

Episode 100 Transcript: At the heart of public service with Dr Gordon de Brouwer.

David Pembroke:

Hello everyone and welcome to Work with Purpose, a podcast about the Australian Public Service. My name is David Pembroke, thanks for joining me. As we begin today's centenary of Work with Purpose, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri peoples, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. And I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast today is joining us from.

It was in the wake of the former Prime Minister Scott Morrison's announcement of a series of major lockdowns to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in late March of 2020 that the idea of Work with Purpose was born. Walking through a deserted Canberra centre early the next morning, I had a feeling that while we were going to hear plenty from our elected representatives in the days, weeks, and months ahead, that it would be just as important that we hear from the people who would be creating and delivering many of those plans in the Australian Public Service. I thought a podcast would be the best way for APS leaders to communicate, not only with their staff, but with the Australian community, and the title Work with Purpose jumped into my head.

Without a word of a lie I arrived at work to a bright green post-it note that said, "Call Drew immediately," and the Drew screaming at me in bold writing was none other than Drew Baker, the then chief executive of IPAA ACT. And when he answered the phone, he said, "Pemby, we are going to need more content." I told him about my idea for Work with Purpose. He jumped straight on board. A call a few moments later to sense check the idea with a trusted adviser and distinguished public servant Jane Madden was next. She was an enthusiastic thumbs up. I then rang the Prime Minister's office as Drew called the Australian Public Service Commission and both thought it was a great idea.

And just two weeks later, Peter Walcott, the then head of the Australian Public Service Commission, and Catherine Jones, the then head of IPAA ACT, were behind the microphones and away we went. Today is our 100th episode, and both IPAA ACT and contentgroup look back with both gratitude and pride about the program we have produced. Early days, it was all about COVID because there was really no other story. But over the years that's followed, it's settled into a rhythm and a reflection and a discussion about what matters to the Australian Public Service and what matters to the Australian people and who are the personalities who make our Public Service work.

And I'm pleased to report that Work with Purpose remains among IPAA ACT's most popular channels of communication as it continues to attract the best and brightest to the microphone. Well, today we continue the spirit of innovation at Work with Purpose with a conversation, with a difference, the young, with the old. Our interviewer today is Thanuri Welaratne. She's a passionate science communicator with a background in ecology from Ngunnawal country in Canberra, Australia. In her current role as an education programs officer at Questacon, she helps teachers and educators implement STEM into their classrooms. Thanuri is passionate about empowering young people and their teachers to feel confident and enthusiastic about STEM.

Joining Thanuri is Dr. Gordon de Brouwer, the Australian Public Service Commissioner and previously Secretary for Public Sector Reform. Gordon was also IPAA national president, and if you've been listening to Work with Purpose for a while, you would've heard him on his own breakout show where

Gordon spoke to a number of people through the APS about leadership and integrity, about bullying and harassment, and the economic recovery from COVID-19. So together Thanuri and Gordon will cover a lot of ground, from contemporary leadership to flexible work, to APS reform. And Gordon will share with us his personal leadership journey and some valuable tips for all of in the Australian Public Service. So Thanuri and Gordon, the microphone is yours.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Thank you so much David, and welcome to you, Gordon. Thanks for joining me.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Thank you, Thanuri. It's great to be here. And congratulations also to IPAA and to contentgroup.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yes, definitely. Congratulations on 100 wonderful episodes. We're very fortunate to have you today, and I'd love to start today by talking about your career. It's been really interesting and varied. I know that you've been a professor of economics, a departmental secretary, a G20 Sherpa, and now you're the Australian Public Service Commissioner. So through that time you've done a lot of things, you've worn different hats, you've had to work through some difficult problems and engage with lots of different leaders. What do you think makes an effective leader?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, thanks Thanuri. It's been a wonderful ride, so it's great, and my current job I really love. I've seen three things I think that really matter for leaders. The first is that you have a really good sense of what's going on in the world, you can see it in perspective, and that is you've got a strategic view of what's going on. You can see what's going on in your domain, but in other domains you can see where it's going to, and you can see, you've got a vision or a sense of where you want it to land. And that may be, for a public servant, heavily informed by the government's priorities. But you're strategic and you've got substance. The second is that you don't just wait, you don't just sit there. You get up and do things. People have different language for that. It may be you're an innovator, you're an entrepreneur, but you get up and go and you don't wait to be told. You do it.

