TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT SESSION
2021 FUTURE LEADERS SUMMIT

RESILIENCE, WELLBEING AND BURNOUT

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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.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Thanks so much, Holly, and thanks Catherine as well for the great speech. I'd also like to thank IPAA ACT for giving Deloitte this great opportunity to hold the masterclass today. So my name's Lizzy Nichols. I'm a senior manager in Deloitte Canberra, and I've been there for about six years now, working from grad all the way through to senior manager. Before I get onto me though, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land from which I'm speaking today, the Ngunnawal people, excuse me, the Ngunnawal people. I'd like to pay my respects to Elders, past, present and, extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander colleagues joining us today.

Resilience, wellbeing, and burnout as a future leader are really topical. I think that everybody on the call here today has probably had some engagement with this conversation throughout their entire career. And it's something that continues to change. COVID in particular has been something that's really affected that as well. So what we're going to do, today's session's going to be quite casual. We're going to have some great speakers talk about their experiences and their research. I'd really like to open up the chat from the beginning. Don't wait to the end to ask your questions. We're going to run it as a Q and A live as we go. Make it a conversation because really wellbeing and burnout is all about managing, having a conversation and keeping the conversation going.

Since I've joined Deloitte, I've been on a number of engagements that have been challenging in a bunch of different ways and life has its own lumps that you had to deal with as well. I'm going to take a bit of time to ask all of our facilitators lots of good questions about how they've figured out how to manage that wellbeing over time and what lessons they've learned along the way so that we can all take away a few Easter eggs with us. The first leader I'd like to introduce to everybody is Paula Allen, Global Leader, Research and Total Wellbeing at LifeWorks. LifeWorks and Deloitte Canada recently collaborated to develop a report, wellbeing and resilience in senior leaders, a risk to post pandemic recovery. Paula's going to share some key insights and findings from the report. Welcome, Paula.

PAULA ALLEN: Thank you very much. And thank you for having this on the agenda. very important topic. The collaboration that my organisation had with Deloitte actually just came forward, fairly organically. I'm with an organisation called LifeWorks and we support the wellbeing of organisations and their people. And we do a monthly report called the mental health index. That report looks at the mental health of the working population. With no surprise to you, we saw a massive decline in mental health at the beginning of the pandemic. We have benchmark data from 2017 to 2019, started publishing monthly in April of 2020 and massive decline in all areas of mental health.

We looked at it a little bit further and we were anecdotally getting some information that our managers were doing not too well. They had the responsibility that everybody has in terms of just adjusting to all the change and uncertainty and living with a lack of predictability and risk. But they also had that responsibility of making sure that their people were okay and the business was okay and that's stressful. That is a lot of additional responsibility. So we looked at the mental health of managers specifically, and that we found that from the beginning of the pandemic, their mental health was actually more compromised.

This is a fairly significant thing because it is different than it was before this disruption in our lives. So for many reasons, being a little older, resources, problem solving experiences, managers tended to have a little bit better resilience, a little bit better mental health on average. But it's different now. And that has continued. So speaking to my counterparts in Deloitte, we also were realising that there really is missing piece of the data set and that's senior leaders. So that was how we came to make a decision to look specifically at senior leaders, one or two levels below the CEO of significant organisations across the globe to see what was going on.

And we were astounded. There was a massive amount of strain on this group. We found that 60% were finding in an inability to relax, 50% having difficulty sleeping. We found many of the measures of mental health actually being more compromised than managers or employees. When we took a step back, it really shouldn't have been that much of a surprise because when you think about it, everything they said about frontline managers is amplified multifold when you're a senior leader and you are shaping and steering a large ship. When you are making decisions that impact many people's lives and livelihoods. When you are also dealing with your direct reports. When you are also dealing with your own needs and anxieties and concerns. When you're also dealing with that of your family. So many levels of accountability and many levels of strain.

So a high level of demand, but also in this environment, the usual tools that senior leaders have were not exactly the same tools. The level of control they had, making decisions in the pre pandemic world and making decisions when you had to consider, changes in public health, when you had to consider concerns of your employees, business model adjustment needs, the supply changing. So many things, not within your typical control. And we know that when you have higher demand, you need a sense of control or you need support, but those three things go together.

If you have higher demand and you don't have great control, if you have less control, your strain is significant and you need greater support. But again, think about how we respond to mental health in the workplace. Very often, we're not talking about mental health of senior leaders. We're talking about the mental health of the population. That isn't right. That isn't fair. It's important to make sure that each and every individual, regardless of their level, gets formed [crosstalk]

LIZZIE NICHOLS: And that's really interesting. Can I ask you a quick question on that then?

PAULA ALLEN: Absolutely.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: You talk about control and how that as that sort of uncertainty grows, you need to be able to have more control. How do you get that? Because often times what's happened in COVID is we've had increased responsibility and less control. So it's amplified from both ends.

