

## Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Gary McDiarmid - Russell McVeagh



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545438/189934f3c3>

Under the leadership of Gary McDiarmid, Russell McVeagh is becoming a diversity leader in the New Zealand legal industry.

Gary, who is the longest serving CEO of a New Zealand law firm (he has held the position for 18 years), launched a long-term Diversity Project at the company, two years ago.

The project initially focused on gender diversity, starting smaller to ensure change could be properly made. It has now developed to include wide reaching policies, including increased focus on cultural and LGBTTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender and Intersexual) diversity this year.

Gary has played a leading role in developing and implementing the project over the last two years and has committed partner and senior management time.

The Diversity Project now includes:

- new and amended flexible working policies
- paid parental leave policies for all staff and new training and support for those returning from maternity leave
- a 'strategies for success' programme for juniors and a new leadership programme to embed inclusion in the firm's leadership
- staff cultural awareness sessions including a Māori and Pakeha Relations workshop, a Māori Business Engagement workshop and a Māori pronunciation workshop is coming up
- a formal structure for mentoring
- unconscious bias training for partners and recruitment team
- the firm is currently in the process of becoming Rainbow Tick certified to support the LGBTTI community
- anti Bullying/Harassment and Diversity and Equal Employment policies

- gender pay equity reporting
- strong support of Global Women including hosting and attending a number of their events
- a new alliance partnership with Diversity Works

Gary strongly believes in accountability. Russell McVeagh's board receives a quarterly report to show whether the firm have undertaken the gender diversity initiatives committed to, and as importantly, whether they are working. An employee engagement survey has recently been launched which will be a real indicator of how far the firm has come.

Gary 'walks the talk' of his firm's policies himself. For example, since Gary began in his role as CEO, the firm's representation of women in partnership has increased from 3% in his first year of management to almost 30 per cent currently (the New Zealand average amongst the top three large law firms is 20 per cent). In the last five years, women made up at least 45 per cent of the firm's graduates, 40 per cent of their senior associates and 50 per cent of their senior managers.

Gary says diversity of staff is good for business. As Russell McVeagh's own client-base is a diverse mix, it makes sense to recruit people that the wide range of clients can connect with. He believes moving away from a cookie cutter approach and embracing the richness of diversity, results in a diversity of creativity and ideas.

Increasingly the firm is recruiting people who can think and work in different ways, not just those with high grades. It's not about what school someone went to or what ethnic group they represent. The firm wants people who are smart, driven and interesting. Several of the initiatives have involved working with new groups. For example, to encourage a more diverse range of applicants as part of Russell McVeagh's scholarship and university recruitment processes they began working with Māori and Pacific Island Law Students' Associations at each of the universities. The firm wanted to help break down any perceived barriers that may prevent candidates from applying to them

Finally, Gary is also committed to wider diversity development.

He is part of a group of leading New Zealand CEOs and Chairs, called "Champions for Change", who are committed to raising the value of diversity and inclusion within their organisations and implementing strategies to actively promote the concept amongst peers. Earlier this year, he attended the Champions for Change Leaders' Summit which was held to set benchmarks and goals, and agree on measurement on diversity initiatives. The Summit also established reporting standards to be used, key areas of focus and work streams to be undertaken by the Champions.

He sees that Champions for Change is helping organisations to think differently about how we serve New Zealand's young talent and what type of opportunities, networking and organisational culture we need to be developing within our organisations, to help achieve diversity goals and result in lasting change.