



# TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT SESSION

## 2021 FUTURE LEADERS SUMMIT

### NETWORKING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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HOLLY NOBLE: Today's Summit is a special one. It is designed purely on feedback from our Future Leaders Program participants and aims to provide a spotlight on the key themes that you told us mattered most – particularly after a big year. The Future Leaders Committee regularly engages with our alumni and I encourage you to contribute your ideas to make our Future Leaders events and engagement program the best they can be for you.

We're now going to move to our second masterclass for today, of networking in the digital era. I know you're going to find our two guest speakers who are networking gurus. Very inspirational. A reminder to please keep engaging with the chat function on the right of the screen. We want to hear from you. I'd now like to hand over to Paul Gist from Learning and Development at the Australian Taxation Office. Who's going to be our lead facilitator for the second masterclass today.

PAUL GIST: So thanks very much, Holly. And good morning, and welcome to the second masterclass for today's summit. Which is on networks in the digital era. Our interactions are increasingly becoming more and more conducted digitally. And in years gone by this particular Summit, would've been held face-to-face. And we would've been building networks through our table work and with through at our breaks. And even perhaps back then, even handing out business cards to one another. And so the question, this is how do we create these connections when meeting in the digital space?

But please let me introduce our speakers for the first part of the masterclass. Belinda Casson, is an experienced senior public servant. With 20 years experience in a range of SES roles, across the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Education Skills and Employment, and the Department of Health. And she's currently the head of HR at the Department of Finance. Rachael Jackson is the inaugural Chief Operating Officer at the National Indigenous Australian's Agency. And Rachael is the lead HR functions in the Departments of Industry Innovation and Science Finance, and the attorney generals. And was the Executive Director of Governance at the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate. Rachael and Belinda will talk about why we need to build strong and healthy networks. And discuss the needs to be authentic in building and maintaining these networks. So please using your emojis, could you a round of applause for both Rachael and Belinda. Thank you very much.

RACHAEL JACKSON: Thank you. And hi Belinda, nice to see you again.

BELINDA CASSON: Good morning. Good morning, everyone.

RACHAEL JACKSON: And hopefully technology is standing up to us. I mean, we are talking about networking in the digital age. And part of the issue is making sure the technology is working. Which is sometimes a bit of a challenge. But the last two years, this networking has never been more important, I think. So Bel, what networking opportunities have you benefited from the most? And what sort of networking events do you attend?

**BELINDA CASSON:** Great! Thanks very much, Rachael and good morning everyone. Obviously technology can be a friend and a foe sometimes. So we're making good progress this morning. I think my main comment here is in terms of taking charge of networking in a digital and virtual environment, is to remember to do the same things you would do if it were in real life. So bring your authentic self and think about what you are bringing to offer to a conversation just the same as you would in person. When we used to hand out business cards, and shake each other's hands, and hug back in the day. So one of the things that I'm acutely aware of is that you can translate to your personal and professional networks from an in-person environment to digital and virtual, and we've had to do it by necessity.

But one of the things I was reflecting on in preparing for today. Was that my graduate cohort, which is almost 21 years old. As in, since we joined the public service, not our age. So I'll let you guys all do the math. As people are moving interstate, back home, or to other opportunities, or around the world. We've resorted to digital ways of staying in touch. And I know that staying in really close connection with those peers from when I was a graduate. Has also then had professional implications as well. And I was talking to the team just before, about how of my graduate cohort of 31 in my department at the time. I've worked for one, I've had people work for me. And it's an incredible network to draw on, to say, "I need a person who can do this."

So the sorts of networking that benefit me often are actually peers. So just really encourage people, not to think it's not straight up and straight down actually it's that across. And particularly for those of you who are in professional streams, or professional associations, or networks. So for us HR focus, the Human Resources Institute as our association, but also the APS HR Professional Stream. Your professional peers in the APS are obviously a really important group of people to network. So they're the ones that I find are most beneficial. So yeah, Rachael, I don't know if you had anything to add about your experiences?

