

# TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

## Future Leaders Series

What I Wish I'd Known

Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM and Jane Halton AO PSM

Friday 28 June 2019

IP Australia, Canberra

- Terry: Welcome to IP Australia, and welcome to IPAA's *Future Leaders Series*, 'On the Couch' event, What I Wish I'd Known. My name is Terry Moore, I'm the Deputy Director-General in the policy and corporate division at IP Australia. Before I go any further, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture, and the contributions they make to the city and region in which we live. We also welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.
- Terry: These sorts of events are not only great opportunities to develop our networks, and to also learn and share experiences, but also a fantastic opportunity to challenge our thinking, and I'd urge everybody here to continue to engage in these events, and to get as much value as you can out of them. They're not only great for you, but they're great for our agencies and they're great for the public service as well. The more we learn, the more we think, the more we challenge ourselves, then the better the APS is, and the better we serve the public.
- Terry: At IP Australia, we're privileged to have two people on the Future Leaders committee. They're both graduates of the Future Leaders programme, and they're your co-chairs for today. Holly Noble and Allyssa Sabbatucci. But now, onto what we're all here for, and what I am really looking forward to, which is hearing our speakers, Jane Halton and Gordon de Brouwer speak to us and share with us what they wish they'd known before they began their public service journeys. And so now, I'll hand over to Holly.
- Holly: Thank you Terry for that warm welcome. Welcome everybody to today's event, future leader series, what I wish I'd know. My name is Holly Noble, I'm a member of the Future Leaders committee, and I'll be your co-chair today with Allyssa Sabbatucci. Now it's my pleasure to introduce our keynote speakers, Doctor Gordon de Brouwer, PSM and Jane Halton AO PSM.
- Holly: Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM, has over 30 years' experience in public policy and administration. He was Secretary of the Department of the Environment and Energy from 2013 to 2017, following senior positions in the Prime Minister's department, 2008 to 2013, including as G20 Sherpa from 2010 to 2013. Treasury 2003 to 2008, the Australian National University as the professor of economics from 2000 to 2002, and at the Reserve Bank from 1991 to 1999. His areas of professional policy expertise include macro, financial and international economics and policy, natural resource and environmental management, climate change and energy policies, international organisations, specially G20, institutional design and governance, and public sector management and reform. He is a strategic and integrated systems thinker, with extensive experience in many areas of public policy, including in Asia and overseas.
- Holly: Jane Holton, AO PSM is a former Secretary of the Department of Finance, responsible for supporting the delivery of the Australian Government budget, the ongoing management of the Australian government non-defence domestic property portfolio, key assets and asset sales, plus the financial and performance framework for Australian Government agencies. She has extensive experience in finance, insurance, risk management, information technology, human resources, health and ageing, sport and public policy, as well as significant international experience. In a 33-year career with the public service, including nearly 15 years as secretary, Miss Holton's previous roles include Secretary of the Department of Health, Secretary for the Department of Health and Ageing, and Executive Coordinator Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- Holly: Please welcome Gordon, Jane and Lewis to the stage.

