

On recruitment ... from Chief Executive, David Hammond

20 March 2008

We asked Chief Executive, David Hammond, a number of questions to understand where he is coming from with recruitment at Ruapehu District Council. This was his reply:



Q. Councils are dull rules-bound places, and yours is remote. How do you get good candidates for jobs?

David:

I tell everybody that starts at our workplace that they have made the right career choice for them and their families. Not only do they come to the best outdoors area in the North Island, they come to a workplace committed to their career development and offering the flexibility to have a life. You can live in a traffic jam if you want, but what sort of life is that – even if you are closer to KFC! Living a life is biking home at lunchtime to see your partner, skiing in the weekends and, for this, getting paid a competitive wage, working in a challenging job that returns to the community, and with a staff team committed to your development. That's life, and that's what we offer here. New Zealanders are waking up at last – did you know that Auckland is no longer growing from internal in-migration of Kiwis? It's true.

Q. How big a deal is isolation? It seems like a real turnoff to working in Ruapehu.

David:

It is fair to say that I see some who don't cope. Everyone should weigh this up carefully and get the agreement of their partner before they accept a job with us. That said, for my family moving from the city – we have found isolation OK. A place is what you make of it and particularly the friends you make. Taumarunui is one of those friendly, embracing places. We used to get McDonalds every week and now we don't. Is that a bad thing? The kids have adjusted fine and we save more money now. My wife is an Internet shopper for the things we can't buy locally and that works well for us. Even my kids, who get pocket money, save up and buy their Lego on Internet! So isolation isn't the big factor it used to be. We can travel any weekend and tend to do so about once a month to treat ourselves, go and see something, and buy other needs – great fun! Overall, we're building a life here and seeing our kids flourish and I don't need a great deal more to be happy.

Q. 2007 saw a big change in the way RDC looks at retaining staff – what's driving this?

David:

When I came here there were various management vacancies that I could not fill internally. The reason was that the organisation had not sufficiently developed the next level down to cross the gap to higher management and leadership. This made me sad that careers could be stunted for years and families miss out on higher salaries because an organisation is not consciously developing its own people. I determined to make sure that this development apathy would never happen again. People would be properly trained. We're seeing the fruits of that now, a year on.

Q. Are you trying to make out that you're the perfect workplace?

David:

I wish. It is a great workplace – but I'm biased. We are also just your average group of people doing our best on behalf of the community. We have our problems and disagreements, but I ask that we be adult about these things. Teams are a strong focus here and I ask that issues are to be worked out in teams, as much as possible. One thing we do here that is really cool is have a commitment to taking on and training up High School students in the holidays. It keeps us connected to the community and gives a really progressive career option for local youth. The ones we have taken on full-time from this bunch are such high quality, and add so much life to our workplace.

Q. If we're talking recruiting today, we're also talking headhunting for senior people. Do you agree?

David:

We lost four managers to headhunting in short succession, so I am opposed to the method in general. There is a gentleman's agreement in local government that we won't headhunt one another's staff. This is not always honoured, unfortunately. In the realities of a tight labour market for technical and managerial staff, I have fewer inhibitions in targeting the private sector and outside the District.

Q. On Council's website there is a Values Charter – are values important here or is this a 'me-too' document?

David:

We launched the Values Charter in March 2008, and for me it's the real thing. The Values describe how we do things around here and I will only be recruiting people who are compatible with these Values. Don't get me wrong – I'm not after, 'Yes' people. But I think that if a candidate did not have a fit with the Values we espouse then, practically, they will likely end up unhappy over time and feeling like a square peg in a round hole. Also, if you have a good look at the Values Charter, you'll see that this Council aspires to be a contemporary organisation that equals the commercial environment in its commitments to service, efficiency, employee development, asset and service development and effectiveness of delivery. People who come to work for us are not stepping back into the 18th Century. We aspire to the cutting edge. I guess if a person was after a 'sunset' career without challenge, and wanted to ease up in a quiet Council, then we're not the place they're looking for, and they're not the people we are looking for either.

The Values Charter is printed below for you to determine whether you have a fit with them, and can see yourself in an organisation that aspires to these ideals:

RDC Values Charter

Our Purpose

To see this District prosper through effective management and delivery of high quality assets and services and the provision of innovative customer and community focussed solutions.

To prosper and achieve real growth we must:

- Earn the trust of communities, customers and employees by being good communicators and consistently delivering on commitments
- Actively manage and improve our high quality assets and services, with consistent commitment to better efficiency and effectiveness of delivery.
- Continue to strive towards a high performance organisation in which every individual accepts responsibility and is rewarded for results delivery.

We value:

- Delivering real solutions - a commitment to approaching every customer and community with the desire to find a satisfying solution to their needs, for a win/win relationship
- Integrity and credibility - includes doing what we say we will do, when we say we will do it and in an ethical manner.
- High performance - the satisfaction and excitement of achieving better results and outcomes than before and stretching our capabilities.
- Respect for each other - the embracing of diversity and enhancing of better outcomes and relationships through openness, sharing, trust, teamwork and involvement.
- The courage to lead change - accepting the responsibility to deliver positive change and continuously questioning and striving for improvement in efficiency and to deliver more for less for our communities and customers.

We are successful in creating value when:

- Our District is improving in prosperity through our positive leadership.
- Our communities and customers are acknowledging the value we create for their rate-funded investment and getting satisfying solutions to their needs.
- Our operations are efficient and effective in service delivery
- Every staff member starts each day with a sense of purpose and ends each day with a sense of accomplishment.

Good Luck!