PAULA ALLEN: Well, you seek the control where you can get it by understanding what you can control, which might be different than what you were able to control before. So that's one thing. There's a shift, a mental shift in terms of how you're looking at your role and your accountability. But the other thing is that even, you might not get back as much control as you had hoped. You might need to have that support, which is the third leg of that triangle. And what we found in our results is that senior leaders who had the support of their peers, did better. It wasn't even so much the support of your one up manager. It was the support of your peers. So being able to sort of rely on, work things through, prioritise with people who understood your own experience, that was one of the factors that made a significant difference.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Yeah, that's really interesting because I think we always looked at our boss for help when, when we're stuck or you look up to go, well, what should I do? You've been here before, tell me I should do. And the peer level is usually where you almost air grievances or, "have you had to deal with this?" It's a bit weird, but it makes sense that you would need that. Just the reality that it's normal and everyone's going through it. How did you deal with that? Oh, okay. I'll try that.

PAULA ALLEN: And it doesn't negate the support of the one up leader. It just, our data just suggests particularly in this group that it's just not sufficient. We have a senior leader group who, they're not managed by tasks. They're managed by accountabilities and that accountability isn't going to change. But how you deal with it and whether you're accepted or not for the struggles that you have, that's your peers. That brings me to a couple of other points actually. You know, one of the things that is really important is that people feel comfortable in being themselves and reaching out for support. What we found that there was a much higher level of stigma amongst the senior leaders than non senior leaders in organisations So it actually went up by the level that you are.

We still have a lot of workplace stigma in the workplace. It was a little bit greater for frontline managers and even greater for senior leaders. And we measured it in two areas. One was self stigma, and the other was fear of career reprisals and both were on higher and senior leaders. So I think we have a lot of work to do and some of the impact of this survey has been having organisations have these open conversations. Having wellbeing sessions, specifically focused on senior leaders. Having reality checks peer meetings. So you can problem solve and prioritise from a work point of view.

Essentially, that very obvious focus on what's needed for that group, because it's a group that's often, the wellbeing is often somewhat taken for granted. You seem to have everything together or else you wouldn't have been in a senior leadership role. So the empathy, and perhaps even the organisational support for your wellbeing tends not to be as specific.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: We've actually got a good question in the chat coming through, and people are starting to ask a few more, Paula. You spoke of the triangle support and control. What was the third arm?

PAULA ALLEN: The demand, support, and control. So when you're under additional strain, you can have, you really want those three aspects to be in balance. So the level of demand meets the level of control that you have, and the level of support that you have is appropriate to the level of strain. And whenever one of those, particularly the demand or control is off balance and the demand increases, the control decreases. Then that really is a risk situation and more support is needed. It also sort of brings me to a point. We all have gone through a difficult time during this pandemic. There's no way, there's disruption, there's uncertainties, some have had a harder time than others. The need to feel validated, the need to feel appreciated, the need feel recognised, goes up when you are under strain.

This is important to know for our employees. It's also important for organisations to know about leaders. Because we found that feeling underappreciated for the extra strain that was a natural results of this time, was one of the drivers of that 51% that we saw were thinking about exiting their role in one way or another. So 51% were thinking about either retiring or downshifting or moving to part time or retiring. Resigning, retiring were the two big ones, but we also had down shifting and part time, as I mentioned. But in total, it was 51%. The number one reason was the emotional strain and very close behind that was feeling underappreciated.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Wow, that's huge.

PAULA ALLEN: It is.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Do you have any view of what the figure was before COVID?

PAULA ALLEN: When we looked at the benchmark data that we had pretty much half. So most of the risks increased pretty much a 100%. You've probably heard it. There's some news reports, et cetera, about this great resignation. It's not just senior leaders, it's others as well. It's just the data that we're bringing forward says that senior leaders are not immune to it. As a matter of fact, senior leaders had more options for exit. We didn't find employees thinking about downshifting or retiring early. We thought, they thought about resigning, but there were more options available to senior leaders, which is a greater risk for businesses.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Absolutely. And I think one of the expressions I've typically heard for managers is that you are in the middle of the bow tie. So you've got the pressure coming from the team, and you've got the pressure coming from senior leadership, and you're stuck in the middle, just waiting to explode sometimes. What you've described instead of, in terms of the demand and the support and the control, I think it's the, at the middle, we forget the support and you kind of feel like you're alone in managing those strengths. And you've just got to somehow make sure everybody's happy, but thinking about what you can do to optimise yourself in the middle of that, it is kind of your key to not being a victim of it.

PAULA ALLEN: Well, I can tell you honestly, that the response to this report has been absolutely overwhelming. When we released it, there was some press coverage and some LinkedIn coverage, et cetera. And the number of outreaches that I got, and my colleagues at Deloitte got, people individually saying, "Thank you. At least I don't feel a alone. I thought I was the only one. I'm glad that this is on the table right now. This is is the best kept secret in the world and considered a dirty little secret that senior leaders have needs too." Like it really opened up a floodgate of, I think, things that are very positive and we're starting to do a bit of a follow up on with organisations who had been exposed to this information early,

Essentially the participants of the study. And the information was shared with their senior leader groups. The information was largely shared with their CEOs, but in a 100% of the cases, they started to take actions specifically to focus on the needs of their senior leaders, which is something that they hadn't done in a very intentional way with respect to mental health before. It was kind of just taken for granted as part of the overall strategy of the organisation.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Why do you think that is, is that because senior leaders are expected to have, to look after themselves? Is that...

