

TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

SECRETARY SERIES: KATHY LEIGH

Kathy Leigh FIPAA (Guest)

Director-General and Head of Service

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Directorate, ACT Government

Gordon de Brower (Host)

Secretary for Public Reform

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

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CAROLINE WALSH:

Good morning, everyone. And welcome to today's IPAA event. It's fantastic to see so many of you here today. I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. And of course, extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are able to be with us today as well. We're really delighted to have a Secretary Series event today featuring the ACT government perspective, and it's wonderful that Kathy Leigh has been able to make time for this event with us today. I would now like to move on to the content of today's event, and I would like to welcome our host for today's event, Dr. Gordon de Brouwer. Gordon is the Secretary for Public Sector Reform at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. And Gordon is also the former IPAA ACT president and IPAA national president. Please make Gordon welcome. Thank you.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Thank you very much, Caroline. Good morning, everyone. And welcome to today's Secretary series address with Kathy Leigh. I'm going to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land. I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land where we are meeting. And we acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of our city and our region. And I extend that respect to First Nations people here today. This is a really nice occasion. I'd like to welcome our speaker, Kathy Leigh, who's the director general of the ACT, Chief Ministers, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and the head of the ACT Service of the ACT government. I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues in the front here around, and also welcome everyone joining us today, including SES guests, members and partners.

It's really great to have such a crowd here. The Secretary Series is a cornerstone of the IPAA events calendar, and it provides an occasion for secretaries to speak about their portfolios and areas of interest and the challenges and opportunities that they face. The format for today's event involves Kathy delivering

her keynote address. Then a very quick open discussion, but then really for you to come in with some questions to ask Kathy. And it will really welcome people who haven't asked questions before to do that, to make it a spontaneous and open event. And then I'll wrap up and invite you to stay for networking over some light refreshments.

It's my great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker today, the first time we've held a Secretary Series event with a leader from the ACT Public Service, and it won't be the last. So, Kathy Leigh is the director general of the ACT Chief Minister, Treasury, Economic Development Directorate, head of the ACT Public Service. She provides high level strategic advice to the ACT Chief Minister and Cabinet, and she chairs the strategic board of Directors General. Before taking up that position, Kathy was director general of the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate. And in this role, she advised the ACT's Attorney General on a range of issues, legal policy, court reform, human rights, corrections, regulatory services, and emergency management. That's a lot.

And Kathy served for a number of years with the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, overseeing policy development and national programmes again around justice, human rights, family law, and administrative law. She's a long serving member of the IPAA, ACT Council, and a fellow of the institute. Kathy is a great public servant, she is a great leader and she's also a great friend. So please join with me in welcoming Ms. Kathy Leigh to the stage.

KATHY LEIGH:

Thank you, Gordon, for those very kind remarks. Yuma, everyone. I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional custodians of this land. And as head of the ACT Public Service, I always like to particularly acknowledge the contribution that all of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members make to the quality of our ACT public service. Thank you all for coming. As Gordon said today, as the first ACT speaker in this series, I'm going to reflect on the role and approach of the ACT

public service, including the relationship between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. And I'm going to draw on some of our experiences in recent years in doing this. I'm very proud to be a public servant, and we can all feel very proud of our roles as public servants. What better job is there than a job that allows us to focus on the fundamentally important issues for our community, the intellectual stimulation, but together with the satisfaction of working to achieve a greater community good?

And by definition, we are working in the interests of our community because we serve the people elected by our community. The skills and knowledge of the public service are a precious and critical public resource. It's our responsibility as public servants to ensure that those skills and knowledge are continually developed and reinforced. If this resource were lost or became ineffective, Australia would be significantly weaker. I'm very proud to be a public servant and I'm particularly proud to head our ACT public service. I'm very fortunate to have a great senior leadership team, a number of whom are here today.

We're pretty well the smallest public service in Australia, and yet we've got the same scope of responsibility as the New South Wales or Victorian governments plus that of the Brisbane City Council. We provide advice to ministers and we provide services to the community on their behalf in a wide range of areas, from growing the ACT and the regional economy, including international investment, commonwealth state relations, policy debates on human rights, justice, education, health, environment, to name a few, the planning of our city to providing schools, hospitals, care and protection services, courts, correction centres, emergency services, transport, parks, and many others. Now, our budget is 1/100th of the Commonwealth budget, or 1/15th of the New South Wales budget. So, you can see that it's clearly a challenge to provide this breadth of outcomes, but we do it. And we've done it by taking advantage of being small to work as one service and trusting our staff at all levels without layers on layers of supervision to get out there and deliver.

