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KNOWLEDGE WAVE 2003 – THE LEADERSHIP FORUM

EMERGING LEADERS PRE-PROGRAMME

WHAT SHOULD NZ's DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS BE IN 2020?

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Wednesday 19 February, 8:30am

Introduction

- Emerging Leaders ...
- This may sound like heresy, but I really don't see what a piece of No 8 fencing wire has to do with my NZ. In fact, I think it's time we ditched that image and its notions of cobbling things together in favour of something which recognises our increasingly world-class technological prowess.
- Our challenge this morning is to consider what should define our NZ as we go forward to 2020 - to determine which of our traditional values we want to continue to uphold, and what new ones we need to create.
- I want to propose two core beliefs to underpin the society we want for our future – the first a familiar one, and the second, one which is new.

A “Fair Go” Society

- First of all, I believe that at the heart of what defines us as NZ'ers is a belief that everyone is entitled to a “fair go”, to a basic standard of living and an equal opportunity to succeed, no matter what their background.
- It's a compelling belief, it's strongly rooted in our past and it continues to inspire us in the present.
- What is becoming increasingly apparent, however, is that for a significant number of NZ'ers, and particularly NZ children, this is a hollow vision.
- Statistics like these are pretty telling:

- From the 2001 Social Report - 13% of New Zealander women reported that their household could afford to eat properly “only sometimes”¹
- In 2001, 4 in 10 Maori students and 3 in 10 Pacific Island students in Manukau City left school with no formal qualifications at all²
- And, whatever, the exact statistics, it is clear that we languish near the bottom of the developed world in terms of youth suicide, drug use, teenage pregnancies and youth unemployment.
- The danger we clearly face is of becoming a two thirds society –
 - Where two thirds of us live in our fabled Godzone, enjoying our clean green country and developing world class skills
 - And the other third – often Maori or Pacific Islanders - live in a world of poverty and limitations, with little possibility of breaking the cycle.

Individual social responsibility

- I want now to propose a twin belief to underpin the society we need for our future. I want to see all New Zealanders recognise, and accept, “individual social responsibility”
- At the moment, most of us hold the view that achieving equal opportunity is the Government’s problem. Whilst we’re appalled by the statistics I’ve outlined, most of us feel little personal responsibility for the situation - and indeed are affronted by a suggestion that we should. There is, many of us believe, a social contract that says that once I pay my taxes, I can leave all community and social issues to the Government.
- Well, it’s time to move on and put what has become a fairly unthinking excuse for inaction, to bed.
- Such a social contract can no longer exist in NZ, if it ever did. Our country does not, and is unlikely ever to, have the wealth necessary to provide the level of social services required. Individuals and businesses simply could not bear the type of taxation that would be necessary. Whilst we can legitimately expect the Government to do, or fund, the bulk of the work, there will be gaps that it simply cannot fill.

¹ Ministry of Social Policy *The Social Report 2001*, 84.

² City of Manukau Education Trust *Youth Mentoring: An Advice Manual for Manukau & Beyond*.

- I propose that we recognise that the buck stops with us – that we are all responsible, individually, as well as collectively, for the welfare of our community. Each of us, as individuals and businesses, has an obligation to volunteer our resources – time and money – to our communities, as well as making a contribution through taxation.
- Establishing this as a core belief will require us to develop a national culture which celebrates and reinforces individual – and corporate – social responsibility. We’ve done this brilliantly with our environment – what school kid does not now nag its parents to “reduce, reuse and recycle”? As consumers and citizens, we demand that businesses uphold rigorous environmental standards. It’s time to do the same for social responsibility: to celebrate our philanthropists like Stephen Tindall and others; to challenge our businesses to understand their roles and responsibilities; and to sit down together as families and individuals to discuss how we are going to play our part.
- If we accept this core belief in “individual social responsibility”, however, we must also recognise a further challenge. How do we ensure that the resources we contribute to our community actually make a difference? This will also demand some changes in approach.
- Most basically, we have to start seeing our contributions as an investment on which we want to see a return, not as a gift. Our personal social responsibility is not met by dropping \$5 in the collection box and walking away feeling virtuous. We must ensure that our contributions actually achieve the results we need by asking:
 - “What is the social problem that this money will be used to address, and how important is it?”
 - “What is the impact the organisation I’m supporting intends to have on the problem?”; and then afterwards
 - “Did the organisation have that impact, and if not, why not?”
- We must push the non-profit organisations through which most of us channel our community contributions to answer these questions for us. And we must develop new ways of seeing and comparing the work of different non-profits, such as the Guidestar.com service available for the US.
- We must also pay real attention to the health of the non-profit sector - is it empowered to deliver efficiently and effectively the results we need? There are real issues here. Many non-profits lack the organisational capabilities to grow to economic scale, to reduce the duplication and fragmentation that characterises the sector, and to achieve their full potential for social impact.

- It's in this context that I'd like to introduce Social Investors NZ, the Knowledge Wave Trust initiative which I've helped drive.
- Social Investors NZ aims to make a difference in areas of high social need by empowering non-profit organisations to increase their impact. Social Investors NZ brings together funders and professional service firms to provide money and business skills to high-potential non-profits. The non-profits it works with are helped to think big, to build organisations capable of delivering results and to achieve rigorous performance standards.
- Social Investors NZ is thus a vehicle for those people and businesses who want to make a difference to invest in our community, and to be assured that they will see a real return on that investment. We're looking forward to telling you more about it in the Community section of the main conference.

Conclusion

- Ladies and gentleman, there is no reason why the country that educated and inspired Peter Jackson, Team NZ and hundreds of others who have led the world in their respective fields cannot apply the same innovative and entrepreneurial zeal to tackling our most urgent social problems.
- If we cannot work together to achieve a society where every child has an equal opportunity to succeed, then we are a country that is hollow at its heart.
- Let us, as New Zealand's emerging leaders, send a message to this Leadership Forum that we are committed to taking personal responsibility for achieving a society where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.