



## VICKI BUCK

*Vicki is someone that likes getting out into the community and making things happen. From 1989 to 1998 Vicki was mayor of Christchurch and in 2008 she was voted by The Guardian as one of the '50 people who could save the planet'. Today Vicki is co-founder of the Ministry of Awesome, an independent director of NZ Windfarms Ltd, and most recently, a newly elected member of Christchurch City Council.*

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

Talent means to me, mostly curiosity – and the ability to move on it. It's not something that you necessarily need to know, it's kind of just wanting to find out. The nurturing of talent is to me a process of not killing people's natural curiosity, and leaving the love of learning, which most kids actually come born with, intact. And then making sure people feel strong enough to take it somewhere.

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

I know when we look at the OECD figures they love us to study STEM subjects, so I don't understand why we make them all so boring – the sciences, learning the periodic table, blah! I don't know if I actually see the difference between philosophy and science or languages and some sort of coding. I'm not really sure that the divisions are so real.

I suspect that we don't know anything about what the world is going to be like in 15 years. My answer to it would be that I honestly don't know, because I don't know what's going to be in demand. I know that the new rock stars are those who can code and animate and do cool web stuff but we live in such

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wonderfully fast changing times that I can honestly not know what 15 years' time will bring. The world will be short of water, and food and extreme weather events will be much more severe and more frequent – so maybe resilience may be one of the great assets.

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

They have people engaged with them who are having fun being there and pushing the boundaries of what is possible and what they can do. They never operate in a climate of fear or command and control. Fear and creativity are seldom mates and a centralised control structure means that we use the brains only of those at the top and that's almost a criminal waste. There's a sense of the ability to completely explore what's in your head so you're not confined to 10% of your brain. There is the ability, and the safety to take sensible risks.

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

I think San Francisco is fine but it's really expensive. You need a lot of money to live there. I think China at the moment is exhilarating. The name means the centre of the world and it feels that way. But I actually think talent hubs can be anywhere as long as you have freedom and some fire and fun and some finance.

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

I think as people we do it individually extremely well. So many people have brought partners or others back to the country, but as a country I'm not so sure. I think 100% Pure is great branding but has been so badly eroded by the environmental reality that we have made it very weak. We can't even believe it ourselves.

No, I don't think we have been very serious about creative environment add-ons, even though we start with so many natural advantages. If you are in Beijing for a week you come back here and just stare at the blue sky and celebrate the fact that you can breathe easily. We have so much. But one thing that is lacking is a fair and reasonable capital market for start-ups to medium businesses.

We haven't even dealt with ensuring sites like PledgeMe, or any other crowd sourcing mechanisms can actually crowd-fund for a business, because all of the rules around your prospectus and investment memorandum have been applied to crowd-sourcing. Yet that's an amazing way for people just to get initial funding, and the fact that we haven't done it is appalling.

The way in which they cut the research and development tax credit was just daft. There seriously has to be research and development – if we want to find out new things, research and development is absolutely key.

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

The rules around capital are so tricky ... and I understand the rationale for that ... but we have to allow something

like Kickstarter for businesses in here and fast. I don't know why anybody would be a director of a company at the moment because it's just so tough. Some easier pool of capital is needed and I would allow for crowd-funding of start-ups.

There are a lot of people, especially here in Christchurch at the moment because there's been a lot of insurance pay-outs, who've got some money and want to do something, you know, share in development. There's no real structure or a history of owning 1% share in this business and if it goes under, it goes under, who cares, and you've only put

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in a thousand bucks or something. But now, if you're going public, you have to have a prospectus and an investment memorandum at least, which you would have gone through every line of with your lawyer, and if you haven't outlined a risk, you're at risk as a director.

I don't necessarily think talent should be confined to the private, for-profit sector; I think the not-for-profit sector is also an area where, in New Zealand, we've failed. Youth suicide, suicide generally, family violence – our statistics are absolutely awful, and to me that's actually far more important than people making money. I suspect if

you come from a background of family violence or any of those things, your chances are severely limited. The community needs to gather around that to make sure that the village does raise the child, so that that child has exactly the same opportunities so that talent isn't just confined to those who can afford it or who won the lottery in terms of parents, because that's just a completely unfair system. These are kids who need help in order to realise the talent they have, and so as a community we have to do that otherwise it's like not letting women have education. You just waste a huge resource of amazing brain power.

## 7. Any final thoughts for young people?

We are leaving them with so many challenges in terms of the destruction we have wrought on the planet that I think they need and deserve all the help they can get. So if you can see that you can help with something, offer that help. It does take a village and we are all part of that village.

Interviewed by Charlotte Greenfield at the Tradestaff offices in Christchurch, on 3 July 2013. Photograph provided by Vicki Buck.