And the third is that frankly everything we do is about people. We're in a people business and how do you work really effectively with your teams? When it comes to being more senior, I think it's reflecting on actually what's your leadership style. And personally, I think command and control doesn't work for that. If you've got a system where you know how to enable and empower people to do their job and that you back them in, you're usually much more effective in achieving what you're after. So that sort of bundle of things is what I see as leadership.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah, I agree. I have found that the best leadership has always been the types of leaders who support me to make my own mistakes and learn from them as well. So I definitely agree with that. Thank you for sharing. What are your biggest reflections from your first 12 months as commissioner?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

So this job, I feel like I've had a very privileged life and people have been very generous to me and circumstances have been good and I brought something, but it's also the circumstances, and this is a real

privilege being commissioner, because you're getting right at the heart of the people side of government and you've got a role to play in that. I think the thing that struck me, coming from the reform side of working with the government to articulate what they wanted as reform and working with the service, as commissioner, you have to do it. So you move from a talking to people to the doing role and you have to do it yourself. You've got to work with your own institution to do that. So that's a big change.

But the thing that really struck me is just how interested the Public Service is, and government, but just how interested the Public Service is in being stronger and better and doing their job more capably. Most people love being a public servant. They are really proud of being a public servant. So when you can lean in and you can support that both in capability or in other dimensions, or frankly even of stewardship, saying you're responsible, the system doesn't sit outside you, you are the system. Own it. And empowering people to do that and enabling that, that's really very exciting.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah, I agree. I'm quite fortunate in that I currently work in a team that really engages with the Australian public, and I think reminding yourself about the people that we're doing this for is really important. And I'd love to talk about that a little bit further. So as an education programs officer, I get to interact with teachers in a face-to-face setting, and not everyone in the Public Service gets that instant gratification that I do when I engage with teachers. So often I'm helping teachers build their confidence in their capability and understanding how to implement STEM into their classrooms. So what I would love for you to reflect on and talk about right now, is for those people that are part of the Public Service and are proud public servants who might not get that instant gratification, what advice would you give them on how... For those that can't always see how their hard work helps the Australian public?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

So it's really great, I think, that you can see very directly what the impact of your work is on people and that's very satisfying and I think for a lot of people that's true. Truth is, the majority, the biggest group of public servants is in service delivery, so quite heavily person oriented, but I think it's great that you get that. I don't think for a public servant that's the only way you can get the joy of being a public servant or the satisfaction. I think there are different things that I'd call on or I see other people calling on. Ultimately you're in a position where you're working with governments to improve or protect people's lives or to improve our natural world. And if you're focusing on an outcome, and sometimes that might sound a bit abstract, but in many cases it's not so abstract, because you're leaning into people's lives or you're leaning into the natural world, and focusing on the outcome rather than just your processes or your inputs or your outputs or all the meetings you've got to go to, the forms you've got to fill in or whatever.

That can give people a lot of satisfaction. So I think really what the things... Why you're there, ultimately. The other side of it, though, is that... And this is where I think public servants can draw a lot on, and this is the special thing about public servants, and this is only about public servants, is that you work to maintain and protect our democracy, and you are one part of a system of open and democratic government that's really important for our social democracy, for our democracy.

And if you do your job well, if you advise and you implement government policy, you're actually strengthening and maintaining these institutions of state, and you look around the world where you've got lots of people who will attack these sorts of institutions, you've got systems that undermine them, you're a protector. So it doesn't mean... Actually this is part of our own sustainable society where you can have lots of different views and they can come in together, but they don't cause conflict or