Alan Hawke, who sadly died very recently, provided a report to the ACT government in 2011 called *Governing the City State, One ACT government, One ACT Public Service*. And we've built on that report to make one service our mantra. It's what our community expects. They don't care which area is responsible, or even worse, which area is not responsible, they just want their issue addressed. And it's how we ensure that our ministers get comprehensive advice. If we give advice on part of the picture to our ministers, we set them up to under-deliver. And most importantly of all, there are actually very few issues that fit neatly into a silo. You might be able to deal with an issue within a silo, but you will deal with it much better if you bring to bear the full breadth of skills and knowledge across the whole of the government.

So, we've worked really hard to establish a culture of collaboration. And taking this approach means that, as a small public service, we don't need to duplicate skill sets or reinvent the wheel to address issues. And it also provides more satisfying work for our staff because they're not frustrated by artificial barriers. The last few years have presented many challenges for our community, our governments, and our public services. And while no one would've chosen to go through COVID, it has provided some real opportunities for governments and public servants to show what they can do. And we're continuing to tackle COVID, but we can begin to reflect on the positive lessons and actively choose not to lose those lessons. I'm going to talk about three. Collaboration, communication and hybrid working.

COVID is a clear example of my statement that while you might find a solution in a silo, you'll always find a better one by working across the whole of government. I'm very proud of how we've tackled COVID in the ACT. With our one service approach already well embedded, we just stepped straight into whole of government mode. In the ACT we've always held daily morning meetings of all of our directors general, so those meetings just naturally shifted to a focus on COVID. So, at the highest level, we had a whole of service focus. We created a coordinator general with a team of Deputy Directors General who

remained in their normal roles but also worked across directorates as a team to solve issues as they arose. Staff moved across the public service from areas that couldn't perform their normal functions fully to areas that were under additional demand. ACT participation in Commonwealth State meetings was actually cross directorate, according to the topics on the agenda.

COVID has been the real proof of the pudding of the value of a one service approach. At the federation level as well, COVID necessitated a much higher level of collaboration. First ministers immediately replaced COAG with national cabinet, a body that met frequently to address the rapidly evolving COVID challenge. The frequency of meetings, at first, they were at least every second evening, meant that ministers could work together iteratively to address problems as they arose. And public servants too worked across jurisdictions, from the first secretaries and first deputies groups that worked on the issues that were directly before national cabinet, to the national coordination mechanism established by home affairs to address all of the practical issues that arose from supply chains, people movement, et cetera, to the offices meetings that were supporting the full range of ministerial councils that were tackling the implications of COVID. And this collaboration is something we do not want to lose. And indeed, I think we can build on it further to ensure that the collaboration is two-way so that we tackle issues with the full range of skills and experience available to us across the commonwealth and the states and territories.

I've worked in both the commonwealth and the ACT Public services, as you heard. And it's very clear to me that while the commonwealth and the states and territories have got many overlapping areas of knowledge and skills, there are also complimentary knowledge and skills strengths. My experience is we are moving to benefit from that two-way collaboration. Relationships at the public service level have always been professional and collegiate, but we're now moving to a more of a two-way flow of information, knowledge, and skills sharing. And I've also noticed that Commonwealth ministers are reaching out via

territory ministers to be able to engage directly with ACT public servants on the ground, for example, our health clinicians, so that they can gain a better understanding of how commonwealth policies operate in practise.

Another way in which the ACT, in particular, can provide an opportunity for collaboration is to run pilots for potential reforms. As I said, we're a small jurisdiction, and so we provide a really practical opportunity to trial a solution where the sample that's used is in fact a complete system, with all the impacts, intended, and more importantly, unintended, able to be visible. Already in tackling some of the current health system issues, the fact that we are small has provided an advantage in being able to see the whole system and identify specific problems and potential solutions. And the ACT mobility across the service has been an effective tool to achieve a one service approach. And I believe that greater mobility between our public services would improve collaboration, it would enhance the operation of our federation and achieve even better outcomes for Australia.