PAULA ALLEN: Actually even more distant than that, they're expected to look after themselves, themselves. And they're expected to look after their staff and the rest of the organisation. Because when we even asked what are your biggest priorities? It really wasn't themselves actually. It was concern about how their role in making the right decisions for their staff during this difficult time. And it wasn't only direct staff, it was the organisation. So it was quite heartening actually to see that the mindset of these senior leaders was on the support that they needed to offer to the organisation, which is quite right.

But it also, there was the subtext of assumption that they had all the tools and the permission to take care of themselves. Some of the text that we saw, some of the comments were that they felt that their role was to make sure that the business and the employees were well taken care of. And they almost felt guilty in that self care, even though they knew that it was intuitively and intellectually the starting point of everything.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Yeah, actually it's a really good point. That's something that I was once told because this is something I personally struggled with is the feeling of guilt taking that time, even just taking a full lunch break and going and doing something for yourself. I remember, and this is quite a specific example to me, but I went and got my nails done on a lunch break. And it was the worst time I could have possibly spent because I spent the whole time worried someone was going to come and look at me and go, "Oh my goodness, we are working so hard and Lizzie's off getting her nails done." And yet I've been working till midnight every night, the last...

LIZZIE NICHOLS: She's off getting her nails done, and yet I've been working till midnight every night, the last month, and just to take that time, I felt so guilty. The advice someone gave me, which I thought was so interesting, was to say, what is the story you're telling yourself? What is the narrative? Which is, that someone will see me and go, oh dear God. I told my team that, and they were like, are you kidding? We would walk past and be like, "Oh, thank God. That means I don't have to feel guilty if I do that because we all work really hard and that's great to see it because I now know I can do that too."

PAULA ALLEN: Well, exactly. How the senior leader is, how the leader is, really defines and predicts how the rest of the organisation is. So, when you think about it, what you were doing is modeling that kind of balanced life. You can't just be focused on one thing and have your brain focused on one thing, because you started to become ineffective, and you start to become burned out and cynical. So, having that kind of, taking those moments for yourself, you're modeling the right thing. People do look, and they watch, and they emulate senior leaders.

The other side of that, is that we find that people who are very high performing, the way straining presents itself, and even depression presents itself, might not be what you see in the Hollywood movies, and read in books, in terms of the lethargic and in bed. It might present it like that, but we often find that people, they use the skills that have led them to be successful and start to overuse them. So, if you are detail oriented, you become obsessively, perfectionist. If you're hard driving, you become much harder driving. We see this profile of this high performance strain that often creates issues, chain reaction, because again, to get to that level, you probably have a certain amount of intensity, and then ramp that intensity up tenfold, and you're probably not creating the healthiest environment for your people.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Absolutely. The way I've heard that explained sometimes is that strengths overplayed become your weaknesses. If you think that being the hardest worker is going to get you to the top, sometimes you can work yourself so hard that that's actually the very thing that stops you from getting there.

Paula, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to reflect on the work that you've done with us today. For a few questions in the chat we've got here, the report is available. We've got it linked there, and we'll make sure everybody can get access to it, not a problem at all, but thank you so much Paula today. That was really, really valuable.

PAULA ALLEN: My pleasure.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I'd like to now introduce, we've got two speakers coming on board. We've got Kirsten Watson, a partner in Deloitte's human capital practice. We've also got Andrew Colvin, who's a partner in Deloitte's financial advisory team, former National Coordinator of the National Bush Fire Recovery Agency and former Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police. Welcome to both of you.

KIRSTEN WATSON: Thanks, Lizzie.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah, thanks Lizzie. Good to be here.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I really want to use this opportunity to pick your brains on how you figured out how to manage this kind of thing. How you have managed what to build wellness into your day. How you've built your resilience over time and the times you've had to avoid burnout. I think probably a good place to start is, tell me about a normal day and the things that you think about to make sure that you stay on top of your game. Maybe we'll start with Kirsten first.

KIRSTEN WATSON: Thanks Lizzie. A normal day means that whatever you planned is not going to go to plan. I think number one, so you can have best intentions, but also being ready to respond to whatever comes your way, is what I learned particularly over the last, I'd say, six or seven years of my career, and it only exacerbates with the more responsibility that you get. I think being able to accept that you've got plans, but they're going to shift is a really important thing. Then, being able to both be satisfied with what you're able to deliver whilst also being able to steer according to what your priorities and your values are, is something that I find very important. There's, when we talk about being a leader in the volatile world, there's this tolerance of ambiguity. I think being able to know that there's certain things that you don't know and being able to reach out and steer and pull things together for me has been an absolute key.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: How do you prioritise in that?