disintegration of society. And the parliament is the heart of that in a democratic state, and we are part of one of the most important bits of supporting that parliament and that democratic state. That's a really proud thing to be, I think.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah, I agree. I think it's really wonderful that we can help inform and protect and influence people's lives in such a positive way. I did want to talk a bit more about your comments about stewarding people, and I'd love to talk a little bit about how we as public servants can maintain integrity and trust amongst the Australian people. I know that there have been quite a few reviews and royal commissions and there's also been some scandals that have triggered a little bit of distrust amongst the Australian public in us, and something that I feel a lot of our sector and the communities that we serve have asked is do we have this right? Have we gotten integrity and trust right in the APS? Could you comment on that a little?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, you're never in a perfect state and I think the clear thing is to articulate what's important and why we're doing it, and then to be open and really transparent and accountable about what you're doing to make sure that some of the bad things... Look, people are responsible for what the service did, but also we're not going to repeat it again and we're going to do everything we can to not have that happen again. When it comes to trust, though, there are two things that really matter to trust. And as I say this, the people's trust in us in the Public Service, one is that we do our job really well. That they can trust us because we're competent and capable, so we do our job. People get a lot of satisfaction from that, but that's a big part of it.

But the other side of it is that we do it openly and honestly and we don't do it against people. So that's the integrity issue, that we're honest and open and accountable for what we do. And that's where I think when you look at some of the things when they've gone wrong, in Robodebt and other things, of seeing where those mistakes were made or what happened, and you can trace them back, they can go back to the nature of silos. They can go back to whether people encourage a culture of openness and telling the truth within an organisation, whether you tell the truth to your colleagues, whether you tell the truth what you see to a minister and their office, and that you do that in writing. Those sorts of things. And they're all elements of integrity.

I think we, over the past year or so, when people saw the royal commission, and then as a variety of other processes including the stuff that's going on in the Public Service Commission, as they come to an end, we'll be able to talk about very directly the lessons learned and really talk very explicitly with people about that. But also the people know that there were consequences to it and you have to treat everyone with respect, but actually that these things matter and they do affect your career. So I think if the public sees that and public servants see that, it's not a gotcha thing, but it is that you're responsible in your job and the public expects you to do your job well and honestly, and within that employment context, that that will have an impact. But there's a lot of positive things in this one too. Most people want to do their job well and they want to be honest, so you're leaning into something where people want it.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah, definitely. I think that's a really important note to end that conversation on in terms of we are very privileged in our roles to serve the people and it is important for us to empathise with the people that we're serving and being honest about where we might've gone wrong and what we could do a little

bit better. I know that you've worked a bit on the APS reform agenda and I wondered if... It's now in its second year of delivery, is that correct?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah.

Thanuri Welaratne:

I think speaking about that honesty and integrity and also being mindful of the fact that most people in the Public Service are really passionate about serving their people, what do you hope we will see more of into the future and what would you like to change about the Public Service through APS reform?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, I probably go back to these recurring themes. You want people to trust us, and that comes down to capability and integrity. So quite a few of these things are entrenching and deepening the capability and the integrity focus, and that's where I think where we've been for a few years, where we will go, especially in the future. I think for part of the reform side of it is a lot of this is a personal conversation. So stewardship was starting a conversation with the Public Service and we did lots of conversations and consultation on this, is that, again, you are the system. The system is not extraneous. It's not like the system sits out there and... Of course there are rules and guidance and you've got a boss, almost all of us do, and you're within that. But actually you have a lot of agency in how you conduct yourself in what you do, and that's really important and you are a steward then of the system and stewardship as a value is meant to reach into that.

And that you kind of got a responsibility to leave the place better off after you move on to do something else. So some of that goes to your heart. The nature of the reform process or transformation of institutions is that you also want that locked down to a degree in incentives and structures and systems. And that's where, say, on the capability side, an example of that is the expansion of the professions. So saying let's deepen and extend the professions. We've got data and digital and HR, but actually evaluation also matters. And frankly, the bread and butter of public administration is often procurement, contract management, and complex project management. So let's grow those areas and get some more there. So that started and that's moving. Trying to understand more of our region. Almost everything in domestic policy has an international foundation in a practice or a rule or an institution. So understand that and then how do you understand your world in order to influence that?

So you can change things, you don't have to accept where things are. So that's a bit about capability, that's for an individual. We've also thought then, well, capability of institutions really matters. And that's where the reintroduction of capability reviews and the government's commitment to make sure that they're independent and they're fully transparent, mean that they're done by experts and they're forward looking, it's not a performance mark, it's actually where are we going and are you fit for the future? Those things, when they're built into the system, just create this reflection back on capability, delivering outcomes and with the right behaviours. And you reinforce it and reinforce it.

