



LIZ MACPHERSON

At the time of this interview Liz was deputy CEO for strategy and governance at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, working to advance government business growth policies. She is also a former acting chief executive of the Ministry for Economic Development. Liz took up the position of New Zealand's Government Statistician in August 2013.

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

It means the skills and knowledge that somebody brings to the role but, more importantly, it's the whole person, so it's about their attitude, their character, their commitment; these are the special qualities that they bring to the role. Basically you can have any number of different people in the same role, and depending on what is intrinsic to them they will bring something different. It's that complete package.

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

In my line of work there is always a shortage of people with good-quality policy skills, and that's the ability to think broadly and deeply, think about problems and innovative solutions that really work. Here at MBIE we have very diverse needs. We hire petroleum engineers and people with backgrounds in engineering. We hire people with good-quality economics degrees, IT transformation skills, people with

commercial procurement skills. We are also looking for people who can make policy ideas work in practice.

So it does tend to be technical skills, but having said that, in today's world technical skills aren't sufficient. When we are looking for talented people, we are looking for people who can connect with others, who are agile and flexible and are able to see the possibilities, work with others to create new opportunities.

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

It's about creating a work environment where people feel that their skills and expertise can truly make a difference, where they have the opportunity to grow and develop. At MBIE, we've got a really diverse range of very exciting things that people can get involved in. Fundamentally, talent attracts talent. So you have to think very carefully about the quality of your leaders, you have to think very carefully in the way that you create an environment where people are empowered to be able to come up with new ideas, work

with others and be recognised for their achievements. A work environment which acknowledges that you are not

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at work 24/7, that you have a life outside of work, is flexible, and allows you to manage your non-work life.

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

My first thought is right here in Wellington, the film and video games industry. The talented people we have here are actually attracting others. We've got the people with the right skill sets working together, creating

new ideas and actually setting up communities of interest where they get together and exchange what they are doing, building off each other's ideas, and that's seen as being okay. They're really fast-paced innovating businesses and individuals who actually enjoy that interaction. Wellington is also *a place where talent wants to live*. The thing you hear about Wellington is that people enjoy the lifestyle, the culture. So the environment, what people can do outside of work and enjoy is also conducive to having that talent hub.

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

It depends which industry you are talking about.

We could do better, and the ideas that have been generated at the moment around developing more innovation hubs throughout New Zealand mean we will more likely both retain our own very talented, up and coming innovators entrepreneurs and scientists, but also attract in global talent.

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

For us, we've got to be in certain niche areas. We can't be average – we've got to be up there with the best. Where are the areas where we innovate well and how can we do better in those areas? For a country that is far away from other places, our connectivity is critically important. The fact you can live in New Zealand and be connected globally via the internet, will make a real difference to people wanting to be in New Zealand for lifestyle reasons. We need to make more of the fact that we do offer the opportunity for a great work/life balance.

Our speed in terms of our innovation, the way we innovate quickly and flexibly is something we can offer as well. New Zealand still has a reputation as an innovative public sector for example. That in itself tends to attract people here. It is quite frequently the attraction of being able to work on large-nation problems, in a smaller setting. These issues are just as complex, interesting and challenging, but you get to do that in New Zealand with work/life advantages you can achieve in this part of the world. The public service is also seen as a flexible place to work, that it is possible to move around relatively easily between different parts so you can get a whole range of different experiences.

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One thing that can make a big difference for entrepreneurs in New Zealand and those thinking of coming here is for us to remove more of the barriers and constraints to people innovating. There are things like access to venture capital. Have we got an environment where it's not only easy to start a business, but where there is supportive infrastructure?

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

One of the most critical things for young people is giving them a sense of what the possibilities are and not closing things down and not getting them to make choices too early. While we're seen as a place of innovators, exposing young people at a relatively early age to the whole realm of possibilities that are out there is probably the most important thing we can do. Young people need to be prepared for a whole range of different careers over the course of their lives. So work placements while kids are at school; having people coming in and talking to the schools about what they are doing; using really innovative case studies when they are studying at school. During your university years, internships to allow people to see what the possibilities are.

Focus on the particular talents and the skills a young person has and then actually use examples from people out there and say – 'Here's this individual look what they did with those talents and skills' – and actually telling these stories. Telling more stories is one of the most powerful things that we can do. It's a way of actually lifting young people's sights and getting them to see the possibilities. I think probably that's number one.

Interviewed by Darren Zhang at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment in Wellington, on 15 July 2013. Photograph provided by the McGuinness Institute.