We all know that the splits between commonwealth and state responsibilities aren't the most logical or efficient. And a better understanding of the whole picture could assist us all to pursue better outcomes. Between the Commonwealth and ACT public service, we've actually benefited from mobility on an ad hoc basis for many years. But I think we should take this further, we should actively encourage mobility between all public services, and we should formalise the arrangement so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel each time. I think this is a concrete step that we could take to embed collaboration across our public services.

The second area that I said I'd cover is communication. When COVID hit, governments moved into emergency communication mode, we all saw the stand ups of ministers and chief health officers. And the public liked that open sharing of information. It generated trust in government. This engagement with the community is key to our role as

public servants, yet I think it's the area where public services have our greatest capability gap. I often wonder about why, and I wonder whether it's possibly because we conflate communication with being political, and it's very important that public services do not become politicised. We have to be able to serve the government of the day by giving the best advice possible on how to achieve their priorities. And we do that best when we're objective.

The role of the public service in engaging with the public isn't political. If we want to deliver on our good ideas and bring people with us, whether it's the various stakeholder groups or the general public, we need to be able to engage with them. And in fact, if we want to make sure that actually the ideas, we have are really the best ideas, we need to engage as part of developing them even before we know what the problem is, because how do we know we're solving the right problem, the one that will actually make a difference to our community? I think there's a greater role for communication and engagement staff directly in policy and project development. Often, they can provide that reality check about what really might be on the minds of our community.

In the ACT, we have our whole of government communications officer in those morning meetings of directors general. We have our whole of government communications officer at the table in our emergency management team. They are able, often, to provide the reality check as to what really needs to be addressed so that we're making sure that we're turning our minds to all of the issues. And even once you've clarified the problem, any important reform is going to require engagement with the community to find the solutions and approaches to delivery that are going to really work on the ground. So, communication's crucial to our core functions, COVID'S highlighted its importance, and we've got an opportunity now to shift communication from being an add-on to being embedded in our work.

And finally, the third lesson that I'd like to cover from COVID, and I think the one that's generated the most attention, and that's hybrid working. COVID'S

demonstrated how much more flexible we can be with how we work. In theory, we've always had the opportunity of flexible working hours and even of working from home. But COVID has proved this to be entirely viable on a large scale. In the ACT, we're holding onto that flexibility beyond COVID. Of course, in the ACT we have lots of staff whose job inherently requires them to be physically present at a certain place at a certain time. You can't be an ambo, a nurse, a corrections officer, a bus driver from your home, and your work hours have to be coordinated with the rest of the workforce. But for many office-based staff, it's entirely viable to be flexible.

Before COVID, in the ACT, we'd already been holding some of our meetings by video, for example, that morning meeting of directors general. Now, almost all of our meetings, including our meetings with ministers, are held by video. So, this means it doesn't matter whether you're in your home office, another office, perhaps closer to your home, or at home, to be part of those meetings. And to support this flexible approach, we're moving to establish offices across the ACT where ACT public servants can choose to go to work.

Staff find these flexibilities attractive. They can minimise time spent travelling and have more time for their personal commitments. They might come into the office on less days, or they might choose to avoid travelling at peak hour. They might travel at a time that works for other members of their household so that they can share a car at the beginning of the day. They might come home in time for their children, and then perhaps once they've settled their children into a routine, then they might return to work via a video meeting. And there are many other ways that this flexibility can support staff to manage their work and personal commitments.

For staff who are working part-time because of caring or other responsibilities, these flexibilities can make it attractive to work full-time or to work more part-time hours. And I'm really keen to see all of our staff take advantage of this to share family and other responsibilities. I believe this flexibility will

immediately make a real difference to women's participation in our workforce, and also to the gender pay gap. Having the full benefit of our whole workforce is crucial to ensuring that we have the best possible workforce. And I'm pleased to say that in the ACT, we already have 65% female public servants, 56% female members of the SES, and 50% of our directors general are women. I'm also pleased to say that we've closed the gender pay gap. For the 21/22 year, it was 0.5%. And so far to date, this year, it's 0.1%. And flexible work is going to help to embed that.