Again, you can reinforce it in performance management. So we're changing the SES performance leadership at the executive level, training around that too. So it's all kind of reinforcement of what's the capability and the integrity we want. And let's go to the next couple of stages on that, the next couple of steps on that. So reform isn't like it's a thousand ideas that are occurring like fireworks in the sky. There's a sequence to it and it's actually based on pretty fundamental simple things of capability and integrity.

Thanuri Welaratne:

I think it's really interesting hearing your perspective on this because at my level I feel sometimes it's hard to know how I can influence change, and it is really valuable to hear the broader perspective from your position as Public Service Commissioner, and I really appreciate you sharing that with us. I'd like to move into talking about the APS and some of the integrity and capability that sometimes we encounter some difficulties in our workplaces and talking more about our workplaces as a whole. COVID really changed our world. We saw a real shift in how we work and the types of ways we interact with our colleagues. We often bring our work home and there's kind of an interaction between your work life and your personal life. I think it would be really interesting to talk a bit more about how we navigate that flexible work practice and what you think flexibility means within the APS now.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, it really is. COVID has made such a huge difference, hasn't it, because it really showed that different forms of working can actually achieve an outcome and that under pressure people can also do things very differently, even surge capacity or the way you work, and that that doesn't come with the sacrifice of productivity or effectiveness or efficiency. But it can also give people an awful lot of satisfaction. But again, it comes with some risks and how do you engage with that? So I think it's kind of built in more now. Flexibility means quite a few different things to different people. It can mean compressed hours, it can mean working from home, it can mean different working hours, different styles of working. That's a very full conversation.

I think we're now very explicit around when you agree that there's going to be... This is the workplace agreement or the enterprise agreement. Flexible work is important and that's part of how we work, but it's a mix of interests. It's your interests as a worker about what you want, what suits you, but also it's your team and also it's your employer and the nature of that business. So particularly if your employer, say, for example is a face-to-face service delivery, really hard to work from home. Flexibility is really more in terms of what the nature of your shifts are and how you work there. It's less about can I do my face-to-face with the public from home? So it really does depend on circumstances and it varies on what people's needs are, what meet your needs, but it's also then with your team. And there probably a variety of different considerations now that come into that.

There is value... I mean a lot of your learning is done at work and how do you maintain your own skills, but also especially of people who've been there for not as long, how do you really grow them to know what the craft is or the culture or the way to get things done and do things in the public sector if they don't see it? And that's that 70/20/10 learning model. 70%'s on the job, 20%'s your professional development, 10%'s mentoring and coaching. So really how do you lean in for people to train and grow them in their job if they don't see it? So there are various trade-offs that are in this calculation.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah, I really enjoyed hearing your perspective on flexibility. I wondered if you could talk about how you maintain your work-life balance and maintain a really good flexible understanding of your job as the Public Service Commissioner.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, so for me, maybe can I say a little bit about what I hear from people as well? But for me, I don't think I do that as well as I should. I certainly do it better now than when I was a secretary. I think one of the mistakes I made when I was a secretary was that I didn't take enough of my holidays and I didn't look after myself. And I also probably didn't measure of, "Do I really need to do this or am I just doing

this because it's a task to do? Is it really what my role requires of me and should someone else be doing it?" So I learned a lot of the things I didn't do well when I was a secretary of... I really encourage people, take your leave, very important, find your own balance. That's a good thing to do. Enjoy your weekends as much as possible, and if you don't need to work, you don't need to work.

You don't need to work long hours unless there's a particular... I mean, generally there's a crisis or something. That's where you lean in. It's not a normal way of working. And if you are in that mode, then actually you should think around can we do things very differently in the workplace? So I go back to was G20 and the global financial crisis in the Prime Minister's department on the economy, we ran two shifts. So PMSE was operating 20 hours a day, but it was done with two shifts. So you can structure yourself and operate yourself, and you shouldn't take that on yourself. And it's how do you make your team work but also support your team in that? I'm saying this now with the benefit of hindsight. I do that more now, but I didn't do it enough earlier on. That's a way of maintaining the pace. It's a marathon, not a sprint, usually.