- Lewis: Welcome everybody, and welcome to Jane and to Gordon. I'd like to have more of a conversation today, I think, as opposed to sort of speeches, so feel free to have a laugh and ask each other questions as well, as we go. So thank you both for joining us, I think drawing on both of your careers, I've no doubt that there's huge wisdom that you can impart to us as we embark on ours.
- Lewis: My first question serves, by way of introduction as sorts, did your younger selves envisage a career in the public service, and are there things today that would motivate you differently in joining the public service than did when you joined? Jane, would you like to start us off?
- Jane: All right, let me start with a geographic orientation. We're sitting, not that we can see it, in Woden. I finished my high school about 50 metres over there. And as in common with many other teenagers, I used to disappear at lunchtime, to the dizzying heights of the Woden Plaza. And as I've said previously, I used to walk past, and teenagers being a rude crew, I used to walk past what we lovingly described as the pubes. I know, it was the 70s people, go with me.
- Jane: And so the notion that I would become quote, shall I repeat it? No probs not, given this is preserved permanently. The notion that I would become one, and as I think is probably well known, there was a certain familial knowledge of the public service, so the notion that I would become a public servant never even entered my mind. And I think, actually in common with Gordon, I spent some time in academia to begin with, and then kind of became the accidental public servant.
- Jane: And as I have said frequently previously, 33 years later, I figured out what was causing it, and decided to go do something else, so no it was not my intention to be a public servant at the outset.
- Lewis: What changed? What value did you see? What was the day?
- Jane: I think in common with many other people who join, you join to do a job, and then all of a sudden you see the opportunity and you see things that are absolutely riveting. They're so interesting, and every time I thought about doing something else, someone said "Oh no, come and do this". And I'd think oh that looks really good. Oh that sounds fascinating. Oh I could go and do that for a bit. So, it's possibly that my psychology is so simple that people simply had to dangle a carrot and I just followed it. But there was always something good to do, there was always something that was a challenge, and importantly there was always something that needed doing.
- Lewis: Thank you Jane. Gordon, was it a similar story for you?
- Gordon: In some ways. So my background, a lot of my family were migrants. We travelled around a lot, around Australia, and we were pretty poor. So it was no privilege in that sense. I had no sense of what the public service was, it was completely removed from anything that I thought about when I was younger. When I went to uni, I did world school and went into uni, and that was still a bit of a surprise, because that was unusual in my family.
- Gordon: I did economics and law, I was okay at law, but I really loved economics. I really loved it, and so I concentrated on that. I got a job working at BP, I was a BP young achiever, that was where I worked in the bitumen business unit. And I did that, and then I was also thinking around public policy, that was the time when the economy was being deregulated, this is going to the early mid-80s. And I thought well Treasury will be really fantastic, so the choice

was do I work at BP in bitumen, or do I go to try to be a grad, and turned out that the grad position came up, but I had no real preconceptions around the institutions.

Gordon: I loved economics, so that to me was an attractor. The idea of all this transformation, understanding the world and having some impact on it, that was just the light to me.

Lewis: Fantastic. I think in your biographies, we've heard the diverse range of jobs you've done, merely in the last 15 years. And emerging leader are often encouraged to develop some elements of career diversity to gain better perspectives and to avoid silo thinking. How important is experience outside of the federal public service, or outside of your agency? Feel free to take both parts of those, and is it important to have experience in the private sector, or academia or elsewhere? And are there any sort of personal challenges that that might face for people, and how should you approach trying to develop that career diversity?

Jane: Well why don't I start? Firstly, I think, and there are some people who do this, it can be for somebody a legitimate choice to focus on a particular content area, or a particular ecosystem. And I think, as I say this, that there are some people who spend their entire careers in defence. It's a huge portfolio, there's a lot of complexity there. And that might be a legitimate choice, but if you look at the people who have reached the heights of the public service, the thing that you could say about them is that they actually have diversity of experience. They've worked at a number of different places, they've often worked both in line agencies but also central agencies. Some of them have done other things as well, not everybody has gone out and worked in the private sector, or has worked in academia, but I think the thing that characterises people who can make a real contribution is a perspective that they can bring to bear, which is not just from the one angle.

Jane: You can see things from a variety of different views, and you can actually understand that sometimes it takes that variety of views to get the best answer to a tricky problem or how you might run something. So whilst I wouldn't say that there's a recipe, you know do three years in bitumen, we wish. Do four years in whatever, and then come back and then your path is clear. I think it's about thinking about your skillset, what actually is going to give you the variety of experience that enables you to bring to bear a mixed set of capabilities, which are going to be good when you're tackling a problem or running something or being a regulator or whatever it might be.

Lewis: Excellent. Gordon?

Gordon: Yeah I really agree with Jane. That when you look at it from this perspective, looking back, it's hugely valuable to have a range of different perspectives, because it really just adds enormous insight, and really much better for solution, also for implementation. All that said, when I started my career, I didn't see it that way, and I really thought that I want to develop my own professional expertise, so frankly study and working at the Reserve Bank was a fantastic way to do that. Did my PhD while I was there. Very well grounded in lots of conceptual frameworks, in data, and then in the real practise of markets. Especially markets that fail, that was a great learning experience.