KIRSTEN WATSON: Well, one of the ... So, we're not just workers, right? We're people, and there's a lot going on, and there's been a lot going on in our lives, especially as Paula was just describing, us as individuals in our families, the nature of the work that we've had to do, and the way that we do our work through the pandemic has really changed. What I've learned, especially over the last 18 months, is it's very important to prioritise according to your values. There's an analogy that resonates with me personally. I've used it with a number of people about the number of balls that we all juggle every a day. We're all juggling things at work and at home, but those balls, they're not all made out of the same material. Some of them are made out of plastic and if you drop them, that's okay. You can pick them up another day, but some of the balls are going to be made out of glass and they will shatter if you drop them.

But no one else can tell you which of your priorities is made out of glass each day. One day, it's going to be a project deliverable that you've got, another day, it's going to be your mental health, or your child's mental health. For me, what I've become very focused on, is what matters to me. It's my life. It's my values, and I'm going to make the judgements that I need to make within that context, according to my values, but also to give people permission, and empower them, that they're the only ones often who can make those decisions in their lives as well. Leaders can't tell people which ones are their priorities, but we need to create an environment where people can trust. For me, that's been the most important thing, the values and the freedom to make those choices in a basis of trust.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Yeah, absolutely, and particularly being the chief people officer at transport for New South Wales. I feel like setting that tone and setting that culture from the beginning for everybody is really important because I think oftentimes people look to you to set those values for you.

KIRSTEN WATSON: Yes, they do. And to make rules that they can abide with, particularly in the public sector. I've been 18 years in the public sector. As we were already working very hard to create flexibility, to create a workplace of flexibility, and people wanted to know what the rules were for flexibility. That doesn't work. We don't have rules for flexibility. That's just a new set of rules. True flexibility is being able to make decisions that are right for you, for your team, for your customers and your clients, in the context of what you're dealing with, and it has to be based on trust.

The number of times, even as we were going into COVID, where people will say, "Well, we like this way of working. Will we be able to keep it? How many days we'll be okay in the future?" I can't that for you. You have to work it out. And so really creating an environment where you know that people are there to do the right thing. You're focused on equipping them with the tools to do the right thing. Then you have to create the environment and the guardrails for people to make those change. But the guardrails aren't two days is okay. Three days is okay, because no one else can make that decision outside of the context.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Yeah, and it's a really interesting point, linking back to what Paula was talking about, how there's almost the self. Everyone has their own sort of metric of what they expect everybody else will tell them is the right answer, and what they expect that this is what I'm expected to do. I'm expected to be seen rather than taking ownership of that and saying, "Well, this is what actually works for me and my values, and I'm going to stick to this and I'll justify it because I've got clear evidence and I'm going to get the work done."

KIRSTEN WATSON: Yeah. I think the move into flexible and hybrid ways of working satisfied a lot of people because they weren't being told they had to go into the office. Then a lot of people didn't like lockdown because they didn't like having to work from home all of the time. It's that voice I've been describing as the element of choice is what's really important to people. In Paula's triangle, it's the control. It gives people something that they can control in a world that is very out of control. I can have a conversation about what the work needs to be done, where it needs to be done, and who I need to do it with, and I can control the best outcome out of that. It's not a question of whether the work will be done. It's how it's best done. You can give people control over that with the right investments and support to make those decisions, but you can't give them the rules.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Absolutely. Andrew, what about you? What would you say is the way that you approach your day and how do you look for ways to improve your wellbeing throughout?

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah, thanks Lizzie. Look, a lot of what Kirsten just said really resonates strongly with me. I love the juggling of the balls, and the making the decisions. I felt that Paula's research. I mean, listening to Paula talk, she could have been talking directly to my experiences, quite frankly. There's no, particularly if I think about my senior policing career, not just as commissioner, but coming through those senior levels, there's no such thing as a typical day. That's the reality, I think of leadership. I think there's a notion that as you go through the ranks and become more senior, you get more control over your day. You don't. You actually get less control over your day because you become the domain of everybody. Especially when you get to those really senior levels and you've got political considerations and ministers who don't care less what you think you want to do that particular day. Policing, of course, it's very volatile.

I'm not going to pretend that I dealt with this well. I learned things along the way. I'm a list maker. I am a huge list maker. I write lists everywhere, on anything. There's no coherence to where I put them, but it helps me order myself about righto. I started the day thinking I was going to do A, B and C. I'm now doing something completely different, so we're going to come back and do A, B and C at some point. For me, talking to what Kirsten was saying about the ambiguity that we are living, I thrived in that. I enjoyed that. To my team around me, they probably heard me whinge and moan about it all too much about having to race off and do things that I wasn't planning, but that was when I was at my best. That was when I felt that I was achieving the most. It was my wheelhouse. That's what I was good at, was ambiguity and chaos.

