



contentgroup WORK WITH
PURPOSE

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

Work with Purpose

EPISODE #111

A FOREVER CURIOUS MIND:
DR WENDY CRAIK AM FTSE

TRANSCRIPT

David Pembroke:

Hello everyone. Welcome to Work With Purpose, a podcast about the Australian public sector, and how it serves the Australian people. My name is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal, and 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. I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast today is joining us from.

Earlier this month, IPAA National's Annual Frances Adamson Oration, which is held to mark the United Nations Public Service Day each year featured the accomplished scientist, policy advisor, and company Director Dr. Wendy Craik, who explored the issues of trust, evidence, scientific rigour, collaboration, and ethical practise.

Dr. Craik has many years experience in senior public policy roles, and has what can only be described as an intimidating CV. One that certainly makes me feel quite frankly like I've been rather idle. Among her notable accomplishments, the University Medal for Zoology at the ANU, chief executive of the Murray-Darling Basin, and Executive Officer of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Authority. Dr. Craik was also once a member of the board of the Reserve Bank of Australia, executive director of the National Farmers Federation, and she's currently chair of the One Basin CRC, a board member and ACT Committee member of the Crawford Fund, a board member of the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, chair of the advisory board of the Royal Australian Mint, and a member of the advisory board for the Centre of Strategy and Governance. She was also awarded the member of the Order of Australia in 2007 for her service to the natural resource sector.

I could go on because there is plenty more, but let's cut to the chase, and welcome Dr. Wendy Craik AM to Work With Purpose. Dr. Craik, welcome.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Thank you.

David Pembroke:

First of all, can I thank you for your career of service on behalf of the Australian people, and indeed the audience. You grew up in Canberra, the daughter of a commonwealth auditor-general. Was a career in the public service always on your mind?

Dr Wendy Craik:

No.

David Pembroke:

An accident.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Sort of, yes, just happened that way.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, I grew up here. I was well aware of the public service. It was a pretty small place in those days when I grew up here.

David Pembroke:

What was it like in Canberra back in those days?

Dr Wendy Craik:

It was pretty small. There was only, I don't know, maybe half a dozen high schools or something. Most of my friends at school, their parents had actually moved here. They were born somewhere else, and mostly moved here. Canberra was very much a place that was just growing.

When I started off, the lake didn't exist. It wasn't until 1964 or something that lake came into existence. Everyone just takes it for granted now. But things like that were quite exciting. The whole development of Canberra at that time was quite interesting. But yeah, it was a small town, I guess. Everyone knew of everyone.

Then I went to ANU, that was obvious. It's nice and handy. Then I went off to Canada. Done my honours on small bugs in what is now the suburb of Canberra in the streams there. But I decided they were too tedious to work on because they were too small, and deeming a microscope. I'm a bit more for the larger stuff.

I thought I'd really like to work on fish, but there was nowhere in Australia that taught fisheries at that time. I went off to Canada, and lived in Vancouver, and the west coast of Vancouver Island. Did a PhD in fisheries, living in a little fishing village of about 300 people, which was just really fascinating, and great. I joined the public service straight out of university. I was really lucky in those days because you could get leave without pay for extended periods. I had leave without pay while I was doing my PhD. I'd only spent about four months in public service, came back, and spent about another month in Canberra.

While I was thinking about what I do, I got a chance to go up to Townsville, and saw the Great Barrier Reef, worked on the Great Barrier Reef. I went up for a three-month rotation up there as a graduate clerk and ended up staying 17 years. That's how I got into the public service. But what I was doing wasn't very public service-ish. I was out surveying corals, fishes, fishermen, and things like that, which really isn't the thing, not so much sitting behind the desk.

David Pembroke:

When did that interest in the marine life, and marine science first strike you? Was it back in the high school at that time?

Dr Wendy Craik:

No.

David Pembroke:

No, more so at university.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, more at university. I started off doing arts, but found that a bit dull. I decided to switch.