Gordon: So 20 years of focusing on economics and markets macro and international, but I think this is ... where you see the value of other perspectives, frankly, was going to PM & C for me, that was the marker of there's a whole range of economic and social issues out there that are bigger than what you've seen, and implementation really, really matters. So in Treasury was more the view, my view was that you develop the beautiful ideas, you give them to the Minister, and that's ... you've done your job, and that's someone else's. When you're in PM & C, actually-

- Jane: Does this sound familiar?
- Gordon: Implementation and delivery really matter. So that, for me was like the world opened up. And frankly, going to ... and doing more and more different things, the world opened up in PM & C. Going to run environment, and then environment and energy, again one of these sort of universes ... so a universe appears, and you realise you've been living in a little orbit here, and there's a big universe out there, of it's not just frankly economics, but science, and gosh it's exciting. Law, because that's how things work. Psychology, because that's how you engage, and influence people. And then institutional organisational design.
- Gordon: So again, another sort of, the universe expands moment, for me. And that's when you see ... well you can see traces in yourself, but you can also see in the groups of people you have, just how important it is to have a range of perspectives, a range of backgrounds, and lots of frankly real difference in the people, because that gives you the insight, and it's a real lived thing, I think. Towards the end of that public service career, it's the real insight.
- Jane: And the thing that you see, as you move into a governance role in your career, which of course is where I'm at now, not actually running things anymore, not that I don't miss that, because there's nothing more satisfying than working with a group of people. But governance, when it works really well, does exactly that. It brings together people from a variety of backgrounds, so if I think of the boards I now sit on, the ones that work really well are where you have people who are not all the same.
- Jane: That everyone, with respect, can bring their perspective. And so exactly as Gordon says, you have people with deep expertise and experience, in a whole series of different areas, and it's the combination that that brings that actually gives you strength. And I think exactly the same when it comes to public sector.
- Gordon: And you see it in your own ... you can see it as you become more senior, that your role shifts so ... especially when you start, you kind of think of yourself as an analyst, and then you think okay I'm a senior analyst, or now I'm a super duper analyst. But those rules aren't super duper analyst at all, they're not that. They really shift from being the analyst to actually the facilitator, the enabler, and the institutional design that means that all those other bits can work.
- Jane: Exactly.
- Lewis: When you described your career trajectories, it all sort of seems as if one thing falls in front of another, these universe expanding moments. But often things don't go entirely to plan, and often you find yourself in places that you don't want to be. I'd like to ask what I think perhaps is a bit of a cheeky question, but one I think we'd all like to hear the answer to, and that's what is one of the biggest mistakes you think you've made in your career, and what do you think you've learnt from that mistake?
- Jane: How many mistakes shall I discuss with you? There are so many. In my case, let me go to a class of mistakes, if I might. I think one of the things, and it does go exactly to Gordon's point, one of the things that you learn as you become more senior is in essence how to practise the craft, and I think one of the mistakes I made early was not probably standing back enough from the craft, and thinking about, whilst I was being the analyst or the senior analyst or whatever I was being, or the content specialist, there was nothing about the Home and Community Care Act that I did not know, nothing I didn't know.