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** Well look, I agree with that, all of that you've said. And I find that things like even participating on recruitment panels. So for the last couple of weeks, I've had the pleasure of being on an ATO recruit panel. And I've been connecting with colleagues who I might call on again for future, if I need to or, but it was great to get to know them. You spent quite a bit of time in between interviews, having chats and getting to know more about other agencies. So that's a great way of getting more connections, and expanding your networks as well, as expanding your knowledge of different roles in the public service.

But I would also say, I remember early on in COVID when we were adjusting to this digital way of working. You reached out to me for a virtual coffee. And I thought it was fantastic, because you've got to schedule these things to make sure that you stay in contact. And actually you don't always have to have a work thing to talk about. It's just a catch up. "How you going?" "Whatever you're up to. How you're adjusting to this new way of working?" So that was really good. And I would say maintaining that discipline of scheduling it. Because weeks turn into months pretty quickly and time goes by. So keeping those networks alive is really important.

**BELINDA CASSON:** Yeah, definitely. What helps you get the most out of your networking? What are your tips for our colleagues today?

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** So I think being authentic. It's hard particularly as an introvert. You think, oh, sometimes it's a bit draining to pick up the phone, or make time to go and see someone. And I often have people reach out to me to, "Can I have grab a coffee?" "Can I get your advice about something?" But I get something out of every time I interact with someone, and it's so beneficial to keep your networks alive. So it is that getting out of yourself and making the time to do it. But being authentic to yourself, don't force it. But I also think when you connect with someone, following up when we can have that face-to-face, the coffee that's really important as well, that you get so much out of that face-to-face interaction.

But with the digital connections, it's just a new way of doing things. But it's really important just to keep in touch. And just to celebrate little achievements, if you haven't talked to someone in a while and you hear they've got a promotion, or they've won award, or they've done something fantastic. Just say even a little text message to say, well done, keep in touch. Those sort of things are really good when you maintain your networks. It's fantastic, because when you actually need someone, they are only too happy to help. You don't have to start cold with that connection. And you've already got that basis of trust. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**BELINDA CASSON:** Okay.

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** So, Bel, given that many events are not held in person at the moment, how do you think we can better connect with people online?

**BELINDA CASSON:** Yeah. Look, that's a great question. I think they're thinking about all the different options that are available to you. And so I'm seeing some of the chats. We've got people dial in from Darwin and you haven't had to travel to Canberra for this quite rubbish, like spring weather we're having today. Although, I think Darwin people probably think Canberra rubbish, Canberra weather rather is rubbish all year. But you can connect across states, across boundaries, across time zones. Which is fantastic. But I think if we're thinking about how to make the most of those online opportunities, think really broadly about what they might be. So I absolutely love your comment about when you see someone's job news or whatever it might be, PSM nomination, all those things take some time to reach out in a way.

And it might be that you've got a text relationship with someone, you might drop them an email. Whatever it is that's reflective of your relationship. I would say though, just something I've learned possibly the hard way. Just like you in real life, there are certain people you need to tell things before you put them on social media. So of course you have to tell great aunt Brenda that you got engaged on the weekend, or whatever it is before she sees it on Facebook or Insta. Remember the same rules apply to professional news. And I'm about to announce some professional news or LinkedIn, but there's some people that I've been calling to let them know. And that's great. Keep up those direct connections with people in real life like you would, if we weren't bound by COVID.

So if we think really broadly about the mechanisms that you've got available to you now. As Rachael said, we did a virtual coffee. Also I convince obviously, to a reasonably large audience, there's been some virtual wines in my diary during COVID. Obviously at the appropriate time of day, when I'm not in charge of HR. But think broadly. You've got all these different ways to connect with people. And I know that I think that's improved to access to some really senior people. I think about some of the events that I've been involved in. Last year when I was at the ATO, was working on the APS HR graduate program. And we had online learning. We had to flip it online. That's quite unfortunately. But what it meant was. Right? Because we just needed a bunch of deputy secretaries to flip on their iPad and jump into a Zoom for 15 minutes. The lack of logistics around that actually made them more accessible.