David Pembroke:

Not challenging enough.

Dr Wendy Craik:

I don't know. I wanted to do history, but the only course they had was ancient history. I did it, but it didn't really interest me that much. I was doing zoology, and then they offered ecology. I did ecology. I really, really enjoyed that of all the subjects I'd ever done. That was kind of the start, and that got me into the freshwater stuff. But bugs are too small, and there aren't that many freshwater fish in Australia, so I thought, "I'll go to somewhere where there are for lots of fish." North America, there are plenty of fish there. It's much easier to work on fish. You can see them without a microscope. Yeah, that's how I got into it, I guess. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

Of those experiences overseas, what was it like as a young Australian PhD candidate finding your way? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about that type of challenge in your career?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, what did I learn about myself? I learned I could survive quite well on my own. When I was at university in Canada, my supervisor made a point of having students from all over the world in his group of students. I shared an office with a young fellow from Taiwan. We used to discuss our letters home. His letters would be Chinese character, Chinese character, picture of a station waggon, things like that. You really got to know all these people from all over the world. But that made it really much more interesting in the place I was working in the Institute of Applied Ecology at the University of British Columbia, had students from all over the world. It was just really stimulating, and really, really interesting.

Then I spent about three years on and off out in this little fishing village on the west coast of Vancouver Island. There was a marine station set up by the five western Canadian university. Again, we had people from all over the place coming to work at the marine station. Because it's a small community, and like every small community, everyone knows everybody. You don't know the sound of the car, but you know the sound of the boat as it goes by. Yes, it was really great.

I lived next to a couple. She was from Estonia, and he was from Latvia that come after the second World War in Canada, and ended up out there. He drove the school boat. They had a sauna. They always invited the graduate students around. It was a really wonderful time.

David Pembroke:

But again, that sounds a wonderful experience.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, it was.

David Pembroke:

But what impact did that have on you? What did you learn to grow, and to know as the fundamental principles that you took away from that experience that you still carry with you to today?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I suppose just make an effort to get on with everybody, because you never know who you're going to meet. Everybody has really interesting things about their lives. Getting on with everybody. We ended up being pretty self-sufficient, because you had to get around by a little boat. Everybody had a small boat. You had to make

sure it kept working. Often, we'd be going home late at night after the odd glass or two. You had to be a bit careful.

David Pembroke:

It was a social time, a very social ...

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, yeah, it was very social. Yeah, that's right. When you don't have much else to do, it was pretty social.

David Pembroke:

Back to Australia, as you say, up to the Great Barrier Reef, that must have been an incredible experience.

Dr Wendy Craik:

It was, it's a great experience. Because we used to go out, and survey fish in coral, we'd go out, and actually either stay on a boat for a week or 10 days, or we'd go to a place like Heron Island and stay there for 10 days. We had to work out what techniques we were going to use.

I got people I knew in fisheries from New South Wales Fisheries, other places to come up, and they'd work with us. We'd work out techniques to survey fish. Because there wasn't any data in those days, there's thousands and thousands of papers now, but there really wasn't anything much documented. Fish catchers weren't really documented.

One of the interesting things we did when surveying coral trout as a kind of large predator species, we wanted to assess the sizes of them underwater. Of course, it's always difficult to assess size underwater, because it's 30% bigger. One of our people at work cut all these plywood models of coral trout out. We've had them strung on a 100- metre line. You'd have to swim this a 100 metres of plywood coral trout, and estimate their lengths. You had to get a certain percentage before you could go out, and do the real thing.

We had fun doing all that. It was work, but we made it interesting. Yeah, it was really a most enjoyable time.

David Pembroke:

Through that 17 years, what were some of the other jobs that you took on from the field work?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, I did quite a lot of field work, and surveying fishermen, standing on boat ramps, asking what they caught, that sort of thing, getting the fish catcher records from fishing clubs. They were the only data that was available. They were remarkably honest, actually. Then we were all involved in the development of the first management plans for the Great Barrier Reef.