- Jane: Every statistic, every ... you know what I mean. Boring. But what I think you don't do to begin with, necessarily, is stand back, and I think the thing that's fantastic about the public sector these days is we have things like this. That you can come and actually step slightly outside your day job, and think about where you fit in relation to what you're doing, but also where you sit in a context. And so for me, the mistake I think I made early was not thinking more broadly, to see what I did in context, and I also think, and I remember having a secretary, when I was a deputy secretary, go check my bio, you'll figure out who I'm talking about, who once said to me, as I literally ran through a work area, because the Prime Minister was keen on something, shall we say enigmatically.
- Jane: And this person said "Jane, there's always time for proper process", and so it was things like that, where I mean a bit ... it's been described by Gordon, a bit like Alice, go down the rabbit hole, and all of a sudden you see, you have this clarity of view that was literally only a step away from where you were previously. So for me, it was not standing enough and reflecting.
- Jane: I can go through when I screwed up this, and when I screwed up that. Everyone screws up. Can I just be really clear, nobody should think that everybody else, other than yourself, has never made a mistake. That is the biggest mistake you could make. Everyone makes mistakes. And in fact, I would argue that if you're not making mistakes, you're not really trying sometimes. Don't make the same mistake twice, because that shows you can't learn, but sometimes you're going to make mistakes. Fess up though.
- Jane: But for me, it was not enough sort of just stepping to one side and thinking enough, early enough.
- Lewis: Gordon, would you reflect in the same way?
- Gordon: Yeah, look I ... quite similar. It's a long list to choose from, so ... and key thing is learning from them. I think the thing I'd refer to, they really come down to institutions and this is how do you learn to be a leader? Especially often with your professional expertise, you kind of groomed for that, or you grow into that and you can have a lot of control over that. Knowing how to run an institution though, there's almost no training, which is what one of the fault I think of our system.
- Gordon: When I was secretary of environment, I took over ... I brought over an issue, or a management issue, that had run very well in Treasury. And it was really around the idea of moderation of people's performance, and the idea in Treasury, which was very intuitive to Treasury people, was that the law of large numbers means that when you do an objective assessment of peoples performance, it should fall into, broadly, a natural-
- Jane: Normal distribution-
- Gordon: Of grades. Very intuitively appealing to the economist, you managed for decades in stats, law of large numbers will just give you that. And so it wasn't, it seemed, in Treasury as an affront to anyone to do that, it was actually just the application of the laws of the universe. So that was ... and that was the view I had in my mind, of how do you do moderation.
- Gordon: Going to the environment department, and-
- Jane: Where there was a riot-
- Gordon: I got to say, it was ... it was a riot-

- Jane: It was a riot-
- Gordon: And I made a couple of mistakes. I enforced it, despite all the advice against it. I enforced that performance management system, and it was very destructive. People saw that as frankly an affront on themselves, that I didn't ... or the executive didn't trust them. And that their relationship with their manager wasn't trusted, and that was the prism by which they saw it.
- Gordon: They didn't see the law of large numbers. They saw relationships and trust, that for me was a really big learning thing of I have gone into this with a particular perspective, and gosh it just doesn't fit. You really have to work with cultures within institutions if you're going to look for change, and there are different devices and ways of getting change than the ones that you're familiar with yourself. So you really have to listen to people, and you really have to then, or in that case, I went up front at an all staff and said I made a mistake, this is why I made a mistake, and this is what I've heard, and this is how we're going to correct it.
- Gordon: But based on that, so it was trying to signal more generally, I make mistakes, I've learnt from it, and I hope that when you make mistakes, you learn from it, and that's the sort of culture we'll have in the department, that's the sort of thing.
- Gordon: So that for me was a big thing, and again it's around the nature of management and leadership, but also, you grow up and see things from your own perspective, and it's very narrow, and you really have to see from a different perspective, and that's again why that diversity really does matter.
- Gordon: One thing we did do after that, was we had psychological testing across the SES and EL cohort of personality types, and ... well I did frankly personally, when you can identify people as being ultra ... I'm quite conceptual and analytic, but other people who are much more people-oriented, person-oriented, I would give particular weight, frankly additional weight to what they said about things when we were doing some transformations, because they were the ones that I thought really knew the institution better, and they should have ... so I was true to myself, but really knowing your own limitations, on those things.
- Jane: I love it when economists discover psychology. Of course they now think it's their own, behavioural economics, have you noticed? Someone got a Nobel prize for it recently. Those of us that actually studied the discipline went ah whatever.
- Gordon: It's true.
- Lewis: Well on that note of learning, I'm going to open it up to the floor I think. And ask for questions. So if anybody would like to yeah, sort of raise their hand and ask a question for either Jane or Gordon, or preferably both, they're more than welcome.
- Stephanie: I'm Steph McLennan, from Geoscience Australia, and I'm interested in your ideas around trust in the public service, and how that looks now, and we're seeing a lot of discussion about it, but also how you've seen the idea of trust within and in the public service change over your careers?
- Jane: I think the question is trust by and from whom? I mean I think, again, taking a much broader framework, if you think about it, trust is something that people now talk about a lot, and the absence of trust is something we talk about. I'm a director of the ANZ bank, you think we haven't had a lot of conversations about trust, in our board meetings recently? We've had a lot of conversations.