But the thing that I... What's really interesting in this job is going around listening to people as well and what that means for them. And one of the nice things has been going to different capital cities and meeting APS staff and hearing what matters for them in their workplace and how they find that flexibility on what matters. And it's quite sobering because you hear very directly from people, "My basic work conditions matter a lot to me. My pay matters and everyone's got cost of living issues. My pay matters, but so does my work, so does my professional development. What's the nature of my relationship with my boss? Is my boss a bully or is my boss an enabler?"

And you hear that from a lot of people, and you then see very directly that what's really important is the lived workplace was really important to people, and they'll thrive in a good workplace and they'll basically be withering in a poor one. So that just means for me, how do you lean in to support people having good workplaces? And that means they're happier, they're also more productive, and you've got good behaviours in the workplace, but they're also more productive and effective. So it is kind of like a win-win-win to my mind of those things that all fit together as a bundle. They're not alternatives.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah. I do think that it's important to talk about how important work-life balance is, and it's really interesting to hear your reflections on some things that you might not have done so well in the past. It is definitely true that hindsight can show you things and you can learn from it, and it's interesting that you talk about the people that you've met and their desires and what they really value in their workplace. I know you wrote a paper on the Public Service and bullying and harassment in the APS. That's some of the difficulties that you can encounter in workplaces, and as you said, if you're in a really positive and empowering workplace, you're more likely to stay and wanting to do better and thrive in that workplace instead of wither. Do you have examples of how emerging leaders such as myself or mid-level managers can really help influence change in that respect of changing that workplace culture that might not be so positive if they encounter it?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

So probably a few ways. I mean this sounds a bit programmatic, but participating in a staff census is important, where you can give feedback on your boss, that's important, or 360s, some form of feedback. Those things are really important because people do read those things, they read the census. And I think more and more they'll be more and more important. The other side of it, though, is that if you've got a difficult person, you've got a choice about who you want to be in that context. And when you're working with a team, you've also got a choice about how you're going to work with them. So if your boss is very

didactic and just tells you what to do, and you can engage a bit on that, but you have the choice of when you're working with your team, are you going to mirror that behaviour or are you going to be different?

So it's that quite explicit of, "I don't have to be... If I'm getting treated badly or I see Paul poor behaviour, I don't have to mimic that. I'm going to do something different and I'm going to be a good leader and I'm going to exhibit that." And that gives you a sense of pride and happiness, but it also becomes your brand. That's your brand. And then people start to see that in you. And then that spreads and that's part of success. We all hear about people ultimately who are really horrible to work for and they generally don't maintain staff, and they don't attract the best, which means that they're not the best. So eventually, I don't want to say that there's karma, but it flies out a bit. But you've always got the choice to be who you want to be and someone else's bad behaviour doesn't mean that you have to do that. I think people can make their own brand on that.

Thanuri Welaratne:

And obviously there's also support in place within the Public Service to help people navigate those tricky times from a HR perspective as well and getting that support where they need so that you can still be a good leader and be positive to the staff below you.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Go to your people person. Go to people and talk about it and raise it, because how people become aware of it.

Thanuri Welaratne:

I'd love to talk now a little bit about leadership. I think that's a nice place to end that conversation. You've talked a little bit about how to be a good leader and some of the values that you can instil in your staff. On behalf of all of the emerging leaders that are listening now, do you have any tips on how to build your skills from your perspective of your really successful career and things you've learned along the way?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

It's your career and I think, as I said, having some substance, having a go and reaching out to people and being part of a team or them being the team leader, those things are where you show yourself. So don't be afraid to show yourself. People who enjoy their work as well, generally, that gives you a high degree of satisfaction, makes you a happier person, and it makes people look to you and it also attracts people to you. So I think that's actually being yourself and enjoying your work is often the key to it. Being decent. I just think being decent is a good way to be. People will call you in and they'll want to work with you, but people will also work for you.

Thanuri Welaratne:

I'd love to talk about interviews and applications. I think you've obviously applied for many jobs, including this one, and sat in on a lot of interview panels. What do you think makes an application stand out? Is it that you are highlighting your passion or what can you say about how to make your application stand out?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yeah, I think in terms of the written, the first point is to think about who you're trying to persuade and how are they going to read what you are writing. And mostly you're applying for a job... I mean, if it's just a... Sometimes it's a very general application. But if you're applying for a specific job, then that institution has specific needs. So if the person who's reading your application can see that you're the right person for it, and they don't have to do all of that calculation themselves, you've presented it, so you're talking about a job, you're talking about what the requirements of that are, and that you've got elements in your experience or your background or your skills or your training that mean that you're a really good person to do that.