Ultimately, in the time that I was there, we did most of the reef. Each area had a zoning plan, like a local government plan, I guess. Then one of the last things I did at the time that I was there, I was the coordinator of a 25-year strategic plan for the World Heritage area, which is bigger than the reef itself, but includes the islands. It includes all Queensland land as well.

We thought it would take us about a year or so, but we had all the major groups in those days. It'd be a nightmare to do it now. There's so many more people interested in the reef. But we had about 60 or so groups. We've got an independent facilitator to run the show. We made sure all the major players were happy with the independent facilitator before we employed them, which was useful. Then we ran this process, what did everyone want to see for the reef in 25 years' time?

I suppose the really good thing that started off as a facilitator, got everyone to draw what their vision was of the reef, not to actually write in words.

David Pembroke:

No, I read that. Yeah.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Not write it in words. That really made scientists quite uncomfortable, which was really interesting because we had an indigenous bloke on the group as well. Of course, he was a great drawer. He got unanimously elected at the end of the day after we'd all traded drawings to draw the final one for the group. It was really interesting though. It was a great levelling exercise. Then after that, everybody just got on really well on and off.

David Pembroke:

You did go on in the speech, the Frances Adamson Oration, to talk about collaboration as one of your golden rules at the end, that you really have to work collaboratively to be effective. How hard was it to achieve that type of collaboration back then? What do you need to do to make teams work together or make people work together effectively?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I think you have to give them time. You know yourself when you meet someone, you know them, and they might seem perfectly nice, but it takes a while to actually get to know them. Can you trust what they say? Do they stick to it? It takes time, even just for a single friendship.

When you've got groups who are a bit suspicious of each other, say commercial fishermen and researchers, or commercial fishermen and conservation people have a totally different agenda. Trying to get those groups to work happily or at least work politely, civilly together, and collaborate together takes time till they know they can trust the other side, as it were. I think the fact that it actually ended up taking us two years to do this plan was a really good thing, because it meant that everybody had time to develop trust in each other.

It was a very trusting group by the end of it. I think one of the good things was there was a lot of continuity in the people who attended. You didn't have a different person every week, which does tend to be a bit of a feature sometimes of government meetings these days. You have to go through the whole explanation of everything again from day one. That slows down the collaboration, I think.

It was partly that, but it was also just the whole business of when we were working up there in the reef. It was their first time in the world, anyone had done a marine park that size. Here, we were telling fishermen we wanted to close the reefs. We didn't have any evidence that it was going to work, but we thought it probably would. But would they trust us for the next five years or whatever it was? If it didn't work, we'd reopen them. But if it did work, then we'd probably do more of it.

David Pembroke:

There are some other principles I do want to come to from your speech as well, patience being another of them. But perhaps before we just get into the speech, and some of the things that you were talking about around evidence, the importance of evidence, and the challenges that really are facing trust at the moment, and building that type of trust that you speak about at the moment, I'm intrigued about your move when you went from the Barrier Reef to the NFF where you took over from Rick Farley. How did that come about? Tell me that story.

Dr Wendy Craik:

I was working in the Great Barrier Reef. I'd been doing the job. I was running the office in Townsville. I've been doing that a couple of years. A colleague of mine who used to work at a different lobby group in Canberra said, "Look, the NFF job is going." One of the people on our consultative committee in the Great Barrier Reef was actually the president of Cane Growers. They were a member of the NFF. I had a chat to him, and he said, "Oh, yeah. You might find it interesting." I applied, and got the job, even though I had no farming experience.

David Pembroke:

What was it when you thought about the job? You thought about the challenge. Clearly, you may have done your time, and exhausted the challenge where you were, but what was it about running the NFF, which is a complex beast of an organisation with so many contested views even inside the NFF alone. What was it that was appealing?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I knew a couple of people who worked for lobby groups in Canberra. They always seemed to have a great job. It seemed to be really enjoyable. That was one thing.

David Pembroke:

They're always having fun.