- Jane: I think you have to put the broader cultural framework around this, which says we used to make an awful lot of assumptions about institutions, sometimes it was we didn't even know it was there, we just ... we hadn't even thought about it, and things kind of happened, and we just assumed that that was the case. Is that the same as saying we have trust in something? I'm not sure that it is. But no one had actually questioned the role of the institution or its behaviour. Whereas now, we have a conscious dialogue about what it means to be trusted to do something, what it means therefore to be given a charter or a continuing charter to do something.
- Jane: So I kind of think as trust as being in a frame that says I define my role, or others have given me a role in a particular thing, my behaviour is consistent with the stewardship or the responsibilities I now have, and I always deport myself in a way that is consistent with those responsibilities, I take it seriously, I'm conscious of it, I talk about it with people, and I always look at my behaviour and I assess my behaviour, inside a frame of reference that is conscious of that view.
- Jane: I hope that doesn't sound a bit too sort of ideological, or theoretical but I think we have to consciously step outside ourselves these days, and ask ourselves that question. So then we come to the public sector, and what I would say is, and this is an institution I spent 33 years of my life in, so I care deeply about the profession, and will continue to, obviously, even though I don't practise it anymore.
- Jane: I think being thoughtful about the role of the public sector in our society, importantly I think in our democracy, because if you look at the strength of our public service, particularly the federal public service, apolitical, and I know that's often debated. But we have to think about what that means, at any one point in time. Not corrupt. And I think that's unbelievably important. And so trust comes down to what is the role we define for ourselves, what is the role others give us, and are we practising our craft consistent with that notion of trust? Noting that trust is something that moves around a bit.
- Jane: But I think if you have the conversation, you can be clear about when the conversation changes, and what that means for behaviour.
- Gordon: So for trust ... again you find similarities, I think when it comes down to public institution, too elements that really matter, it's really that people generally see that those public institutions are there for them, that they work for them. They're acting in their interests. Doesn't mean necessarily always in their own very particular circumstances, but generally are working for the interest of people, and people know that sometimes ... again the system will play the system, and there's a bit of honesty around that.
- Gordon: But that really, that public institutions work for the public. The second is that they do so with honesty and with respect and you trust someone who frankly will tell you the truth, even if you don't like it, but that they're honest to you, and that there's no grudge or game being played with you, by them. That is that they respect you as a person. And they're dealing with you like that.
- Gordon: So myself, I think it's those things where you can see the damage over time that people don't really think that some public intuitions are working for them. They're ... going a bit of critique about economics, that it's all about some remote set of ideas of a global order that doesn't really relate very directly to the benefit of their own lives. So it's removed from that. And that those institutions aren't working for them, they're working for ideology or a view of the world.