These flexibilities also support staff to see their work in terms of achieving particular outcomes rather than in terms of being at a particular location at a particular time. And they can make it easier to collaborate because if remote working is the norm, there's no barrier to working together. And where staff do want to physically come together, the less they feel attached to a particular location, the more coming together to work on an issue is going to seem the natural and easy way to work. I also think it's been a good thing for honing management skills. Anyone who was still managing by presenteeism had to shift to managing to outcomes, which, of course, everyone should have been doing all along. You really don't know what your staff are doing at their desks. Right now, despite my best efforts, somebody here is probably doing their shopping list in their head. So, the only way you can really know if your staff and colleagues are working is by the outcomes and outputs that they deliver.

And flexibility can have benefits beyond the direct benefits to how we work as public servants. Flexibility can support emissions reductions by minimising the number of trips to the office or the number of cars that are leaving a particular household. Flexibility allows people to spread their travel outside peak hours and reduces the demand for road infrastructure. That's valuable taxpayer dollars that we can put into other important priorities for our community. We, of course, need to think about staff wellbeing, whether it's the physical environment that staff are working in, or how to provide emotional support to those staff who are

confronting difficult situations as part of their job. And of course, it's very important to ensure that staff have the benefits of human engagement with their colleagues.

And I'm certainly not saying that all of the ways we worked during COVID, because we had to, are the ways that are ideal to work. But I do think that COVID has demonstrated that we can operate efficiently and effectively, far more flexibly, than used to be the standard approach. And we've got the opportunity now to hold on to those flexibilities where there are benefits. And I do note that the concept of a large workplace where everyone had to go is actually a relatively recent phenomenon. And this was pointed out in a recent productivity commission paper on working from home. Large central workplaces provided efficiencies of scale by consolidating certain functions. But today, with technology, that's no longer an imperative. And so, just as the economies moved from craft-based production to mass production and large corporate offices, the world's moving on again. And I'm really pleased to have the ACT Public Service at the forefront of that direction. So, in closing, let's all continue to build our great public services. And as we do, let's keep collaboration, engagement and open-minded, innovative work practises to the fore. Thank you all.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Thank you very much. That was great. And I learned a lot out of that. Phil, we'll go to questions, so maybe if you've got a question. I'll start actually. My own experience, Kathy, has been that the commonwealth can learn a lot from states and territories and from other jurisdictions. There are lots of things we get from the ACT, from New South Wales, New Zealand. Can you reflect on some of the things that we see, in particular, around the focus on people at the centre of what public service does? Have you got some insights of what you've seen that works and what doesn't work with that, and any reflections you'd have around that when you look at the commonwealth on what the commonwealth could do around that?

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah, look, I think it's something we've all been trying to think about and improve. I think there are probably

two things that come to mind for me. One is going back to communication, getting that feedback from our community as to what's working and what's not. One of the things that we've been doing in the ACT for a few years now is we have an online panel that we can use to get feedback. So instead of governments just hearing from the squeaky wheel, just hearing from the key stakeholder groups who are very important, but they don't give you the full picture. We have an online panel, about 6,000 people we keep on this panel that we send out about 15, 16 surveys a year, checking in on what their priorities are, whether they're receiving information from the government, and how they're receiving that information, and whether that's working for them. And there are different topics to the surveys. I think that's been a really valuable thing to do to just cut through and make sure that we're getting another lens on how we're going as a government in delivering to the community.

And then I think the other thing is we all talk about citizen centric, all our public services are organised in a way that is most logical to be an efficient public service, but that's not how the community sees the government. And so, turning that around and thinking about the community experience in engaging with the government. Something that we did a few years ago was to establish Access Canberra. We brought all of our regulators, all of our licencing, our outward facing functions into one organisation. And within that, organised the staff around the groups that were dealing with them, hospitality, for example.

And Dave Pepper, who's here, who was the first head of Access Canberra, used to tell a great story about how, if you wanted to set up a new cafe in the ACT, you're going to need health, you're going to need buildings approval, unleased public land to use that footpath and so on, and how frustrating it was for people to go and instal the sink because that was a health requirement. Only to discover, when the building approvals came in, that it was in the wrong place. It's a very practical thing. But by organising ourselves around that group and offering a coordinated service, we don't diminish the protections

that we give the community, which is the very important reason regulation is there. You don't want to cut your regulation. What you want to cut is how you engage on it to make it easier for people.

