

NZIM/EAGLE TECHNOLOGY YOUNG EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

Brett Gamble

LEADERSHIP WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

Working in an environmentally sensitive fossil fuel-based industry, it pays to think long term. And that is precisely what this year's winner of the NZIM/Eagle Technology Young Executive of the Year Award, Brett Gamble does. He is a leader and a strategist who constantly thinks about the next 20 years for South Island-based Solid Energy New Zealand.

Gamble is Solid Energy's strategy director and, as such, is a key member of the company's senior management team. But while he keeps focused on the future, in the past year he has "made an outstanding contribution to the recent and ongoing success of Solid Energy", says chief executive Don Elder. "The quality of his work has contributed directly to the company's strong financial performance and also greatly enhanced its reputation with shareholders and external stakeholders such as financiers."

Educated at Otago University, Gamble joined accounting firm Deloitte as an auditor in 1993 before heading offshore, first to rejoin Deloitte in its Philadelphia office and then investment bankers Warburg Dillon Read in London. He stayed overseas until 2001 and joined Solid Energy in 2003, first as the company's manager of strategy and planning and then moved to his current role earlier this year.

Since arriving at Solid Energy, Gamble has played a key leadership role in the start-up and growth of the company's renewable fuels company, Nature's Flame – a biomass energy business that manufactures and sells wood pellets from renewable wood waste. It also manufactures specially designed "environmentally friendly" burners for household, commercial, institutional and small industrial use.

Gamble led the team that identified and then acquired the Nature's Flame business. Solid Energy has grown the business dramatically in the South Island in the past two years and last year expanded into the North Island and established a new palletising factory. "The business has strong export potential into Europe," says Elder. And in 2004 Nature's Flame was the joint winner of the EECA Energywise Award as the Renewable Energy Company of the Year.

According to Elder, Gamble leads from the front. "Brett is respected throughout the company for his strategic thinking and analysis, his business acumen and experience and his technical

skills, work ethic and determination to produce the best possible outcome from any situation."

Gamble has a clear vision of Solid Energy's future. "Most people think of us as a sunset business," he says. "We simply see it as a sunrise industry, with coal bound to become a strategic energy resource."

Strategic thinking is the core of Gamble's role at the company. And that's why Solid Energy considers him one of New Zealand's most outstanding and promising young executives. "Perhaps contrary to external perception Solid Energy is a reasonably diverse company operating in and investigating a wide range of projects in a variety of New Zealand-based and overseas markets," says Elder. And because of its long investment cycles the company's strategic thinking and planning is done formally over a 20-year horizon.

But, says Elder, "given the world's changing energy markets and developing environmental expectations, some of our strategic analysis is over a period of 50 to 100 years". Gamble plays a key leadership role in investigating and analysing Solid Energy's responses to external drivers, to a post-Kyoto energy environment and in contributing to New Zealand's new energy solutions such as biomass, coal seam gas, coal-derived transport fuels and hydrogen-based fuels.

Being a senior executive in an energy company like Solid Energy is not always easy. "You need to keep up the morale in a company that is so often targeted negatively by the media and pressure groups," he adds. "But working on New Zealand future energy needs is my passion. I am passionate about the company and I am passionate about New Zealand."

Gamble enjoys leadership. And he has since he was head prefect at his secondary school. His style is, he says, inclusive rather than dictatorial and he works hard to achieve buy in from his team. "I focus on recruiting exceptional people and then ensure a high level of empowerment, which needs to be supported by strong two-way communication. I set very high standards.

"Ultimately, my role and personal contribution are all focused on building future value for Solid Energy while reducing risks that may prevent the business achieving this," he says. "And I'd like to be remembered for helping to take the blinkers off people in terms of how they use and think about coal."



JUDGES' COMMENTS

WINNER

BRETT GAMBLE
STRATEGY DIRECTOR
SOLID ENERGY NEW ZEALAND

This year's Young Executive of the Year Award judges were impressed with Brett Gamble's inclusive management style, his ability to see the bigger picture and wider business opportunities, and with his "intellectual robustness".

Under Gamble's oversight, strategic planning has become an integral part of Solid Energy's management process, providing the corporation with a single vision and strong accountability throughout the business. This vision has been supported by strong decision-making support tools and can be tested through sophisticated simulations.

This "Southern man" had, they said, focused on broadening the scope of Solid Energy's operations. Gamble, an Otago University commerce graduate, has been responsible for championing Solid Energy's strategic planning processes and identifying opportunities for the enterprise as it moves from its traditional coal mining and distribution base. He has also co-led an acquisition that delivered rapid growth to the business and the investigation of opportunities for the clean use of coal has been one of the strategic issues under Gamble's wing.

FINALIST

JONNETTE ADAMS
PROJECT MANAGER
TRANSIT NEW ZEALAND

Jonnette Adams is the smiling public face of Wellington's inner-city motorway bypass project for Transit New Zealand. Adams had, said the judges, done much to change the public's negative impression of the scheme.

Adams is responsible for a spend of over \$50 million. It is also a controversial project that has been very closely "over-sighted" by the wider community, including a well-established and connected protest group.

The scheme was recently awarded Transit's Best Large Project Award – an achievement that reflects well on all involved and particularly on Adams' leadership and management skills. She has, said the judges, good broad management ability, a high level of engineering skill, vision and an ability to motivate her team in a calm and firm manner. Her communication skills were also recently recognised by an award from IPENZ.



FINALIST

JASON NEW
REGIONAL MANAGER, AUCKLAND
WESTPAC BANKING GROUP

Jason New is a natural and innovative leader who has recently been appointed to the newly created role as Westpac's Auckland regional manager. According to the judges, he impressed as a leader who creates energy in his team with clear expectations, holding people to account and supporting them with training and skill development.

New demonstrates creativity and enthusiasm and works with the wider bank team to deliver strong operational performance for his region.

A past national football representative, New has continued his enthusiasm for sport and community projects. He is engaged with a number of projects that meet clear community needs – increasing the number of blood donors and supporting low decile schools – that are linked to Westpac's community activities. "Jason is a strong motivator who has a good feel for his fellow man," the judges said.