You actually didn't need to organise car parts and complicated logistical arrangements. People are just flicking on their iPads in their offices, and coming and dropping in on things that we might've actually been able to achieve in pre-COVID time. So I'm very much of the view that some of the things and options that have become available to us because of COVID actually, are benefit. So, and it's hard to remember that there's some good things that come of this, but I think it's important for us to do that. Rachael, one of those things, obviously that's been promised of us, so we better deliver. Is our tips and tricks for networking. Is there anything that you wanted to share with the audience today in terms of your go-tos?

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** Well I really like what you said about, let people know before you're about to post something. That's a really important point. It is a matter of courtesy, and sometimes you can forget to do that housekeeping first. But also when you're using digital platforms like LinkedIn don't overshare. But be consistent with the sharing on LinkedIn. I share a bit, but not a lot. But it is a professional network, it's not Facebook. So I think just the right amount of sharing stuff on those things is important. I mean, I've got loads of contacts through LinkedIn. But I would say only a small portion of them are true connections. Sometimes they're useful though, when you've got people reach out and you think, oh, I might learn something from that connection.

Or they might have something that they can share with me, some insights. But keeping your true connections alive is really important. And I often think active listening is just so important when you do connect with someone. And I find what I value I could bring to a network is often, if I'm listening to someone who needs some advice. I'm then searching my bank of networks in my mind, who can I connect you with that will help you with the wicker problem that you're trying to solve? So, but following through is really important. If you say you're going to do something then you've got to do it. So don't over commit if you're too stretched too thin.

And help people with introductions. So that role of connection is important. But sometimes you might need to do a warm introduction. Which might be well, Belinda, I'll organise a meeting with you and my connection over here. And then you two, you've got something in common that I think you can collaborate on. But you might need to do a bit of warm handover as they say.

And then I often have people asking me for coffee or a chat. Which is fantastic. But make sure if you are reaching out for someone, it's not just all about what can you do for me? Because that gets a bit thin sometimes. I mean, networking should be about a two way connection. And yeah, I think they're probably my main tips. Or the other thing is just don't over rely on them emails. People like us, we've got busy jobs and get hundreds of emails every day. So think of different ways of connecting as well is probably a tip. What about you?

**BELINDA CASSON:** Look, good question. I think your point about creating time and space for the give and take of networking is important. And I know I spend a lot of time talking to my branch here, and obviously in previous places about the time that they invest with my full support in creating the networks across, different for us, our HR teams across the Commonwealth, invariably pays off. We offer up our recruitment plan for X, Y, Z. Someone else might need it. And then they're the people that we need to call on when we need to do this diversity initiative. So that really thinking about creating platforms for mutual exchange. And it doesn't always have to be there and then. It's about investing in future relationships as well. So I think one of the things I would also caution people, we spend a lot of time talking about peers.

And obviously reaching out to senior people, mentoring, coffees, those sorts of things. I think it's really important. And I place a really high value on knowing that people that I'm connecting with are also doing the same thing to their peers, and to people who are working for them or with them. So I think come as a thing when it comes to networking. So I think that's something to keep in mind as well. Now I think we're probably going to get our wind up soon. Because Rachael-

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** Yeah.

**BELINDA CASSON:** ... and I could talk about this stuff all day-

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** Absolutely!

**BELINDA CASSON:** ... together as well. That's a double edge sword there. Isn't it? We've been asked to cover maintaining those connections. So when we're all really busy, what's your advice Rachael about maintaining the connections and making them lasting? What would be your tips?

**RACHAEL JACKSON:** Well, it goes back to, I think the scheduling or the, if you're busy, just even the short little touch of points every now and then. To let them know that you haven't gotten about them, or sending them an article of something that might be interested in, or an update of some sort depending on the type of relationship. But I think it's really important to reflect, if it's trying to make sure that you're scheduling a connection, so depending on how organised you are, or whether you like to organise yourself. But for me, I like to make sure that I've got things in my diary so that I will connect with that person. And I've made a commitment and I'll keep that. And just not letting too much time pass for...

But as you say, I mean, you've got so many connections. Being really open when people need assistance. But also as you say, sharing documents, I've been on a regular weekly, COVID catch up with peers around the service. And people are like, "Well, can you share what are you doing with this?" It's so valuable just to have that. So you've got to be open, you've got to be able to invest of yourself. And I love what you're saying about this, not just looking up and over it. It's thinking about people who've invested in you along the way. We need to do the same with people coming up.