Dr Wendy Craik:

It did seem to be really interesting work. Yeah, it was interesting. I thought, "Gee, this would be really interesting." It did have relevance to the reef because at that time on the reef, people were starting to get concerned about runoff from agriculture, and its impact on the reef. It had a bit to do with the cane growers, with some of the cattle graziers, and things.

Yes, I was going to the other side of the fence, I guess, as it were. Thinking, "That'd be really interesting doing that." Actually being a bit closer to government than working as a public servant. But from the outside, I just thought that'd be an interesting challenge.

David Pembroke:

Now, we could continue down all this remarkable career, but you've just bounced from one to the next, to the next, and thought, "Oh, that might be interesting. I might go, and have a look at that."

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yes, something like that.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Is that the science to it? It's not as if you've been quite deliberate about it. It's really about you've found yourself to the next opportunity, probably weighed things up, and thought, "I might head in that direction."

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. Yeah. It's when I had the opportunity to, after the NFF, I knew I didn't want to go into politics or anything. Five years in that job was close enough. Then had this possibility of going to BC over a listed company. I thought, "Oh, that'll be different, and interesting." It was in an area subject matter that I thought

was interesting. I had a go at that. Yes, it's really a bit of a matter of what's on the horizon, what are the possibilities, and, "Oh, that'd be good. That'd be interesting."

David Pembroke:

What advice then do you have for public servants who are listening now? Perhaps young public servants who are thinking about their career, what advice do you give people when they say to you, "Wendy, what should I do?"

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, I'd say, get to know as many people in different areas, working in different areas as you can, not just in your own little subject matter. But get to know people in different areas. If you get an opportunity, take it. You never know where it's going to lead. It might be really exciting. You can always go back if it's not, or do something different. Take the opportunities that arise, and don't be afraid to take it.

David Pembroke:

I was going to probably get to that point. How do you overcome the fear of, "Oh, maybe I've built up a certain level of expertise, seniority, and respect in this public area. If I go over there, maybe it's not going to work out." How do you overcome that?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I think you're just honest about it. Because I remember, when I just got the NFF job, it was my first radio interview, and I forget his name, Clive Robertson, I think it was the name.

David Pembroke:

Yeah, in Sydney. Yeah, 2BL at the time.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right, on the ABC. It was the day of the first NFF meeting, the council meeting. He asked me, "What was going to happen with this commodity this year, that commodity, and the other commodity?" I managed to get about three or four of them. Then he asked me about cotton. I said, "Frankly, I don't know. I've only been in the job for a week, so I don't know, I'm afraid."

He took that quite happily. We managed to get on fine for the rest of the interview. But yeah, just be honest. I'd go out, and talk to farmers. They knew I didn't have a farming background, but they always answered my questions, and none was too silly for them to answer sort of thing. Yeah. It all worked out just fine. I think being honest about how much you know is a bit helpful, actually. People are quite sympathetic, and understanding.

David Pembroke:

Would you describe perhaps one of your superpowers as being curious? Is that what leads you?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I suppose it is, yes. Also, just the challenge of doing something different. Once you've done something for a while, doing something new, and different is always a bit challenging, and makes you think about other things. You get different perspectives, which is always useful, having different perspectives on an issue. Yeah, I think curiosity is part of it. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

Now, I'd commend people to go, and read your speech that you gave at the Frances Adamson Oration, because it's a good speech. Plenty in it. But you did highlight the fact that science and expertise are increasingly regarded with distrust, and cynicism. There is this contestability. This idea that there are different versions of the truth, and that they often assembled to delay, to confuse, to subvert. What do you see as the root cause of this issue?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I'm sure like a lot of other things, social media's got a lot to answer for here, as it has for some other things. Because anybody can say what they like on social media, and get away with it. They don't have to own up who they are for a start, and what their evidence is. I think it's very easy to make claims without any evidence.

