

★ Cassius Kuresa: A Day in the Life

Cassius Kuresa spoke with Jean Ottley about his pathway into his present role as Chair of Va Pasifika, the Pasifika staff network at Careers New Zealand, and his mission to improve the career system for Pacific youth.

Cassius Kuresa's parents came to New Zealand from Samoa in the early 1970s to give their children more opportunities and education. Cassius was born in Porirua and attended Porirua College. He did well at school however left in 1991 with no concept of 'career' and no clear idea about what he might do next.

"My parents meant well but they didn't have the right information to be able to influence us. Their only idea of a good job was to be a doctor or a nurse, but they didn't know how to get us there."

After seventh form, Cassius followed his friends into a series of TOPs courses (Training Opportunities Programme). 'It was an easy form of education and a way to get paid' he says. Next stop was a job at the Mitsubishi Motors factory, which in the mid-1990s was the largest employer in the Porirua region.

A turning point came when Mitsubishi, seeing his potential, sent Cassius on the week-long Rotary Youth Leadership Award Programme in Taranaki. "I was the only Pacific Islander from a factory, put in with all these confident European kids." It was a foreign and intimidating environment but Cassius thrived on it. "It was something different. It changed my way of thinking."

The experience also set a pattern for Cassius of "taking risks", that is, seeking out opportunities to challenge himself and learn. He left the Mitsubishi plant and embarked on a two year Health Promotion pilot training programme under the Health Funding Authority. Again he was able to earn while he learned. "I had good tutors that made the learning fun and relevant."

After completing the programme Cassius had a stint in a call centre, then was offered a Health Educator position at Regional Public Health in Wellington, progressing to an advisor role. It was 1999 and he had found his niche, Public Health. "I had discovered my passion for youth and for my people."

Cassius stepped out of Regional Public Health for two years to set up the Healthy Eating, Health Action (HEHA) project for Porirua City Council. He enjoyed the opportunity to start something that would benefit the community. Back at Regional Public Health and progressing to the role of Pacific Strategic Advisor and then Project Manager, he developed his project management skills through a series of training opportunities offered by the organisation. "I enjoyed being given a target, resources, and a timeframe and then making it happen." His deep understanding and experience of community engagement led Cassius to his present employer, Careers New Zealand.

Taking another 'risk,' Cassius successfully interviewed for a job as a Community Engagement Facilitator at Careers New Zealand and started work on an initiative called Career Capable Communities, building Career Capable Porirua.



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Cassius has supported the development of career resources and programmes for Pacific peoples. Initiatives like PAVE, a family engagement and empowerment approach, is an effective way to build the career development knowledge and skills of aiga (extended families) in Pasifika communities. It relies on engaging community leaders as career mentors, focusing on community values and reaching families through the community that they know and trust.

Stakeholder engagement involves “building relationships to the point where people are comfortable to work with me.” Cassius wants to see an improvement in the career system for Pacific people, “especially for Pacific youth so that they see a pathway for themselves.”

Cassius and his colleagues are focussed on ensuring that career information is well presented, relevant and tailored to priority groups, and there is a ‘feedback loop’ to keep up with changes, especially in digital technology. “All our kids are on social media. We need to communicate through channels that are appropriate for our young people.” Developing digital products and services to increase Careers New Zealand’s reach to Pasifika is a key deliverable.

Cassius talks about “Va” – the space that relates people with everything. “When we “teu le va” we resolve and maintain the relationship.”

Va Pasifika is the name of the Pacific staff network at Careers New Zealand, of which Cassius is the elected Chair. Being involved in establishing the Va Pasifika network at Careers New Zealand was a challenge for Cassius. Unique among government departments and agencies, the Māori network chair and the Pasifika network chair at Careers New Zealand are part of the Senior Leadership Team.

There is an opportunity to develop Pacific cultural competencies among the staff at Careers New Zealand. “It’s all good to pump out resources” he explains “you also have to make sure our organisation is aware and informed working in the Pacific space.”

At Careers New Zealand Cassius has found a name for his risk taking behaviour in the world of work. “Career Development is what I’ve done,” he says. “It’s about ensuring that you are learning and challenging yourself as you grow, upskilling, so you don’t get bored.

“Now that I understand what a career is, I am confident to pursue new opportunities when they come about.”



Cassius Kuresa. Chair, Va Pasifika, Senior Leadership Team - Careers New Zealand.

Editor’s note:

In October, Cassius Kuresa will be speaking to the 2016 CDANZ National Symposium about Project Lumana’i. Project Lumana’i (meaning “future” in Samoan) research is to inform Careers New Zealand’s development of new digital career tools and resources for Pasifika learners, with a focus on enabling decision making at important transition points.