But at the same time, the other half of my brain was like, okay, Andrew, you've got to make a list. You've got to write down the things that you are not getting back to. So, I would be a big list taker. I learnt that later in my career that I needed to take lists. It was the only way, frankly, sometimes I could get myself out of the office, and I could get myself to sleep, was to go, 'Okay, I may not have got everything done, but I know what I need to do. So, I've got the bits done that I can control. The rest of it, I'm going to get back to. I'm going to get somebody else to do it. Or, I'll do my best to get it done tomorrow.'

That was important for me each and every day to understand that nothing was going to go the way that it was planned, but I had a system. The other thing I would say too, how do I get through on individual days? I can't overstate how important exercise was for me. Again, I didn't realise this at the time, I'm no super fit human being, but the days that I would do something in the morning to exercise, be it a bike ride or go to the gym, I was so much better. I was so much better during the day. I can't describe why that is. Doctors will tell you it's got all sorts of chemical things in your brain that help you with that. I don't know. I just knew it worked for me. I think it was also the camaraderie of doing that with somebody else.

It was my only periods of time, and I think about my senior career in policing, I was never turned off. Police talk about that all the time. You're hypervigilant. You're always turned on. The only time I wasn't turned on was when I would be exercising, partly because I liked to mountain bike and I'm not very good at it, so I would be very focused on trying to stay upright. So, I wouldn't be thinking about too many other things, but on every other occasion, your brain is sorting through things happening, and it's just dicking around, whichever one's at the front at any given moment, but right behind it, there's 10 other things. The only way I could get through was to find ways just to switch off, or at least feel I had that control, getting back to that triangle that, okay, I've got control. I understand what I need to do.

Yeah. As you become more senior, your day is actually less in your control, and you are owned by more people and more people want a piece of you. You've got to find ways to keep that control.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I think the control is a really interesting one. I might circle back to how you've made room for yourself to be able to make those decisions, but I just want to touch on the exercise for a bit, because I think it's really interesting. I've read some really interesting studies that show that when you're in a stressful situation and when you're in sort of a flight or fight response, it's the reactive part of your brain that kicks in, and if you let that carry on, you're not making really good long term decisions. You're acting with a stress response that's heightened, and based on the immediate need that you can see, it doesn't allow you to do the long term planning. Consistently, they've found that if you even just touch a forehead, put the kettle on, do some star jumps, whatever works for you in an office setting that you feel comfortable with, but the physical, the brain always wins unless you reinforce it with the physical.

Sometimes, even in a stressful meeting, if someone says something that's a little bit confronting, or it wasn't what you expected, or something hasn't been well received, buying some time to take a few deep breaths and reestablish yourself in the physical presence has been proven by science to get the right part of your brain into gear, to allow you to make better long term decisions. The importance of physical activity to do that, you can't say it enough, it's just how we make better decisions as leaders as well.

The other thing I think that goes with that too, is elite athletes. Think about how much time elite athletes spend focusing on recovery. You won't find someone going to the Olympics saying I'm going to train every single day until I get there, so that I am the most burnt out person at the start line. It just doesn't happen.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah. I mean, I think that's right, Lizzie, but the reality is we're all imperfect. Sometimes, you know that that's what you should be doing, but you're not really good at doing it. I was a classic case of that. For me, I hit the wall a few times. When you hit it, you hit it pretty hard, and it's because of all the things that Paula was talking about, and all the things that we know. You even said it yourself. I think you're lying about focusing on your strengths, or overplaying your strengths, can become your weakness. I was good at working in ambiguity, in chaos. I saw one of the questions. How do you survive when it's not chaos? I always worked hard. No one would ever say I didn't work hard.

I always put everybody else in front of myself, including the organisation. I would be focused on what's the organisation's needs? What's the organisation's wellbeing? What are my individuals wellbeing, before myself? Then, eventually it just builds up and you hit a wall. For me, that wall looked like, quite frankly, an ambulance coming to my house one day because I just hit the wall. When it was diagnosed, the doctor just said, "You've got to stop. You have to take a break." Those moments you, you're not proud of that, but I tell you what, you learn from it, and you realise you've got to do things differently.

KIRSTEN WATSON: That was a real wake up moment for me as well, when try is no longer enough. It's do or don't do, and there's consequences to don't do. This idea that I'm going to try and look after myself, that's nothing. You actually have to prioritise eating while sleeping. Well, look at how much you're drinking. Look at what your stress triggers are. It makes the world of difference. Just thinking about it is not going to actually change anything.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: So, in terms of making that practical then, what's some things that people can take away? Where do you start? What are some practical things that they can do today to intervene with those triggers?