I suppose when people see those claims, they made other people who may also have odd views, feel quite comfortable about parading their own views. That encourages everybody who wants to claim they're correct about stuff to make outrageous claims. Nobody ever has to provide the evidence. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

How do we manage that though? How do we change that? Is it through regulation? Is it through behaviour? Is it through education? How?

Dr Wendy Craik:

It's probably all of the above, I think. Everyone has a contribution to make there, and where possible to challenge people when they say things that are clearly outrageous, and to provide the evidence when you're making a case that is substantiated, a scientific case or an evidence-based case, and to seek evidence. I think it's good that Andrew Lee has been promoting the importance of monitoring government programs, and what their impact is.

I think that's really, really valuable. There should be more of it, examine the impact, and then report it publicly so people can actually see what the impact of government programs are. I think that's really important. For other people, too, to translate the evidence in a way that's understandable, and credible by people.

I think this business collaboration, working closely with people, and working in partnership with people really helps in that, because then you are not the only one singing the message there. They're singing the message as well. I heard a great example of that last week.

I was at the Crawford Conference where a researcher from Southern India was talking about an irrigation group that he'd been working with. They'd done four years of research. At the end of the four years, he was a bit stunned because a section of the farmers got together. They put together this street dance, which was the results of the research project. They sang and danced this what you do now for irrigation in Southern India, which is more climate adapted.

All the other farmers were transfixed. They didn't only perform this street dance once, they performed it 200 times. They'd really got the message. They were really selling the message. Collaboration, and working in partnership with people can really help because everybody can sell it.

David Pembroke:

Are you optimistic about making progress?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, yes.

David Pembroke:

Are we going through a period of getting used to it, settling into it now, and perhaps as you say, regulation, education, collaboration, participation, partnership will help to give people greater ability to understand, and see what is the truth is?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, yes. I'm optimistic. You couldn't exist if you weren't, I don't think. But yeah, no, I'm very optimistic. I think the example that I mentioned in that talk where the Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Consensus Statement, where they spent two years putting together, analysing, doing peer reviews, and summarising the results of something like 4,000 research papers since 1990 on water quality in the reef, and what affects it. They had hundreds of reviewers at various levels in the whole thing. They came up with a single statement that was evidence-based. It's been thoroughly reviewed. It'd be very hard for anyone. It'd be almost impossible to refute it, because it's been through such a thorough, rigorous process. It's all transparent.

I think transparency is a really important thing, but something like that. It means it'll be very difficult for people to challenge, and make it much easier, I think, for anyone to respond to it. What do we do now?

David Pembroke:

Really, the role of science, and scientists really comes to the fore in this, doesn't it? Because once they've done the work, they then need to be able to effectively communicate it, whether it be through dance, interpreting, or however they're going to do it. How important is it that scientists become more effective communicators?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I think it's really helpful if they are, but not everybody is. If you can't do it yourself, you need to get someone else who can do it for you, because not everybody's a great communicator. Sometimes it's hard to make a person who's not a great communicator, a great communicator. Get someone else to do it for you. Someone who would have credibility doing it.

But I think it's really important that you try yourself, and expose your work to people who are likely to be critical. You've got to be able to defend it.

David Pembroke:

But what if the motives of those who you are trying to convince are bad, are poor? It wouldn't matter what you told them, they're not going to believe you. How do you deal with that?

Dr Wendy Craik:

There's probably not much point in trying to persuade them in this case.

David Pembroke:

Move on.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Move on, basically. Yeah, that's right. No point beating your head against a brick wall. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

What advice, though, do you have for people in terms of that ability to translate highly technical information, and get it into a form that policymakers, and others can understand, the public can understand? What's the best way?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Practise, I think.

David Pembroke:

Practise.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, and work with people. Try to work with people who can help you write the thing clearly, write the thing in words that the audience will understand. I think practise is actually probably a lot of that. Understand that everybody doesn't think the way you do, and try to relate it to how you understand they see the world. I think that's helpful.

Get someone to help you if it's difficult. Most people are very willing to help other people sell your message.

