

NZIM/Eagle Technology Young Executive of the Year

Grant Watson

PROFESSIONALISM, SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

His career is the stuff of corporate legend. Join McDonald's as a crewmember and become part of the senior management team. Except that in Grant Watson's case it's happened and he's now added the NZIM/Eagle Technology Young Executive of the Year to his list of trophies.

It's been 18 years since a young Watson put on his first McDonald's crew uniform. His part-time job was his path to pocket money and the cash needed to fund his commercial pilot's licence. Now strictly suit and tie and still only 34 years old, Watson carries responsibility for McDonald's entire operations function in New Zealand. That includes all 29 company-owned restaurants, field service (working with franchisees to measure and improve restaurant performance), franchising, operations development, restaurant technology, McCafé and training.

His role, says managing director Grainne Troute, reflects Watson's professionalism, skills and knowledge and the key leadership function that he plays across the international company's local business. "McDonald's has always recognised Grant as a remarkably talented individual."

For the past three years a member of the company's senior management team, Watson has notched up a raft of achievements along the way. When the New Zealand company decided to revamp the image of all of its 140 restaurants within just two years – an ambitious project never before attempted in any of the 121 countries in which McDonald's operates – Watson's approach was so successful that it has since been adopted internationally.

Similarly, when he took over responsibility for the McCafé business and its brand development last year, Watson quickly realised its potential and focused on developing coffee and food quality, and assessing opportunities for cost efficiencies. McCafé New Zealand is now the worldwide standard for McCafé worldwide.

Over the past two years, Watson's leadership has introduced 16 new franchisees – the backbone and lifeblood that re-invigorates the business – into the company. And the much-publicised links between McDonald's and sporting legends Hamish Carter and Sarah Ulmer can also be attributed to Watson.

His trophy cabinet includes the McDonald's President's Award – recognising his global 'best of the best' re-imaging work – and the Supreme Award at this year's Hospitality Standards Institute Excellence in Training awards.

Outside of work, Watson is no sloth either. Besides spending time with wife Belinda and their families he lists his interests as diving, tennis, water skiing, flying (he got his private pilot's licence at age 17), skiing, running, property investment (12 prop-



erties in 12 years), travel, music and playing the guitar.

Troute observes that, without overseeing every detail, Watson keeps in regular contact with his team, noting both morale and performance and providing regular feedback. "Consequently, Grant's team has a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities within the organisation as it relates to the vision of the business.

"Grant manages the fine line between building strong working relationships with his team members and expecting outstanding results from each of them. He has built a strong culture of accountability and results."

In dealing with everyone from restaurant staff to franchisees, Troute sees Watson as a considerate, courteous and clear communicator "with a wicked sense of humour". Watson, he says, has an "extremely comprehensive" knowledge of the McDonald's business and has the knack of communicating strategies and complex issues "without being condescending or confusing".

"Grant's industry and overall business knowledge enable him to develop solutions that add significant value to the business – such as creating efficiencies and/or growth on a sustainable basis. He

has the ability to think strategically and tactically, considering both the big picture and the immediate needs of the business.”

McDonald's financial controller Darryl Green describes Watson as a “dynamic individual” and “a leader of great inspiration and strategic vision”.

Watson's Otago MBA clearly kicks in when it comes to talking turkey with the finance team. From a finance perspective he is “amazing to deal with”, says Green. “He has an excellent understanding of accounting and financial management concepts – so good in fact that he can keep our finance professionals on their toes with his critical analysis and the questions that he asks.

“Grant uses this knowledge in conjunction with his commercial acumen to debate financial issues in language used by finance people. This ensures that there is always clarity with regard to the outcomes desired and, without a doubt, Grant's skill in finance has ensured he has the respect of the finance team.

“For such a young bloke he has it all. Grant is a balanced and formidable all-rounder destined for great success.”

Talking about this year's finalists, the judges said that exposure to three of New Zealand's brightest and most successful

young executives is one of the joys of being asked to judge the award “but having to select one amongst such an outstanding and talented group of individuals is a problem”.

“The three finalists came from very varied backgrounds but all three have already successfully launched their careers and have been recognised as leaders by their peers both nationally and internationally.

“Two of them work in organisations with very significant international connections and the third has had an international marketing orientation. This depth of exposure to international challenge, to a global perspective, and to New Zealand's place in the real world showed through in a maturity of outlook and conceptual ability of all three finalists.”

The judges said Watson clearly achieves well against international standards, but does so recognising and responding to the local and worldwide pressures for responsible eating, providing for salads and deli selections to complement and provide options to the traditional McDonald's range.

In the end, Watson, pipped the two other finalists at the post. **M**

JUDGES' COMMENTS

WINNER

GRANT WATSON

VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS
McDONALD'S RESTAURANTS (NZ)

This lad from Mt Albert Grammar School may have joined McDonald's as a part-time crew person but he's now responsible for McDonald's entire operational function in New Zealand.

Grant Watson is an executive who has clearly achieved well against international standards and has done so by recognising and responding to local and worldwide pressures for responsible eating. His exceptional skills would transfer easily to any other business sector.

Watson is an impressive young executive blessed with entrepreneurial flair and extraordinary management skills. And he uses both to very good effect. He builds strong teams, develops timely and market-tuned strategy and promotes performance across the board. Watson is a worthy winner of the title NZIM/Eagle Technology Young Executive of the Year 2005.



FINALISTS

SIMON DOIG

GENERAL MANAGER MARKETING
& SOUTH ISLAND MARKETING
MANAGER, SOLID ENERGY

Simon Doig has already made his mark as a key executive with Solid Energy. His work helps drive the company's growing export suc-

cess, and contributed to Solid Energy winning the Supreme Exporter of the Year Award 2004.

He has a track record of superior performance in achieving results and a solid understanding of management responsibility and accountability. His marketing pedigree backs up his ability to develop a strong team approach, focused on delivering results.

A former professional rugby player, Doig adopts a continuous incremental improvement (Kaizen) approach to team building.

He impressed the judges with his quietly spoken direct style and good grasp of managerial and leadership tasks.



THERESE WALSH

GENERAL MANAGER CORPORATE
SERVICES
NZ RUGBY UNION

Therese Walsh has developed her career in a tough and male-dominated business that in recent times has undergone significant change.

She is a key member of the Rugby Union's four-person management team, sometimes acting as CEO when others are offshore. She is a dynamic manager who will easily move upwards to a chief executive role, particularly one that requires strong advocacy and drive.

In her role as general manager corporate services, Walsh has found it necessary to revamp, modernise and consolidate her organisation's key corporate services – from finance and human resources to legal compliance and international relations. She provides strong leadership and creates effective teams – building on an excellent base of good management processes.