KIRSTEN WATSON: I saw there's ... Be conscious of what your easy buttons are and what your reset strategies are. Our easy buttons, for me, it's chocolate. Maybe after work, it's a drink. That kind of thing. They're very easy things to reach to, but you know that that's not really restoring you. It's a release in a moment, but it's not really putting fuel back in your tank. What are the things to break that trigger? I now make sure I have several glasses of mineral water before I have a drink of alcohol, and I probably don't really feel like the drink of alcohol after I've done that. Going for a walk around the block. I don't exercise a lot, but I do do micro exercise. So, just having that ability to have a physical release.

For the emotional triggers that you were talking about, Lizzie, in a meeting, I've become very attuned to my physiological reactions. When I feel like a flush of blood come through my face, or a sinking feeling in my stomach, or I get the sweaty palms, or I'm shaking, I think what's going on with my body? What am I feeling? What am I thinking? What is the thought process that's driving that physiological reaction? Am I angry? Am I ashamed? Am I embarrassed? Am I offended? Start to engage with what's going on and having a conversation with myself to work through how I respond. Because again, back to Paula's control, and someone's question about when the world feels so out of control, we can always control how we respond.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah, I would say I learnt to listen to people around me Lizzie. Again, it took me a long time, too long, to learn that lesson, that I wasn't the best at knowing when I was on a downward trajectory. Your partner, it might be your spouse, best friend, partner, whatever, they know you better than you know yourself. For me, my wife, who I didn't listen to nearly enough until it was too late, there's a common male story. She knew. She could see it, particularly towards the end of my term as Commissioner, but the other thing I did that I think is important, and Kirsten and I have talked about this, you surround yourself with people that you enjoy. You can't always, of course, but yeah, you don't always get to pick everybody in your team, but I surround myself with people who I could have a laugh with, who understood me, knew when the pressure points were on, knew when they could have a bit of a joke at my expense, knew when I was having a bad day to put a chocolate on my desk, because I love chocolate too. Just those little things.

You might have had a really bad meeting with the minister. You come back. You got to a zillion things going through your head, maybe career defining stuff, and you get back, your teams know that it hasn't gone well, and they've just done something that makes you laugh, makes you smile, say the right thing to you. That would just lift the weight of the world off. It's having the right people around you, listening to them at the right time. The other thing that Kirsten and I talked a little bit about is we are allowed to have fun. I used to say it to police recruits all the time, every time I'd graduate recruits. I'd say, "Essentially, yes, this is a serious job and I expect you to take it seriously. I expect you to perform to your best every day, but I want you to have fun. Because if you're going to do this for 30 years, or 40 years, and you're not having fun, then you're not going to be in a good place."

That's the same for the public services. Same for everywhere. Wherever you work, you are allowed to have fun. You're allowed to have a laugh. Find a way to do that because we spend a third of our life doing this. The third of it's asleep. You're not leaving much time there to have fun in life if work is really all down and down.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I couldn't agree more. One tool actually that someone gave me recently, which I just thought was gold, was around thinking about your time as a bit of a menu. They basically said, you might have an entree or an appetizer, and that could be five, 10 minutes. You might have a main meal. That might be a holiday for two weeks with your partner or friends. Dessert might be just a weekend away or something like that, but break your time into chunks and come up with a list of things that you really like doing. If you've got five minutes, it might just be listening to a really good song. If you've got 30 minutes and a meeting's canceled, instead of just looking at your computer and going, "Oh my God, I've got so much to do." Go, "All right, I've got 30 minutes. What's on my 30 minute menu? Okay, I can go for a walk. You know what? I'm going to do that. I'm going to do it with purpose." You have this list of really fun stuff that whenever you get some little time, you can actually choose to spend it having more fun and doing things that you know restore you and replenish you, or even if it's having chocolate and you know it's a choice, make most of it when you do.

ANDREW COLVIN: Hundred percent.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I like chocolate.

KIRSTEN WATSON: I've always approached work choices that I'm going to choose my boss as well, which, and practice doesn't always happen, but you've got the choice to leave as well. Sometimes I've gone into ... When I go for an interview, I'm interviewing the person who's going to be my boss, and they can change. You don't always get to have a say in who the new boss is, but if it doesn't align, if it's not giving you energy, go somewhere else. But also when you're choosing your team, think about their skill sets for today, are they going to be their skills? Are they capable of having the skill sets fit for the future? Are they going to give you and the team energy back as well? Because it's just too hard. The work is too hard, especially in the public sector. It's tough. Dealing with difficult to work with people, on top of all of that, it's too much.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: What I'm hearing is from both of you, is that it's flipping your thinking from, someone's going to tell me what to do and someone's going to frame it for me, to having way more control than perhaps you realise to make good decisions for yourself that set you up in terms of your whole team, your whole career.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah. You have control even when you think you don't have control. Even when everything seems out of control, there are things that you can still control. Focus on those things. They could be simple as the five minute breaks that you take to go to the bathroom. I'm going to consciously go to the bathroom right now, and on the way back, I'm going to get a drink from the bubble. You've got elements that you can control and slowly you'll start to build out the things that you can control in your day. In that chaotic ness of the day, which is a reality, becomes a little bit less chaotic.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: Yeah. Because what you focus on gets bigger.