And I still get just completely unsolicited emails from people saying, "Oh wow, my son was wanting to set up a cafe and couldn't believe how easy it was." Because it really has made that difference in the community. So, it's flipping it around. And I know that's something the Commonwealth's been thinking about too in terms of Services Australia.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Excellent. Did you find that you made mistakes in doing that, or you get learning, so you change the way you do it? These things, the path is never smooth to something, it's the learning in that. You got any insights or experience around that?

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah, look, I think that's a really important point. As you do something, you are going to learn things that you couldn't learn until you started to try to do it. I think it's really important to be upfront with people, "We're going to try this new thing. We think it's going to improve things, this is why we're doing it. But if it isn't quite right, we'll change." People value that. It goes back to the thing during COVID, just being upfront with everyone, this is what we're doing and why, and what we don't know. And we're listening. I think that's really important. And rewarding people for doing that and letting your staff all the way through the organisation have the authority, the licence to speak up and have good ideas and say, "I think there's a better way of doing this here." And to show that that's valued. A lot of our staff are going to see things that the higher up you go, the less you're going to actually see.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

So, there's been a lot talked about. So please feel free. It must be provoking questions or things that you want to raise. And maybe introduce yourself just in here.

AUDIENCE:

Thank you. I might stand up. I'm Danette Colbert. I'm from the department. Forgive me, I've just come back from long service leave and it's a new one of Climate

Change, Environment, Energy and Water, DCCEEW. You mentioned something that has really rung bells with me. I've had half my life in private enterprise. I started in ACT government after some time in the military. And then I've been in the commonwealth for quite some years now. And one thing that really rang true for me was you said you don't operate under layers and layers of supervision. And I think Gordon de Brouwer was on that bandwagon as well. And I wanted to know how ACT government has done that and gotten around sort of adjusting your risk culture.

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah. Well, look, to start, to be honest and upfront, we didn't have a choice. We are really small and we just don't have the resources for layers and layers dealing with any particular issue. But it has been a real benefit. Staff step up. If you'd give staff the responsibility, they step up. And it is so demoralising to have your work go through layers and layers of checking outside of your influence and control. I think the important thing is you need to have good frameworks, you need to have good policies, you need to have good guidelines. People need to have the values that tell them how to, you need to provide good training, you need to have good assurance mechanisms. So, whether that's performance appraisals, audits, and make sure that that feedback's being fed back in. But then if you do all those things, people will step up and you need to recognise that and reward it.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

I was going to ask that question too. But it's good. You talked about collaboration. Can you talk a bit about some of the ways you went about doing that? So, besides the call of the directors general, what other ways do you build that in or reinforce that as a culture and as a behaviour?

KATHY LEIGH:

And look, I think it does take some time to get there. You do really need to keep reinforcing it. But we've used every tool we had available, legislation, values, budget bids, public service structure. Our Public sector management act specifically says that directors general have the leadership function to work together to achieve a whole of government focus and to promote cooperation and collegiality. And our SES

similarly promote cooperation and collegiality across the service. One of our values, one of our four values is collaboration, and that's also in our public sector legislation. Budget bids. If the chief minister says budget bids that are joint will get priority, people respond.

In terms of public service structure, two things. For some years now, our administrative arrangements, in addition to allocating responsibilities to particular directorates, have also established clusters, a real signal that nothing can be really well achieved except by working together. And we've got committees of our strategic board that reflect those areas. Also, something we use very often is the coordinator general, I mentioned it for COVID. We've used that many times. And I think it's a formula that's really worked well for us. It means that you have a director general or a deputy director general responsible for an issue that cuts across the service, leading a team, but all those people just stay in their day jobs. And the advantage of that is the reason they're valuable for that work is because of the skills and knowledge and connections that they have in their day job. So, you don't want to take them away from that, but you do want them to be accountable to someone on the cross-cutting issue as well as to their own director general.

And if you think about the difference between, say, an IDC where people come from their department and of represent their department's position, rather than necessarily feeling jointly an obligation to achieve the outcome, or if you think about a task force where you pull people out of their day job, I think it's really worked well to get the benefits of those approaches, but also to have a stronger commitment to working together and to bring the strengths that people have.

