

# Miriana Stephens



Miriana Stephens hails from Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui and Ngāti Rārua. Born in Motueka and raised by her grandparents as a marae girl, she lives every day knowing that she not only carries her whānau in her heart, but that she has been taught the ways of old that ensured she had a strong cultural upbringing. She is a lawyer, a director, a businesswoman but, most importantly, she is a mum of four outgoing young achievers. Aotahi Ltd (Aotahi) was her first education-related startup.

As the executive director working in partnership with Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, she not only created small business and personal financial management programmes, she also delivered them out into the wider community. Tired of using outdated teaching resources, she established a series of case study books that provided business context across

Aotearoa, Australia and North America. It was during those days that she honed her governance skills by becoming a director at Wakatū Incorporation and Kono, a Nelson-based Māori venture with an asset base of over \$300 million. Business has always been a part of what she does. Her grandparents grew hops and tobacco, and she is involved with land trusts that own and manage an extensive collection of businesses. Business to her is not just commercial; it also entails being a kaitiaki of our whenua, our moana and our economy. Some of the challenges for her relate to the way in which Māori serve. She says, “We live in unprecedented times where Māori are seen as leaders in our industries, because the real risk we face is continuing to do the same things that we have done in the past.”

According to Miriana, Māori businesses can lead the way. We need to enter into purposeful partnerships that share risk and rewards, we must deploy agile methodologies to update our products and services and we need greater investment in innovation, science and technology. “Change can be painful and rewarding. It requires leadership that is courageous, bold and ambitious,” she says. In the future, Miriana says that the taiao and our relationship with the natural world need to be at the centre of everything we do. The broader notion of business and working for our communities is essential. “Having a connection with each other as whānau, and our whenua and moana makes me feel proud and secure. I have an identity, I belong and I feel loved,” she concludes.