So I think that's really important. But yeah, just making sure you don't think of networking as something additional to your role, it's core to do your role. I think I've said before to this crew. That one, when I got this job at NIAA, one of the first questions the CEO asked me was, "How are your networks across the service?" It's so important. So it's core to your role. So schedule it in like you would other things in your day.

**BELINDA CASSON:** Yep, absolutely! And I'm going to draw on some advice that I heard Andrew share earlier, about the importance of decompression time and exercise is a pretty handy way of doing that. I actually do some exercise on a weekly basis with some colleagues, from different parts of the APS. And obviously the exercise part's important. But actually the coffee we go and get afterwards, where we solve all of the problems of the public service in that half an hour is incredibly valuable as well. So exercise is a very stinky way and productive way to catch up with peers and colleagues. While also all the health benefits of exercise are clearly well known. And investing in yourself is obviously a really important thing to do as well. So I do like that multitasking approach that comes from sharing something with colleagues.

You can obviously, once we're all back in the office together, go for a walk around the block with a colleague and get a coffee. There's all these incidental ways that you can build your networks, and your relationships. And finding the right cadence for the right connections, that's really important too. So I know that I really enjoy when staff of mine are happy to do their one-on-one, over a walk to get a coffee, or whatever it might be.

Obviously not today with the rain in Canberra, let's not go outside. But think through, how can you creatively create some space and time to do this. And digital platforms have given us some extra ideas on how to do that. But remember also, soon we'll be able to do it. Well at the moment in Canberra certainly we're fortunate enough to be able to get back to normal. But across the country, we're going to have some more opportunities. So be creative would be my advice as well.

Awesome! Now I think we're going okay for time. We haven't been, the lovely IPAA folks had a plan in place about how to tell us to wind about. So we haven't got that yet. I'm just going to pick up if I might about, just some of the comments and questions that are coming through. Because I know this is not a Q&A session of course, but we can see them. So we can try and be helpful by answering them. I can see a question here, I to be interested to get your views. How do you make a connection mutually beneficial with someone who's more senior than you, who you might not be able to offer much to, but obviously they could potentially offer you a lot. What would be your tip?

RACHAEL JACKSON: So that's a great-

BELINDA CASSON: Yeah.

RACHAEL JACKSON: ... question. And my first reaction to that is don't underestimate what you can bring to that relationship. I mean, I still maintain a relationship with a secretary who wasn't a secretary when we first had a connection. We've been working in the service both for a long time. But I still bring a perspective to her of what's happening, that she finds really valuable. But also having someone to debrief with in that trusted space, is really important. But never underestimate what you bring to the relationship. Levels they're just a thing. Your perspective is still really valid. So yeah, that's my reaction to that.

BELINDA CASSON: Fantastic!

RACHAEL JACKSON: How about you?

BELINDA CASSON: Yeah, I think it is really important to think through, as I saying earlier, I've worked for people who are grads in my year, way back when. I've also had people who are grads in my cohort working for me. And those things are going to change over time. People duck out to study, to have parental leave. So those levels is, I don't know. I know levels are a thing. Obviously, I work in HR and know all about levels. But I also know that levels are not the thing as well. And it's about genuine human connection, and there's ways to find commonalities, no matter whether it's the secretary you're talking to, or your APS 1 career starter and everyone in between.

RACHAEL JACKSON: Yeah.

BELINDA CASSON: Now we can see Paul, so now we know.

RACHAEL JACKSON: Oh, he's back. Yes. Hi, Paul.

BELINDA CASSON: [crosstalk] tell us what's up.



RACHAEL JACKSON: Yeah, we could keep going-

BELINDA CASSON: Thank you.

RACHAEL JACKSON: ... but we won't.

BELINDA CASSON: Thank Rachael, thanks all.

RACHAEL JACKSON: Thanks Belinda. It's been great chatting.

BELINDA CASSON: You too, thanks.

PAUL GIST: Great! Thank you so very much, Belinda and Rachael. A really insightful conversation. And I really did like the tips about utilising LinkedIn. That it really is not Facebook, it's a professional platform. So thank you so very much.