David Pembroke:

There's multi-formats these days, aren't there?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah.

David Pembroke:

In terms of being able to get the message across, whether it be something like what we're doing now, which is a conversation in a podcast, a video, animation, written drawing. Again, going back to the dance.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. There's all sorts of ways of exploring, and experimenting perhaps in different ways.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, even showing people, taking them out to see something. That always really helps. When we're working on the reef, taking people out to see stuff is really, really valuable.

David Pembroke:

As your career then, you said in your speech, though, that you don't really feel like you're a public servant. That you're public servant adjacent. But you've always had the service, and service to the community as part of it. How do you reflect then as someone who has spent so much time in that space when you look at the APS?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Look, I think that public service generally does a really good job. I think they cop a lot of unfair criticism, to be honest. But I think the majority of public servants aim to do the right thing, aim to serve the public, actually, and serve the government, whoever it is. I think the majority of people do that.

Yeah, I've only been in what I see as the mainstream public service for a very short time. Mostly, I've been in either kind of statutory authority arrangements or outside. I know they're part of the public service, but not quite what I think is straight line department.

But the public service, I think they're really valuable, a really valuable service to the country. I think there's a lot of really clever people trying to do their best, and trying to come up with the right solutions for people. I'm a great defender of the public service. I think their intentions are by and large honourable, and really just trying to do the best they can in sometimes very difficult circumstances, and very challenging circumstances.

David Pembroke:

Perhaps advice then maybe that you might have for public servants as they look perhaps towards that environment that you've been involved, whether it's the not-for-profit sector, being on boards, or being in quasi organisations that sit outside, how should the public servants think about engagement with those types of organisations? How should they get the best out of those types of relationships?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I know it's human nature, but you often think, and having been guilty of this myself, I often think it too, when we were working on the Great Barrier Reef up in Townsville, you deal with public servants in Canberra, and there's this natural tendency to say, "What would they know about it there in Canberra? We are up here in Townsville," and vice-versa.

David Pembroke:

That happens everywhere, and still.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. I think one really needs to be a bit more tolerant than that. I think it's inevitable. You sort of think that, but you really ought to think, "Those people have particular qualities, and expertise that I may not have." You really ought to become friends with them rather than be an antagonist or tell them they don't know what they're talking.

David Pembroke:

For the public servants, there's probably value also, isn't there, to travel?

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

To be present in these places.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yes. To go and see them, see what they do, and see what people do, I think really does help to get around. I really think this notion of having a really wide range of contacts and friends is really helpful. Not just in your own little discipline, but broadly. Because you never know. They might have an idea that really helps in the

things that you do, that you wouldn't have thought of. I think that breadth of subject matter, and people in different subject matters is really, really, really helpful. I've certainly found it helpful.

David Pembroke:

Some of the golden rules, just before we wrap it up. This notion of patience, and being patient, it's difficult.

Dr Wendy Craik:

It can drive you bonkers.

David Pembroke:

Waiting when you've got ministers, officers, and advisors who are piling into you. You've got everybody telling you what to do, when to do it, how to do it, by when, and you are saying, "Just be patient."

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. Just be patient.

David Pembroke:

Great, Wendy.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yes, I know. Not everybody is, and it's a difficult one to sell. I know. But you do have to be patient. Because if you're trying to get other people to agree to something, they're less likely to agree, I think if you're trying to hassle them to agree by 5:00. Whereas if they've got a few days to think about it, you might likely get a much more positive answer. I think this whole thing of, you need to let me know by ...

David Pembroke:

Have you noticed this through your career, though? This acceleration of life, and everything, have you?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yes. Yeah, very much so.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Do you yearn for the old days of-

Dr Wendy Craik:

It was quite nice.

David Pembroke:

... back in the Barrier Reef where you say, "We had two days." It sounded lovely. We're sitting on the lunch where we are talking to each other, and we've got time to build those relationships.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. Yeah. It was a big deal when we got a fax machine in that office. That was those faxes that were those smelly, purple ones on the shiny page.

