



GRAEME WONG

Graeme is an investment manager and a director and board member of various companies, including China Forestry Group NZ. He has held a number of high-profile roles in the forestry, agricultural and investment sectors. Currently based in Wellington, Graeme provides us with an example of a New Zealander who is working to increase this country's overseas trade and investment relationships.

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

I think of talent as the top 20% of skills in any given activity or profession; that is how I would describe talent. People who do not have to be absolutely outstanding – not the top 5% – but certainly the top 20%.

Any area – it doesn't have to be in their chosen field. I do not think of it as intellectual skill alone. I mean, 50% of talent is application and dedication so you can be intellectually average in traditional learning skills that people teach in school or university, but actually be very talented.

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

In terms of what I do, we do not have a big organisation, just two or three people in and out of the office. A lot of the things that we do are intellectually based, but where we need support I will generally contract in that support. The way I think of it is to get

the right skills, to do the right job, at the right time. And that doesn't mean they have to be fully employed by me. We do rely on skills, and as long as I can find the right skills to do what I want, then I am happy.

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

Well, a lot of it has to do with having a platform and therefore an opportunity for them to work on interesting things and display that talent and get a result. If we bring in a consultant, we would hope that they find the task interesting and challenging and derive the same satisfaction as we would. If we're trying to add value to what we do, then hopefully it is obvious to everybody who works on it that we are adding value.

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

You have to have enough critical mass, I think. Because talent is not only about having some skill; you need to interact with other talented people and get

ideas and help solve problems and all those types of things. Part of the secret is knowing who to talk to when you have a problem, because a problem is an opportunity. These days, you can talk to anybody in the world pretty cheap,

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via computer, Skype, that sort of thing. So you can be connected without being physically adjacent. So I don't think a hub is just a physical hub, it's the intellectual harnessing of talent.

Another thing is that you need a certain amount of diversity. You can't have everyone the same, because that doesn't get the different perspectives

and judgements, and doesn't add value the way diverse skills thinking about the same problem from different angles can add different perspectives and solve problems.

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

I think New Zealanders are pretty talented generally. The issue is whether or not they are working in a way that is dedicated to New Zealand. The answer to that is frequently they are not, because talented people can work in an international environment so they get attracted to do whatever opportunities there are in the world, and because we're so small, often that's not to the immediate benefit of New Zealand. Talented people are attracted to talent at a level that they can get to. And if that is not a New Zealand opportunity, then you can't stop them going off and doing whatever they are going to do. Whether they come back is perhaps the question.

How do you say 'We want you to come back'? You might say, 'I'm doing my PhD in London,' or 'Well, I've got this five-year project and it relies on a particular resource that's in the biggest hospital in New York, because that's where the leading guy is.' Saying, 'Listen, we need you in Wellington, come to Wellington' – how does that work?

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

You can have a playing field and set of rules, which relative to the rest of the world is favourable. You can have a set of rules that's attractive, that's specific to whatever the rules are in a certain industry or a certain type of

business. You might say, 'Well, these people need this type of thing.' So you make the rules attractive for them to come. In order to specifically pick on sectors or activities, you have to work with the competitive advantages that you have. If you build off your activity, then you've got to say, 'What's the aspect of technology and agriculture that we can develop?' We already have a competitive advantage in agriculture. Therefore, getting technology development to apply is achievable.

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All industries are a bit different. Some industries do rely on some sort of physical presence. But some things lend themselves to scale in a non-physical sense. Ideas are powerful and can be built on. You can't milk cows on the internet, you have to have dairy farms. But you can do research, collaboratively and in different places, so you have to find the intellectual ideas and research. That can be harnessed without having a physical presence. You can help people do that by connecting them, and helping them connect with other people in their field.

Probably the most valuable thing is to have a work ethic. If you have that, talent can be realised. Most people have the most opportunity to realise whatever talent they have in whatever field.

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

You have to be good enough on a global scale. So how do you find that out? You can't find that out sitting in Wellington. You have to measure yourself against other talented people in your field. You have to go overseas and figure out, do I have it or not? I think the issue for New Zealanders is, once they get up to a certain point, how can they then help New Zealand? So, that's a valid thing to do – tap into all the talented Kiwis you can find around the world, and figure out, now what?