

Walk the Talk Award Winner: Russell Stanners – Vodafone NZ Ltd.

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/137431538>

People work for people...capture the heart and the head will follow. Vodafone New Zealand is a telecommunications company and subsidiary of the London-listed company Vodafone Plc. Formed in 1998, it is New Zealand's largest mobile phone operator employing around 2,800 people with operations nationwide and its main offices in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

Leading the charge to be the most admired company in New Zealand, is Russell Stanners, Vodafone New Zealand's Chief Executive Officer, or Chief Story Teller and Communicator as he once introduced himself. A family man, Russell grew up in South Auckland with the mind-set that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed, no matter what their background or origin.

As CEO of Vodafone New Zealand, Russell is accountable for the overall performance of the business in New Zealand including people, performance and brand. He has held this position for 13 years, his tenure a testament to his strong leadership, impact and personal achievements and business successes to date.

"People look at me and think I'm a role model because I come from Manurewa. I believe everyone should have the same opportunity to achieve success no matter where you come from", says Russell.

Russell's deep, personal commitment to building a diverse workforce stems from growing up in South Auckland. His first, real introduction to diversity came when he attended University and noticed he was one of only five South Aucklanders in a cohort of 400 people studying a Bachelor of Commerce.

He has a family focused view and takes the opportunity to access diversity of thinking across the various customer and community groups he engages with, in order to build and lead a diverse workforce, truly reflective of the people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Russell is very deliberate about his focus on people. Driven by a strong sense of fairness and treating people with respect, he believes that to get the best in people you must invest in them. Vodafone has a strong culture and people orientation which comes through in Russell's passion and prioritisation of this.

Russell has taken some very deliberate actions to drive Vodafone to take a leadership position when it comes to Diversity & Inclusion. As an organisation the diversity priorities are driven by a vision to create a workforce that accurately represents the demographic of New Zealand and Russell sets a positive example for others to follow.

The Executive team at Vodafone New Zealand make up the company's Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee whose mission is to advocate for a diverse workforce, and encourage an inclusive culture that delivers value for customers and communities alike.

The Steering Committee is responsible for setting Vodafone's annual Diversity and Inclusion priorities, currently focused on Women, Youth, Māori and Asian communities, with an overarching aim to create a sustainable framework where diversity and inclusion initiatives will be driven by the voice and aspirations of Vodafone's employees.

In April 2014 Jan Bibby, Head of HR Centres of Expertise and Antony Welton, HR Director, appointed Kirstin Te Wao as Diversity Lead for Vodafone New Zealand. The full-time appointment of a dedicated Diversity Lead was a first for Vodafone New Zealand, and a decision which saw the company benefit with the successful execution of various diversity initiatives such as: Matariki events, a new maternity policy, a youth strategy and enhanced graduate programme. The value of this role was affirmed by Kirstin's permanent appointment in April 2015; a significant move and one which was encouraged by Russell.

There have been a number of notable achievements during Russell Stanners tenure as CEO of Vodafone NZ. Under his positive leadership, the business has established a strong Graduate and Apprenticeship programme which currently employs 43 Graduates and 19 Alumni. They have embedded a partnership with AUT University, providing over 90 internships to students completing their degrees. The benefits are not all one way though, the Graduate and Apprenticeship programmes enable Vodafone the valuable opportunity to increase the ethnic representation of their workforce comparative to Aotearoa. Perhaps even more importantly, it also allows the business to future-proof itself as an organisation, by identifying and developing the future leaders of tomorrow who will take the success of Vodafone New Zealand to the next level.