David Pembroke:

I bet you didn't like that either, when it was like ... They can get at me now.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. That was pretty slow compared with email, and things today. I've seen a lot of change. We used to have those Gestetner things to multiple copies. Yeah, the world has changed dramatically. We've got the first word processors, WAN, computers, PCs, I remember.

Yes, the world has sped up a lot more, but I think sometimes has it achieved a lot more in recent years. I suppose it has. I suppose productivity is a lot greater than it was in those days. But nonetheless, there's often a benefit to be gained by considering things a bit more slowly, I think, and not being too impatient to get the result immediately. Is it really going to make a difference if it's another day or another few days?

David Pembroke:

Yeah. There's this principle in project management of think slow, act fast, take the time to learn, to consult, to listen to. Then once you do know what you're going to do is, "Go."

Dr Wendy Craik:

Go, and do it. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Make it happen.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

David Pembroke:

Be collaborative, collaboration. You've mentioned that a few times already.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, really important. Whatever you want to do will be done much better if you're doing it with other people, and other ideas. Some of your ideas might be okay, but other people will have really good ideas, too. You can really benefit from working with other people. Usually, you end up achieving a lot more. Yeah.

David Pembroke:

Turn up, and listen.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, I think one of the things you've got to really do, if you say you're going to come back at such and such a date or to do something rather than to hear the reply, you've got to go back, and do it. Actually turning up in person is really important, certainly was in dealing with farmers in regional Australia. They really like to see you face to face. They really like to get to know you as a person, not at the end of a phone line, or not at the end of a Zoom. It's a real, personal thing. I think they assess you on what you do.

I think the whole business of actually going out there, talking, making the effort to talk to them, and doing what you said you'll do, not just saying, "Oh, sorry, can't do it anymore," I think those things are really, really important in the rural sector, and farmers particularly. Yeah, I think it stands you in good stead.

David Pembroke:

What about giving bad news? You've got to go, and front the bad news.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, you've got to go, and front it. Yeah. Painful as it is, you've got to go front it. Yes. There's no other way, unfortunately.

David Pembroke:

I can see the scars.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, that's right. That's right. You've got to be honest.

David Pembroke:

Just a final word, a quick last one. We'll grab science, and evidence. They help you to make better decisions.

Dr Wendy Craik:

They do. Absolutely no doubt about that. I'm really at a loss to think why people would think that it wouldn't be the case. Because if you've got evidence that something actually works, it really is compelling, I think, to why wouldn't you do some more of it?

David Pembroke:

Yeah. But it really is that next piece that you highlighted before though, isn't it? Once you've got the evidence, the job's not done. You've got to explain. You've got to go, go, and go again with attention spans, challenged, hyper-competitive, the contest for people's time and attention, you really have to just start explaining, and keep explaining. You never stop explaining.

Dr Wendy Craik:

That's right. Yeah. Try to find different ways to explain it, if you're having trouble.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Where to from here for you? What more can we expect?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I don't know.

David Pembroke:

You've got plenty of things already to do.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah, I'm still doing a few things at the moment that keeps me busy enough. I don't need anything else at the moment. No.

David Pembroke:

No, not looking for a new challenge.

Dr Wendy Craik:

No, I'm not looking for a new job.

David Pembroke:

There's no part of the economy that you haven't stuck your nose into.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Not that I can think of, really, at the moment.

David Pembroke:

What was it like being a reserve bank board member?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, I learned a lot there. It was really, really interesting. The people at the bank are very impressive. They're so knowledgeable about the management system. It really is staggeringly impressive how knowledgeable they are, and how much they carry in their heads.

No, I found that really interesting. The staff were just great. The other board members were really interesting as well. It was really interesting having people with different perspectives on the board. That was how they were chosen at that time. They have quite different perspectives, come from different areas of the economy.

David Pembroke:

Did you feel the responsibility?

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, yes, you do.

David Pembroke:

Because when you're sitting there, thinking ...

