



## JAMIE BAND

*Jamie is a 19-year-old, currently studying at Duke University in the United States. He has founded three business ventures while a freshman, is the CEO of the Duke student incubator, and has been short-listed as one of the Top 20 Under 20 Entrepreneurs. He still calls New Zealand home, and would like to find a professional reason to live here once he graduates.*

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

Talent's always been a buzzword, especially throughout my education. People, particularly parents, love to label people, saying, 'Oh, they're talented.' I've always found it kind of infuriating when people use the word for me. It just feels like it's an excuse, as if there's something about me, physically or whatever, that separates me. But really, what I think it is, is hard work.

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

I think it's a misconception that New Zealand has talent gaps. For sure, I grew up listening to stories about the brain drain and all these skills going to Australia, but in terms of skills that we as Kiwis have, I think we can fight on a par with anyone like the US on so many levels.

We need more visionaries, though a much better word is 'problem-solver'. Before going to the US, I worked in a

number of science start-ups in Dunedin and what I found was that we had so many scientists who were just so brainy. They had everything that any

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scientist I'd met in the US had. There was no educational difference or academic ability. What the problem was is, say you have a scientist in New Zealand, they very much focus on their

little niche. Whereas a scientist somewhere like the US, they think, 'What are the commercial implications for this? What's the bigger picture here?' We need more problem-solvers because it's a matter of using those skills in a real-life context.

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

Google has a thing called Google Twenty Percent, and that means 20 per cent of an employee's time is for them to do whatever they want – work on personal projects, work on ideas, work on anything and get paid for it. It's giving them an opportunity to say we as a company are not only wanting you to help improve the company as a whole, but we want you to grow as an individual.

So a lot of companies in the US are now adopting this idea of 'intrepeneurs'. So you have entrepreneurs who go out and they're risk takers and they find an idea and they try and build a company around it. And you've also now got this growing shift where you've got these things called intrepeneurs, people in

these big organisations who get to work on projects within the safety of a big organisation. There's very little risk, but they get to follow their passion.

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

There's a couple of places I just love. There's New York. It's just got this feel – you get on the street, you pick up this energy, everyone's got a purpose. I also like San Francisco. I really like Singapore. I think it's got the best mix, to be honest, in terms of the resources that it had available to it when it first started and what it's become. If you had to have a model, Singapore would be one of the best, especially for somewhere like New Zealand.

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

A lot of people just don't know New Zealand over here in the US. If you talk about New Zealand, it's like, 'Oh, Lord of the Rings?' That annoys me every time I hear it because we should be so much more than that, and I don't know what that is. It's just difficult when we've got this massive dependence on tourism as an industry.

I think part of the problem with New Zealand is that it has this identity crisis. Part of us wants to be touristy. Part of us wants to be an agricultural economy. Part of us wants to become a financial centre, and then there's some people saying we should go into oil. It's kind of a mix-match of everything, and I don't think we're doing badly – I think we're doing ok – but we've sort of become a jack of all trades and a master of none.

That doesn't necessarily mean that everywhere in New Zealand has to become a financial district; it just needs

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to be more defined. That's the reason New Zealanders go to Australia; say with Sydney or Melbourne, in Melbourne it's an arts city, if you want to have anything to do with the arts, you go to Melbourne. If you want to go to Australia and have anything financial, it's Sydney. I think we need to get more definition around exactly what places in New Zealand want to do.

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

I think we need to hold up and almost idolise those people who have said, 'Hey, you know what, I could have started a business in Silicon Valley or something, but I think New Zealand's a pretty great place to start up somewhere too.'

I think New Zealand has this disadvantage of being small, but part of being small is that you can still stay personal. And so, for instance, I'm not going to be able to talk to a CEO who's one of the richest men in the US, but in New Zealand I can approach someone who's worth a couple of hundred million dollars. New Zealand shouldn't try to be anything bigger than it is; it can grow at a natural rate, but the advantage we have is that we're small, we're

nimble, and that we can stay personal. Build on those personal relationships.

#### **7. Any final thoughts for young people?**

I'd say, one, talk to everyone you can. Honestly, I learn more outside of the classroom than I do in it and whether that's taking someone out to lunch to hear about their experiences or just sitting in a lecture hall and talking to the person next to you – network is worth so much more than so many things people consider right now. I would say travel, especially independent travel, because you learn so much more about yourself, you learn so much more about how other places are functioning.

This is something that I noticed growing up through high school, and it's one of those things that you don't notice until you leave it or until it changes, but New Zealand kids in high school, there's this perception that work isn't cool. It's cool to be that kid who just is insanely talented naturally at hockey, whereas it's not cool to be the kid who started off fairly average at hockey and just trained and trained and became so good. New Zealanders are fairly impatient people at that sort of thing. With some things, they're fairly relaxed and chilled, but with hard work and personal progression I think there needs to be this shift. And sure there is a balance, you can easily forget things like friends and family, but one of the things I always like to stress whenever I speak to a school in New Zealand is that it should be cool to work hard, it should be good to try your best at something, and I think if more people did that, then we'd be solving a lot of the problems we're talking about.

Interviewed by Charlotte Greenfield via Skype, on 23 June 2013. Photograph provided by Jamie Band.