The thing that doesn't work is when people just say very generically, "These are the things that I've done or the jobs I've done," and they provide a list of all of the requirements of those jobs, but it bears no relation at all to what they did in that job. So you're not showing what you did in those jobs. Or when they say it's I, I, I, I, I, and also I, and there's nothing... They're claiming credit for everything. The worst or the biggest I've seen is when someone said they solved all the climate change problems, and you just know, and having worked on that, you know the people, but also you know the subject matter, and that's not the case. So don't over claim.

And then what people are also interested in you as a person with other people. And if everything's about you, not about actually how you mobilise, enable others, or this was really successful because you put a really great team together, you provided the strategic direction, but you really motivated them and worked through solutions that would work for government. That's the sort of thing that people want to see. And that's talking more about you. It's talking, it's being honest.

So you read the stuff to see does the person know themselves? Do they know the job that they're after? And what will they achieve? Are they a person who just everything is about them and they burn out everyone, or are they a really good leader? So it's kind of reading that stuff to see can you do the job. Not just that you've got a list of things that you've done in the past, but how are they relevant to this job, this job in particular. As you get more senior, that becomes more necessary. Sometimes you just want to show you've got a set of basic skills and that's good.

Thanuri Welaratne:

And what are your tips on interview prep? I know that personally I like to spend a lot of time thinking about how I'd answer questions and I'll come in with my notes. Do you do the same thing when you're interviewing for a role or even at your level?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

So sometimes notes can be helpful, but they're not if you read them. So if there they're a prompt. So having, for example, your application in front of you, and then you can use it as a prompt of words, people get nervous, and interview panels really know that people get nervous. And some people get very nervous and then they find it hard to talk and then they need to read. And the panel will try to relax that person where they can. As much as possible, enjoying it where you can. Now that's harder if you're a shy person or a nervous, you get nervous in these things. But using it as a prompt and not reading is better. Thinking about where some of the questions are, and people want to know... They want an indication of what your skills are, and they'll usually enable you to say something about that or your background at the start. But they also want to see you and the way you think, the way you respond and the way you talk about other people.

They want to see, especially as you get more senior, they want to see, do you have a chip on your shoulder or not? Do you understand yourself? Do you know that you're not perfect and that you can deal and work with people who aren't, and that when your own staff do something wrong, you're not

going to execute them, you're going to work with them to improve and find an outcome and support them through that. So people who can generally acknowledge and see their own limitations are ones who can accept that in other people and work with them in a constructive way. That's what they're trying to get a sense of in an interview.

So the thing is, being yourself is important. You're not a disembodied, empty vessel. Giving mechanical, robotic, very jargonistic answers, most people, they won't understand what you're talking about and they won't see the real you. And I've got to say that doesn't work in interviews. Jargon doesn't work. But being able to talk about what's on your mind, what the issues are, they can see who you are and they can see how you can fit the job. That's what matters.

Thanuri Welaratne:

And having a good conversation, like we are right now. Finally, the Work With Purpose podcast started four years ago in April of 2020. In over 100 episodes, people have talked about their purpose, what they do and the advice they would give to others. So if you could speak to yourself at the point in your career that I'm in right now, what would you say to yourself about the purpose of your work and your future career in the public sector?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Well, purpose is really deep, and that's one of the most fundamentally motivating things. I didn't come from a rich family, I came from a poor family, so money matters, but purpose is the thing that drives you. It's the thing that will give you primary meaning and find that out in your work. I think if I was to say to myself what I'd do differently, I worried too much about my career and I fretted about that, and maybe you can say for me, "Oh, that was all fine," but actually you can waste an awful lot of energy on thinking about how I can do something and what I can do and all of that.