Dr Wendy Craik:

Yeah. That's right. Because if you're going to raise interest rates, think of the impact that it's going to have on people. That's right.

Similarly, if you're going to lower interest rates, all these retirees who are relying on their term deposits, what's the impact they're going to be? Yes, it is.

David Pembroke:

How'd you deal with that? Obviously, throughout your career, you have been a lot of important jobs where you've had to make important decisions. How do you deal with that responsibility?

Dr Wendy Craik:

I think you just try to make the most responsible decision you can. You've got all the information, try, and pull it together. Make the best evidence-based decision that you possibly can, or based on the argument that carries the most weight. I think discussing with other people, so that you actually get a lot of different views in on the issue, I think that really helps you, and can convince you or not convince you that you've actually made a reasonable case for the one that you're putting. I think having a group of people to discuss such an issue does really help in terms of clarifying, what are the reasons for, what are the reasons against, where do we sit?

David Pembroke:

A final question. We've been doing this podcast now for a few years. It's great. You talk to so many interesting, wonderful people in, and around the public service. It's this diversity and opportunity of challenge where there's so much that's so interesting that you can apply yourself. When you turn around, and look back at your career, what do you take out of it? What are the one or two things that you take out of it that you think, "I know this to be true?"

Dr Wendy Craik:

Gosh, I can't think of anything other than the sort of things I put in the talk. But all those things I put in the talk with things that really resonated ...

David Pembroke:

Okay, rather than that. Yeah, you put those things, but you must look back, and smile. You must look back and think, "That's not bad. That's been fun. I've had a good time. I've made a contribution."

Dr Wendy Craik:

The Great Barrier Reef, I think. Yes, that was fun. It was brand new. It was really fun. I think I made a contribution there.

What else? National Farmers Federation, I think I made a contribution there. Yeah, where else? Good question. Oh, I'd lead a letter panel doing a review of the Intergovernmental Biosecurity Agreement, I don't know, quite a while ago now, eight years ago or something. I think we made a good contribution there. Really, really helped. I suppose they're the things that stand out immediately in my mind.

David Pembroke:

But there must be that satisfaction that you've worked hard, you've tried hard, you've worked hard, and you've made a difference.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Oh, there's a lot of satisfaction in it. Yeah, a lot of satisfaction.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Lots more to do though. Got to keep you healthy.

Dr Wendy Craik:

It keeps your mind engaged, as I've seen, no doubt about that. But then about healthy, too much sitting at a desk, I think.

David Pembroke:

All right. Listen, Dr. Wendy Craik, thank you so much for coming in, and sharing some of your knowledge, your experience, your wisdom, and your recollections of the great contribution that you've made to public life here in Australia. The country's clearly a better place for it, because of the work that you've done.

I know that to be given the honour to speak at the Frances Adamson Oration, that is top shelf. Congratulations on that honour. Again, thank you on behalf of the audience, and the Australian people for your service.

Dr Wendy Craik:

Thank you very much, David.

David Pembroke:

To you, the audience, as I said before, you can see the full transcript of the Frances Adamson Oration by Dr. Wendy Craik. Just jump onto the IPAA National website, and we'll also leave a link in the show notes. Plenty more episodes like this one are still available for you to listen to. You can go back, and listen to past episodes via Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, or wherever you do get your podcasts from.

But, listen, to follow all the latest news, and interesting people in the Australian Public Service, you can follow them at contentgroup, and at IPAA ACT on LinkedIn to stay up to date on Work With Purpose. Indeed, if you do have time to leave us a rating or review, of which there are now many, it does help us to be found. Thank you very much to all of those of you who have taken the time to leave a rating or a review.

Work With Purpose is produced in collaboration between contentgroup, and the Institute of Public Administration of Australia ACT, and supported by our good friends at the Australian Public Service Commission. We'll be back in a fortnight with the next edition of Work With Purpose. My name is David Pembroke. It's bye for now.

Voice Over:

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