- Gordon: And also, there's almost none of the language that you get from public institutions is honest and respectful to you. It's all about how they manage you, it's all about spinning you a line or something like that. And a lot of that goes back to the political ... the politicians who talk from notes rather than frankly from their mind and their heart. So I reckon that's the issue, the core issue around trust. Around what's actually the purpose of the institutions in the first place, and then how do you engage with people?
- Gordon: And again, if you're thinking around within departments, how do you have trusting relationships with your staff or with institutions, or with the public or with ministers? It goes down to those things. I reckon that's also the source of regaining trust, is starting to speak normally and being very explicitly that these things are designed for the purpose of how do you protect and improve someone's life? It's not an ideological frolic, or it's not a political frolic.
- Jane: Yes, being candid.
- Lewis: Is there anything in particular that Future Leaders should keep in mind to help with engender that trust, when they're doing their jobs, not necessarily in positions of leadership or governance, but in their everyday work?
- Jane: I always used to have a couple of little rules in the back of my head, in terms of behaviour. One of which was I would say to people "I'll tell you if I can tell you, I'll tell you if I can't tell you, and I'll tell you if I don't know". So having a level of personal credibility, which goes, does engender trust, being prepared to be honest. Now, I always had a reputation of calling a spade a whatever, but actually, I think that's part of the brand, and it's also part of people ... they mightn't like it, but at least if they trust that you're not playing games.
- Jane: So I think actually always having a little ruler that you hold yourself against, you have to know who you are personally. And you have to be clear about what it is for you, where are the no go zones? What is appropriate behaviour, and how it is I'm going to treat with others, what am I going to do in terms of how I behave in the workplace?
- Jane: Now it doesn't mean everyone's going to like what you do all the times, and one of things about leadership is sometimes you will make decisions that not everyone is going to like. How you take people on that journey, so at least have them get to a point where they're going "Oh I suppose so, I don't like it but I suppose so". That's sometimes actually the best outcome you can get, not having people cheering. But I do think thinking about that, particularly as you move into leadership positions, is really, really important.
- Gordon: I mean, I agree with everything there. My language, I'd say maintaining, being authentic to yourself and what the purpose of your job is. And keeping that in your mind. It's not about playing games, that's not ... that's the sort of thing that when you smell that in someone you just think I don't, you're not really suited to this. If it's game playing. It's really that ... has a genuineness and authenticity in the person, and they know their moral compass, they know their intellectual compass, they know the limitations, but they also know what they're there for.
- Gordon: And which is to serve people. It's public service-
- Jane: Exactly.
- Lewis: Excellent. All right should we go to another question? Yep.

Tom: Thanks Lewis. Hey Gordon and Jane, Tom Hogan from the Treasury here.

Jane: An economic, excellent. Have you discovered psychology?

Tom: I won't throw a behavioural economics question out, I promise. You've spoken a lot about the nature of public institutions, but I think from your experiences I'd be really interested to hear about how you see the private sector interacting with the public service. Do we have that relationship right, and maybe what are some of those key challenges that you see from your perspectives?

Jane: You go first.

Gordon: I don't think we do have those relationships right, and there's lots of insight. And it's not that ... the real value of knowing how business works is, and knowing a sector, is that you really do know how that sector works, not in theory but actually in practise. You know the structure of the market, what really drives it, is it always ... what's the nature of the competition, is it, how imperfect that is, what are the role of psychological drivers and dynamics in those particular markets?

Gordon: And that just means that you're trying to think around public policy problems, not from a ... I don't mean to be ... I love economics, but it's not from a very simple, remote theoretical model, but actually from the actual operation of those markets. And I think that's a thing that we don't really understand, and I thought the ... on finance, for example, Reserve Bank work in the markets, day to day, has a very good feel. Treasury, traditionally, was much more remote, and I think they tried to fix that by being in cities, in big cities more.

Gordon: But I know in other departments, and things I've seen, energy or other areas people don't have as broad an understanding frankly of firm dynamics, of market dynamics and the sector itself unless they've got that immersion. So how do you grow that? It's a bit of back and forth, so you want people who are well trained in conceptual frameworks, but also people who have that lived experience of how do people make decisions, so that's where movement of people around, go to the energy market commission that sets the rules, go to the operator, go to the regulator, go work in a firm for a period and come back, do exchanges, that sort of back and forth.

Gordon: Just gives you a feel for the dynamics and nature of markets. It doesn't mean you're owned by them. So I think what people are concerned is that, especially with integrity around public sector, is that if you know something about a market you must be owned by them, or a set of institutions, you must be owned by them. I think we're bigger than that, people are generally bigger than that, and you can have criteria and standards around that, and you can develop a culture around that as well, which is part of the integrity issues that Peter works on.

Gordon: So I think there's scope for an awful lot more, and it just ... it's very enriching. And it's enriching on both sides frankly. For the private sector as well as for government.