But of all the things we've done, I think mobility has been the biggest one. It's normal in the ACT now, if the director general is going to be away either short or long term, the first thing we do is say, which other director general wants to move sideways. And that's a really great thing to do because people get a good understanding of broader government priorities. It

really builds collegiality. We do it at the deputy level as well. Of course, it's harder to do the further down you go because I just don't have visibility. And so, we are trying to put in place systems to help that. Damian West, who's our head of whole of government strategic HR, set up a mobility register and that enables DGs to have more visibility of who's out there.

So, we're working really hard to look at how we can really embed this through the service because it really does strengthen the service and ensure that everyone has that whole of government perspective. But I think, finally, you just have to walk the talk because if you constantly talk about collaboration, but people see that people actually get rewarded from working in their silos. People aren't stupid, they're going to work in their silos. And so, you really have to show that people who collaborate get the opportunities, people who collaborate get recognised and rewarded for that. And then people believe that you really mean it.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Okay, thanks. That's very comprehensive. That's good. Yeah, Glenys?

AUDIENCE:

I was just wondering, it's Glenys speaking. Mobility between the Commonwealth and the ACT, you're talking about mobility across the directorates, but how do you encourage more of that? Because I think I can see many senior people here who've done both. And I think Commonwealth public servants would benefit greatly from being even seconded to the ACT government to see how things work. So, I'm just wondering what you're doing about improving or facilitating or even increasing the number of those mobility opportunities for both ways.

KATHY LEIGH:

And Glynnis, of course, is a great example of that. Yeah, look, I think we've been really lucky. It's easy for people here because you don't have to upset your personal life to move between the two services. And so, we have had quite a lot of it. And also, there's been a reasonable amount of recognition of leave and super, et cetera, for people to be able to move without worrying about losing some of those advantages. And I think some of those things we really do need to look

at because they do hold people back. I think formalising some of the arrangements. We've done it many times, both permanent moves and secondments between the ACT and the Commonwealth. Every time we do a secondment, we have to reinvent the wheel, we have to renegotiate, and we do it separately with each department, and how are we going to manage the payroll and the workers' comp and all of these issues? We do it again and again. They're just standard, simple issues. And I think if we had a clear framework that answered all of those questions, it'd be a lot easier to get that movement.

And I think in the ACT, there's just no reason why not because, as I say, don't have to upset your personal life. It's why when I got a phone call from a head hunter about going to ACT years ago, I went, oh, I could do that. So, it really is an absolute no brainer. I would like to see it across all of our public services. And of course, there are more personal issues for people in managing that. But nevertheless, if we had a framework and it had that formal recognition, I think we would get a lot more people. At the moment, everyone has to sort do it individually, and there's nothing that signals to people this is a good thing to do with your career. If we had that formal framework, it would tick both those boxes, I think.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Yeah, I hear a lot from people, for themselves personally, the benefits that they get when they've moved to different jurisdictions, the insights they get re-applied, and the contacts and the understanding. So, to my mind it's a no-brainer.

AUDIENCE:

I'm Katie here from the education directorate in the ACT Public Service. Kathy, gender equality and gender equity is a passion of yours. And you've talked already about how hybrid working is an element of creating greater equity for women. What do you think the other things are that we can do to further ensure that our workplaces really do provide the support for women to fully participate and, I guess, then maximise the potential of the ACT public service through making the most of the talent we've got?

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah, thanks Katie. And you're right. I do think it's incredibly important. Daniel Woods, who's the CEO of the Grattan Institute, created this great image at the Jobs and Schools Summit where she said, "If all the underemployed women were all in the ground, people would be falling over themselves to dig it out." And I went, "Yes." And I still have this image in the ACT. We don't have primary industries here in the ACT, we don't have minerals so far that I know of in the ground, but I have this great image of all these women that we've got in the ground that can be dug out.

And so, look, I think, probably one of the things that we could most do is just encourage men to take on more family responsibilities. And that's why I said I really hope that our hybrid working will be taken up by all of our public service to ensure that everybody fulfils all of those domains of their life. And once we stop going, "Oh, this is to make it easier for women. This is to make it easier for women." And instead, it's how we make it easier for everyone. That's when we were really cut through. And it's taken decades and decades and decades, various famous people. I remember when Mary Gordon was appointed to the high court as the first woman, saying, "I look forward to the day when it's no longer remarkable." And now we've got more than half on the high court.