ANDREW COLVIN: Absolutely.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I think that that's quite a nice point to bring it around to the concept then of resilience, because a lot of this is about, you get to that point and you learn the lessons and you go, "Okay, that's clearly the limit." Then, oftentimes, I think people forget and then they go back to your working pattern and you sort of recover from that burnout and you go again and you find, "Oh, the limit's a bit further than it was before. I can just keep doing this." What advice would you have for people on the call about managing that cycle? Because it almost, it validates the story that if I keep pushing the limit will be further again, because I'll be a bit more resilient and I can keep going.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah. It's a rubber band, isn't it? You keep stretching it, it's going to break. I guess it's that self awareness to know that that's what you're doing and you can do, you can sustain it for a little while, maybe, but again, if you're listening to people. Paula talked about peers. For me, in my senior career in policing, peers were so important to me, partly because they had a sense of what we were dealing with, what I was going through.

I found that I wasn't a good share. I'd share bits with lots of people. I'd never share everything with one person, even my wife at times. Yeah. I look back and I think yep, could have done that a lot better, but they would be a guide for me. They would say, that rubber band's getting too thin, Andrew. You got to take a step back a little bit. [inaudible], as well on that, but I learned a lot about resilience through the bush fire work and just seeing communities in a completely different scenario. If you have an opportunity, I'll talk about that.

KIRSTEN WATSON: The athlete's model is, I think, seductive, because they do so well. The Olympic athlete, everyone would love to be an Olympic athlete. That's in comparison to a professional career. It's a very short period of time. As Andrew said, you can't drive yourself like an Olympic athlete for the length of your professional career. We need to reframe what it takes to perform, and what success looks like in the context of a lifetime, especially with our lifetime, our healthy lifetime increasing. How are we going to really make the most of that as whole people?

One of the things that I've learned to do, especially again, over the last 18 months, and especially at home actually, but also at work, is ask for help. It's often in those moments that I've helped the most overwhelmed, where I've just literally sat with my head in my hands and thought, I don't know what to do. I can't do all of this. What I do now? Now I've got on my phone, literally, a list in my notes section called people who can help. Because, in those moments of overwhelm, it's very easy to feel on your own, but we're never on our own. We're never on our own. People will always rise to being asked to help. From a professional perspective, the more you ask people to help, the more they grow as well. You lifting as a leader, gives people space to lift into, and that's good for them as well.

The other thing that I would say from a resilience perspective, often the times that we build resilience are some of the worst experiences in our lives. I want to call out the concept of shame. I'm a huge fan of Brene Brown's work. Sometimes the things that make us feel the worst, we don't want to tell anyone. We're holding onto it. It's a shame storm going on in there and it's not getting any better. When you've actually verbalized what it is with a really trusted colleague, friend, partner, shining the light of day on it really helps. It's a lot worse when you hold it inside.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: I think that is great advice, and so important as leaders. I think Brene Brown's got some great stuff on vulnerability and how to navigate the emotional turmoil, which is exactly what Paula was saying about the emotional stress on leaders and finding vows for that. I'm conscious of time, but Andrew, I do think it would be worth if you've got a moment to give us some of your reflections on the bushfire crisis and how some of these concepts came through in terms of the recovery effort. Before we move on, we're going to do a quick [inaudible] poll after that, but I think it would be great to get a minute or two.

ANDREW COLVIN: Yeah, happy to Lizzie. Probably the greatest piece of advice for everybody listening if they haven't heard of Brene Brown, and they haven't watched or read, watched her YouTube videos, or read her books, get out there and do it because she's brilliant. It resonates with me so strongly what she said. The bushfire victim, the bushfire role, was an amazing privilege for me to get out and sit around kitchen tables with people who've been through the worst day of their life and try and work out what we can do. I expected that mental health would be an issue that I would have to dig hard to get people to talk to, particularly because these were rural communities, hardened farmers, your typical ... Yeah. If there is anything such as a stereotypical Australian, but what people think of is stereotypical.

I got to say, if it wasn't the first thing people raised with me, it was in the top three, every time. I was blown away by it. There is a consciousness in the Australian community right now of mental health, wellbeing, burnout, fatigue, stress, that I don't think was there five and 10 years ago. The question of course is how do we capitalize on that? What I was seeing was, and I guess it's important about resilience as well. The fact that there'd been a bushfire, wasn't the cause of the stress or the pressure. Yes, probably maybe lost a home or whatever it might be. Clearly, that's traumatic, but it was just the pressure of everything around them. So, even my presence would be adding pressure to them because I would be asking, what can I do to help you?

Sometimes people aren't ready for that question. Nobody travels that journey at the same pace. It's the same in your workforce. Everybody's at a different place in their own mental wellbeing, in their own journey, and us making judgments about what should be a rational decision, or why can't you fill that form out? It's really simple. It's illogical because you're not putting yourself in their shoes. I've found that time and time again, it was the same in the [inaudible]. It was the song in the bushfire, all of it. We make assumptions about how people are because physically they look fine. They met me at the table. They've made me a cup of tea. We're having a grand old chat, but they're not fine. I think the lesson I learned is you've got to scratch past that surface to understand how people really are traveling.

