have a go. You can't grow a talent-based economy if you're not going to stand up and celebrate it in the mainstream.

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

People's motivation and what drives them to succeed has been well studied, and it's known that money only drives people up to a certain point. Beyond that, people want to be stimulated, rewarded and know they are making a difference. Provide that environment – and it's pretty simple to attract and retain talented people.

To attract and retain talent, New Zealand should look to build good brands, have bigger-picture, internationally focused goals and have good leaders who are passionate about going after them. Then you'll get people flocking to work for you, because that's what most Kiwis who go offshore want. They are going for something that is big, has an international connection and flavour so people can feel like they are relevant. And we should be public about it, get out there and make a bit of a fuss. A classic example in Wellington is Xero. There's a buzz about town and everyone wants to work for them. Trade Me's got that, and the likes of Magritek in the science community too. Instead of being green-eyed let's take inspiration from them.

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

When I was doing sales and business development for Izon, an early-stage nanotechnology company based in Christchurch, I spent time at ETH Zürich, a major technology university there. Within ten years, they have gone from being an ordinary university town to having the most unbelievable entrepreneurship culture. All the people I met there who were my age were all recent graduates and many were CEOs of their own companies. It was almost an unstated thing amongst them that if you haven't tried to commercialise your research, then you haven't really succeeded with your PhD. A lot of that was achieved by putting in place mechanisms that encouraged people to think about it as an option.

So the coolest things about those entrepreneurship hubs is that there's a massive culture of 'do' and there are mechanisms in place to support and encourage you. People see others doing it, so it becomes vogue and cool to try, and that's what New Zealand needs.

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

The vast majority of people I know who have come back to New Zealand, have done so for the lifestyle, they have family here or because it's home. Ultimately, it is our home and they want to live here and contribute; they want to have meaningful employment. But they aren't driven here because of the professional standpoint, it's all driven by the personal reasons in my experience. I don't think we do very well at attracting and retaining our talent on a professional basis. A lot of it is about our culture; a lot of it is about organisations needing to provide opportunities

and having those big visions. If people don't feel like they are doing something meaningful and that they are contributing then they are always going to be here for secondary purposes. After a while, that job in Hong Kong might look quite attractive.

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

The thing to note here is that it is not just about permanent retention. It's about looking at the diaspora as an extension of New Zealand; those people are what gives us connections into globally relevant markets. You want people to come back, but actually you want them to go, come back, go and come back. It's about connections and bringing things back here again. It's not just about going overseas in your twenties on your OE then coming back and never leaving. Kiwis are always going to want to travel, it's just how we are, it's in our history and in our DNA.

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

The biggest piece of advice I could give (and this is coming from a person who has spent half of their 14 years after leaving high school studying) – is take every opportunity you can get your hands on, because so much of how you get ahead is through what you've done. Your experience and your networks count for ten times more than your academics ultimately. It's about who you know and then them trusting you to do a good job, which is especially true in the New Zealand 'hidden job market'. Only one out of the four jobs I have had came through the traditional recruitment. Every other job, including all the ones I really wanted, have come purely from networks. In fact, what at the time was my dream job, working at Izon, I got because I cold-called Paul Callaghan.

People who do the best are the ones who are creative, adaptable, can come up with their own solutions and take on opportunities, even though they might seem completely random at the time. So be adaptable, take every opportunity you can – any experience is good experience, it doesn't matter if you think it's relevant to your career or not at the time. Also network like crazy, and then you will get ahead fine. Otherwise if you sit back and wait for the world to hand you something, nothing will happen, not in New Zealand anyway. You've just got to get out there and grab it with both hands.

Interviewed by Darren Zhang via Skype, on 26 August 2013. Photograph provided by Viclink.