So, we do get there. But I think the more we can do to support our whole workforce to take advantage of all of these terms and conditions, the more that people look and they see, I'm glad that we can see in our senior leadership, that we've got equal women there. People go, "Oh look, you can do it here. It's real. It's not just the talk." So, they're probably the two things that I think are most important, just demonstrating that it's real. And actually, can we finally get to the point where we don't have to think about it because we're thinking about all of our public servants.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Where the Commonwealth struggles in particular is around culturally and linguistically diverse First Nations, and some of them around disability, differently abled as well. How do you address those? Because structurally, there's a problem.

KATHY LEIGH:

Look, we still are challenged by that as well. We've set targets for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and for disability. And they've been flowed through to the performance agreements of every director general, and they've been broken down to directorates. So, it's real. It's not just some amorphous target up there, and we all get on with sort well-intentioned but actually not making a difference. So, I think really making it hard line, establishing designated roles where that's appropriate, say, in our corrections services, in our park services, et cetera, to recognise the value that our First Nations people can bring to those roles. We've done a lot on cultural awareness. A while ago I created a cultural advisor for Chief minister's department, but we are just in the process of creating one whole of service. We're creating an area in our whole of government strategic HR that is dedicated to looking at our First Nations staff.

I think it's incumbent on all of us to gain greater understanding. Things like our wraps are really important for how are we all going to step up and get a greater understanding? It's not until we are truly an open-minded, welcoming environment that we will really crack that. And people with disabilities, actually we're struggling more even with that. We are doing exactly the same techniques to try to address it.

And one of the things that I wonder with disabilities is just what we mean by that. And we still have the image of the wheelchair as a symbol of that, but actually there are many different ways in which people may have disabilities. And once you get onto things like neurodiversity, I actually start to wonder whether the whole concept of people with disabilities, people without disabilities is actually the right concept. I think there's just a whole range. And the more we move to understand that and look at the value that all about the different types of people can bring to our service, that's when I think we'll really start to crack that one. But look, we're interested in any ideas anyone has as well.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Yeah, I think we're all experiencing the same. Anyone else? I can keep on asking, but it's more interesting if

you do. And then we'll go.

AUDIENCE:

Kathy, I'm really curious to know, you keep talking about this daily director general's meeting that you have. And I'm really interested to know what's the purpose of it. Because it's quite an investment. And how do you contain it? And what do you get out of it?

KATHY LEIGH:

So, it is a short, sharp. And I'm going to put a caveat on that in a minute. But it is a short, sharp meeting at 09:00 AM in the morning. It's by video, everybody just tunes in. And basically, it's information sharing. It's not decision making. We have our strategic board to do proper, considered decision making. This is just short, sharp information sharing, what's hot? What do you all need to know about? What do other directors general need to know about? Where are the risks? What's just happened? What might hit us this week?

And it's a short, sharp. We basically just go, "Hi everyone who wants to say something?" And I can see everyone on the screen, so people can just chip in. And pre COVID, five minutes, and everyone's off again. Once COVID hit, it did go 30 minutes plus, understandably because just so much was happening that needed to be shared. And now we're starting to pair back again. But that's what it is. It's just, "Is everyone on the same page? What do you all need to know about? What happened yesterday? What happened last night? What do you need to watch out for?" And it just means we're a team. And if somebody just wants to say, "I need this or that," they can just say it quickly. They can agree to talk afterwards or whatever.

AUDIENCE:

Mischa Warren from CMTEDD. First of all, thank you very much for your speech this morning. Really keen to understand the interaction between your point around better communication, particularly to staff, in relation to, of course, hybrid working and the way that communication obviously has to change. I'm just interested in some of your insights, particularly around some of the tools, the processes and the behaviours to really activate and make hybrid working work. Thank you.

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah, look, it's a good question, and I think it's something that we're all working through. Everybody out there's interested in this. There are millions of articles in the press with all different conflicting ideas about what makes it work. I remember reading early on that some of the big tech companies in the US who have always had staff all over the place, they had a rule that if you're in a meeting and some people were on video, everybody turned and faced their video screen so that everyone was equal. I thought that was a really good insight because you don't want the ones who happen to be together to be the in group and the others to somehow be marginalised.

