

Tapping New Zealand's Mood for Success in 2010

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"Being ambitious for New Zealand" was the theme of John Key as well as the National Party in the 2008 election campaign. Continued high poll results through 2009 for National and John Key as Prime Minister reflect our acceptance that ambitious action was not possible in 2009, no doubt because the global financial crisis morphed into a relatively deep economic recession.

Looking forward, the wisdom of the masses, as captured in the UMR Annual Review of the Mood of the Nation, indicates that 2010 will be a good year here in New Zealand. The survey results recorded the sharpest turnaround in public expectations in its history to the second highest level seen in nearly 20 years and last recorded a decade ago. This turn around is hardly surprising coming as it does from such a low level of optimism a year ago. During the last two decades there have been three other similar low levels of optimism as last year, but never a turnaround in one year of 24 percentage points.

Despite this level of optimism it seems some of National's traditional support base is concerned that the Government's apparent lack of policy ambition means it is unlikely to contribute much to the level of success in 2010 and beyond. The political question is whether the Government can move from reactive to proactive policy and carry middle New Zealand with them?

2010 is year two in our three year election cycle. My pick is that Government announcements and actions leading up to the 2010 Budget, and how well they communicate and implement these programmes, will determine whether this government is perceived at the next elections to have set in train a step change in ambition or not.

However, I hope none of us are sitting on our hands waiting for action from the Government. We need to be ambitious for ourselves in 2010, with or without encouragement from the Government, through a mix of changed incentives or penalties.

New Year is traditionally a time for personal resolutions. Whether our resolutions will remain just that or be implemented and successfully

driven by our ambitions depends on whether we are already good practitioners of self-management, or developing this competency becomes an integral part of our new resolutions.

The evidence is quite compelling. Self-management is a key foundation for personal success at any time, not just in 2010. So much so, that it is one of five key competencies integral to the new school curriculum, which comes formally into effect in 2010.

Our children are to learn the importance of self-management and how it is associated with self-motivation and a "can-do" attitude. As Kiwis, we like to pride ourselves on having a can do attitude. Our challenge in 2010 is to reflect this more in our behaviour and our habits.

Our children will also learn that the competency of self-management is the foundation for the establishment of personal goals, making plans, managing projects and setting high standards. What a great example for us as adults to do the same in 2010.

We know that to achieve a more sustainable economy in 2010 we need more confidence across our businesses that they can be excellent and internationally competitive, even if they only serve their local community. Yes, a more competitive exchange rate would help our export success, but learning to succeed despite the exchange rate should be our goal. For that, research indicates we need both operational and cultural excellence in our businesses.

Operational excellence is vitally important, especially for more capital intensive businesses. However, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for business success. Self interest always wins out. If we want to gain the benefits from hiring talented people this requires a corporate culture of excellence. That is easy to check out by simply surveying whether an enterprise has a high degree of engagement from its people.

Whether we step up our degree of ambition and good management at a personal, enterprise and country level in 2010 will determine whether it is an even better year than the Mood of the Nation suggests or not. I hope you join me in ensuring it is.