Sometimes those circumstances, you do have a lot of control over that, and it comes down to your knowledge and your spirit of innovation and actually how do you work with people? How do you treat people? And that's the sort of thing... I'd focus on those things, other things that are going to help you with your career, rather than that you can minutely plot and plan every step of your career. There's a lot of serendipity, a lot of discovery, and frankly, just a lot of joy in doing different things.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Would you say that you stayed curious throughout your career?

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Yes, yeah.

Thanuri Welaratne:

Yeah. It's really validating to hear from you and reflecting on your career that you struggled with a lot of the things that a lot of people at this level might feel where it's hard sometimes, not worry about your career and try to plan ahead. But it's great to hear what I can think about into the future. So thank you for your time, Gordon.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer:

Thank you. Thank you.

David Pembroke:

Thanuri Welaratne and Dr. Gordon de Brouwer in discussion there about life in the Public Service, and what a wonderful conversation between two people who love their job. You could see Gordon light up there with this sense of purpose because clearly it's what has driven most of his wonderful career. And it's good to know that in Gordon's role going out and seeing lots of people in the Public Service around Australia in all sorts of different roles, he's discovered that there is a genuine passion for the job of being a public servant. And perhaps one thing I've taken away from this is that stewardship, which is a new value of the Public Service, is quite simple. It's about you. It's about you, the public servants. That whatever job you've got, whatever job you are being asked to do, do it to the best of your ability. And that was the advice that Gordon just gave Thanuri there, and it's advice to all of you.

So when you read stewardship, think about yourself and think about what it is that you are doing in your job as it contributes. Again, what Gordon spoke about, that really the essence of the Public Services to improve or protect people's lives or to improve or protect the natural world. So really that simple rubric about what the Public Service is relates to each and every one of you. I reflected also, I think, on some of the things about the Public Service and about trust, driving through with purpose, and trust equals capability and integrity. Capability of the institution, but capability of the individual, but also integrity in everything that public servants do. And finally, I took a lot away from Gordon's reflections on how to be a good leader. It really is about knowing and owning a vision and really understanding a strategic context that you can bring to the work, that you do have that knowledge and that spirit of innovation that Gordon just spoke about.

He also said don't wait. Don't sit back, get up and do things. So don't ask for permission. And indeed, it's exactly what Blair Comley said the other day in the speech that he gave at the Natural Portrait Gallery about his reflections on less command and control, more empowering, and really getting on with it. And also just in summary, that really, when it all comes back to it, whether you're in Thanuri's role, you're in Gordon's role, you're in any of the roles that you're in, it's about people. It comes back to the simple essence of doing a great job, so as that you can serve the Australian people in the best way that you can. So what a wonderful conversation from Thanuri and Gordon, and I thank them for marking the 100th episode of Work With Purpose, with that important conversation.

And when I think back on 100 episodes of Work With Purpose, it is the people, it is the story, it is the mission, it is the purpose. And I know sometimes those of us who work in and around the Public Service, we can find ourselves in places where people groan about public servants and they'll tell you, "Oh, this, that, or the other," and they reflect perhaps in an ignorant way. But I think those of us who are privileged enough to be close enough to it understand the importance of the work, the credibility, and the integrity of the people.

So all I can say to all of you public servants out there is keep going. Keep at it and take the lessons and the insights that you've heard today from this wonderful conversation into your work. And indeed, Work With Purpose will continue to be there for not only the past 100, but the future 100, and probably the future hundreds after that. And indeed, Kate Driver, the new CEO of IPAA ACT has some plans for Work With Purpose. So we are thinking about what else we can do with this brand and with this program to continue to promote the great work of the Australian Public Service.

So to you, the listeners, there is so much in the archive to go back and listen to, so do that via Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts from. If you do get the chance to leave a review, that helps us to be found. So that helps other people to discover great conversations like we did today. We do have lots of reviews, which is fantastic, but if you had time to do that, that would be great. And indeed, if you'd like to follow on with what the latest in Workwith Purpose is, you can either follow contentgroup or IPAA ACT on LinkedIn. Work With Purpose is produced in collaboration between

contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration of Australia ACT, and supported as always by our good friends at the Australian Public Service Commission. We'll be back at the same time in two week's time for the next episode of Work with Purpose. My name is David Pembroke, and it's bye for now.

Voice Over:

Work With Purpose is a production of contentgroup in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and with the support of the Australian Public Service Commission.