I think we need to think about, every work here is going to be different. People, I think, do need to come together as well. We're human beings, there are things that will be lost if we don't do that. So how do we do that in a way that's going to work best for as many people as possible? Do we choose Tuesdays between 10:00 and 15:00, where if you're going to come into the office, you'll all try to come then just to give people an anchor. Every work area, depending on the nature of their work, is going to be different. And I think it's important to give every work area the flexibility to decide what works for them.

I think there are benefits as well, even outside of that office spaced area. Our Access Canberra is looking at, well, does flexible work mean that we could actually start offering more flexibility to our staff but also to the members of the community? Maybe we could be closed some mornings, but open one evening. A lot of people who need to go in for some of the things you still need to go in for might find that helpful. And that might be a benefit for our staff as well who could have more flexibility as to when they work. So, it really does depend on the needs of the work area. And I think we've still got a lot of lessons to learn about what will work and what might actually not be a good thing. And at the moment, I'm encouraging everyone to talk in their work areas and decide how they want to operate and then keep adjusting.

AUDIENCE:

Hi, I'm Jazzy Amga. I'm a new grad in the ACT Public Service. I wanted to see if you have any career advice

for graduates who've just started.

KATHY LEIGH:

My advice would be, grab every opportunity that comes your way. And if it's something that you don't think interests you, then grab it even harder because, as a grad, you've just got this great opportunity to try things out and decide that they're not for you and move on. But you'll have learnt something. Often, in my career, the things that I was least interested in when I was asked to do them were the things, I learnt most from, probably because the reason I wasn't interested was I really didn't know much about it. And so, you learn a lot. Reach out to your colleagues, everyone's really keen to help. And put your hand up. If there's something you want to do or get invited to, ask. Don't sit and wait. People aren't leaving you out intentionally. If you think something will be a benefit, just ask. And I'm sure people will be happy to involve you.

Grab the opportunity of being at this point in your career to move around as much as you can, and experience as many things as you can. Do the things that you love but do the other things as well. And keep a balance, make sure that you stay anchored in your personal life as well because, one, that's good for you. And two, it's good for your work. You'll be a much more balanced, objective public servant if you make sure that you stay anchored in your personal life as well.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

That's great. So, this is the last one. Last question now. I'm sorry, we've got some hands, but whoever's closest to the microphone gets the question.

AUDIENCE:

I feel a lot of pressure to ask a really good question, being the last question. Hi, I'm Naomi, I'm an IPAA member, but I'm outside ACT gov and APS. I work for a design and research firm called Portable. Kathy, I loved that you talked about co-design and kind of moving it more from the standard inform, consult, to actually collaboration and co-designing with services. There's sometimes a challenge that people feel like they don't have the time and the resources to do it genuinely. And so, I love how you built that confidence with the digital panel and things like that.

KATHY LEIGH:

Yeah, look, I think that's always a false notion because in the end it'll be more efficient if you get it right up front. And I think it's something that we've worked iteratively on and learned. Being small, innovation's another one of our values. You really have to look at what the opportunities are to do things differently because you just don't have the resources not to grab every opportunity. We've long had a government that's been very respectful of our public service and welcoming of ideas. So that really reinforces that for our staff. And I think you just got to encourage everyone to come up with ideas and have a go.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Thank you very much, Kathy. And I think on behalf of us all, I'd like to say just how much we really appreciate your insights and your ideas, very practical. But also, then your reflections on how to be true to yourself and what sort of person you want to be through a career. And you've had, so far, a fantastic and brilliant career. And you're a wonderful leader, you're a great example and a great role model and friend. Yeah, go on.

KATHY LEIGH:

I was saying stop.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Yeah, I want to say, you're very modest. But thank you. And can we give you a small ... Go on.

KATHY LEIGH:

Thank you. Can I just say thank you, Gordon. Thank you for hosting today, and I've always had the most enormous respect for you, so thank you. And thank you everyone for coming. It's been great to be able to do this. Look forward to future events.

GORDON DE BROUWER:

Thanks.