Often, it's not about diagnosing, or telling them what they need to do next. It's simply understanding what they're going through. So, I quickly pivoted my work with the communities to stop trying to say, "Well, I can get you a free counseling session with your local GP, or I can do this. Or if you fill this form out, we can get you some money." Just let them tell their story because the storytelling was the most powerful thing. I saw it in the AFP as well. We went through our challenges with culture and behavior. We went through some terrible challenges with mental health and suicide.

People didn't always need the answer to be given to them. They just needed to be listened to. They just needed someone who understand what they've been through. That did more to build their resilience than anything I could do in terms of, clearly rebuilding a home and thinking that was going to be good for them, but in the moment, listening was so important and storytelling was so powerful. I mean, there's so much I learned in that 15 months or so that I'll take with me forever, but was a real privilege.

LIZZIE NICHOLS: That's amazing. Andrew and Kirsten, thank you so much for taking the time to provide your own personal reflections. The biggest thing I think I've taken away is someone who is looking at the leaders in all organisations, is that you realise that they're humans and most people on this call have probably gone through that realization of, "Oh, they're just people too, and you don't need to shield the challenge that everybody goes through because by talking about it, that you get the support that you need."

Thank you very much.

We're going to do a quick Menti poll for everybody here today. I'm conscious of time, so I'm going to power through it quite quickly, but we've got some slides that we're going to put up and we're going to have two key questions that we'd like to reflect. Firstly, scan your QR code on the screen. This will take you to the link. Alternatively, you can type in mentee.com and enter the code. You don't have to log in or anything. It's completely anonymous. We've got two key questions that we're going to ask.

The first question is ... Here we go. I'm just bringing out my notes. I hope everybody's got access. Crowdsourcing from your peers, based on your personal experience, what practical advice would you share with other future leaders to help them protect their wellbeing and avoid burnout?

LIZZIE NICHOLS: So I think we've had some great examples from today. Talking with your peers is probably something that is new. And I hope that people take that away from the people that they've met through the IPAA journey. I myself had been through the program earlier this year. And the connection that you get it makes networking not something that's this transactional business relationship, but actually your support network to help you be a better person, and a better leader in the community.

So hopefully people can start. There we go. So we've got; ask for help, take me time. Set boundaries, that's a tricky one. Something that you need to do every day. Lead loudly, I really like that one. Lead by example. Sleep on it, sleep on it. Know that it's okay for everything not to be done. Routine, not alone, meditate, self care. I think this is really good. And you can see that there's a clear theme here about prioritizing yourself. It's not about being a master leader, it's about saying by putting myself first, I'm actually helping everybody.

What else do we have? Surround yourself with good people. I think that's really important. Learn how to say no. Excellent! Take the time out, talk to others. Accept that you can't do everything. Yeah, this is really excellent. What we're going to do is take all of these away and group them up into some of the key insights that we've heard also from Andrew and Kirsten today. And we'll circulate some of these out, so that you've got a bit of a toolkit to take away. It's not just a conversation that you listen in on. You've actually got a few things that you can walk away with. Buy a good pair of earbuds and to do meetings while you go for a walk. That's great. I thought you were going to be like, so that people don't talk to you so you can focus. But that's also fair. Go for a walk on meetings. Yoga, excellent!

All right. And the final question is what's one thing that the APS could do to better support future leaders to avoid burnout? I'm quite interested to see this one, because I actually think that a lot of what we've learned today is the concept that you control more than you think you can control. So you are actually able to define your own path. And you're expected to in a lot of circumstances, even though there's this narrative telling you that someone else will tell you what the answer is. Let's see what we've got here. So as it's refreshing, set the tone from the top now, allow that control to be exercised at lower levels. That's a really good one. Knowing how to let go so that your team is empowered as well. Culture of openness is really good. Be realistic. Champagne results on a beer budget, I like that. Set reasonable spans of control, yeah.

Listen to the people in your life. I think that's really good. Reduce pressure coming down, yeah. So this is really interesting. So this might be, even though the question is what is one thing the APS could do to better support future leaders to avoid burnout? What are these things you can do yourselves? Which I think is really awesome. If I can summarise four key takeaways from what we got today is; think about your day, think about the habits that you can create, that can set you up for success. And know that change starts with yourself. Listen to your peers, and your family, and your friends who know you better than you know yourself. And don't forget to have fun. Look for ways to have fun every day. That's it, thank you very much. I think I'll pass over to Holly.

HOLLY NOBLE: Thank you, Lizzie. Thank you very much to of Deloitte of course, Lizzie, Paula, Andrew, and Kirsten for that wonderful session. It was so authentic. It very clearly resonated with everybody today.