Jane: So I endorse all of that, but if I can add a perspective from where I now sit. So I sit on the board of a couple of listed companies. I sit on the board of the third biggest legal partnership in the country, and one of the things that I'm reminded of daily is it's not usually mostly their business to understand government. Now sometimes they have to, because they're regulated, and it's bits of their businesses that have to understand. They have to understand the rules that they play by.

- Jane: But it is not actually their day to day job, their day to day job is to run their business. However, if you're in the public sector, and you are steward of a policy area, or regulatory responsibilities or whatever your job is, it is actually your job to understand what's going on out there. And so what I'd say to you is that this isn't an equal relationship actually, there's more onus to my mind, and I see this much more now that I sit out there, I mean I do think business could understand more about how government works, I'm constantly amazed is probably the right word.
- Jane: I'm constantly surprised that you can become very senior sometimes in business, with actually having almost nothing to do with how the public sector works. Like literally nothing. You cannot do that in the public service. Let me change that. You should not do that in the public service.
- Jane: It's almost nothing that you do in the public sector, that will not at some point touch on what's going on in our economy, or in particular areas of activity. If you don't understand, as Gordon says, how that works, what the issues are, how people take decisions, you will not do your own job effectively. So I think better engagement with industry is really, and the economy more broadly, is really, really important. I don't think our people inside the public sector necessarily always have the right skills, they kind of fall over.
- Jane: Unless they've got training in economics or business or whatever, often they kind of discover things, like I reckon if you walked 50 metres that way and went on any floor of one of the departments over here, ask them whether they could read a P & L, half of them would say what's a P & L? Actually, more than half of them would say what's a P & L? What's P & L people? Well done.
- Jane: You understand the point I'm making? So actually understanding the frameworks that actually drive people out there, I think help in here, do their jobs properly. So no we don't have that right yet, but I think it's an evolving craft, and it's evolving part of the dialogue, but we need to think about it more broadly. And that's actually where economics is important, but psychology's important. Understanding how people run their business will help you understand your role.
- Gordon: I can just go back a little bit more on that one. It's across all sectors frankly, it's in every department, every line area. And one thing that's really important about it is that if you really think that the public service should be the principal policy adviser to Ministers and the Prime Minister, you're not going to be taken that seriously unless they know that you know the sector that you're talking about. And often they don't have confidence, frankly, that the public service knows the sector really well.
- Gordon: And so that's why changing the dial on that interaction, it's not a form of privatising government or anything like that, it's really just knowing the sectors that you're working with, that gives you a lot of authority in dealing with a Minister and the Prime Minister.
- Jane: And go to regulation for a second. Essentially, there's a yin and a yang when it comes to regulation, there are two sides to the equation. And I think regulation, which is unbelievably important for the kind of orderly conduct of our society, business, et cetera, provide protection for people but also provide the rails on which things run, which means that you have predictability which means that you can get on with your job.
- Jane: We need to understand, if you're a regulator, or if you're the person drafting policy in respect of regulation, if you don't understand exactly how it works out there, you will, putting it crudely, screw it up. And then you'll get a lot of people complaining that your

regulation is terrible, then you get consumers complaining regulation isn't adequate, so there's a whole interplay there, which by definition, you're sitting in Canberra giving ministers advice, if you do not understand exactly how it works out there, your advice will be wrong. Or your practise of your craft will be wrong. So we're not there yet.

Lewis: Excellent. I think we've got time for one more question, if we ... fantastic.

Speaker 8: Thanks. Kerry Purcell, from Health, currently with PM & C this week. National Indigenous Australia agency next week. Just at the moment we're going through a whole APS reform look review, if there was one thing you could change about the public service, what are the top things on the agenda that the public service needs to improve on the way we do business, particularly with our stakeholders, or our certain territories. Be interested in your thoughts about how you would reform the public service if it was your remit?

Jane: Well it is his remit so [crosstalk]

Gordon: You can go Jane.

Jane: No, no you go first. I want to hear what you have to say.

Gordon: Well it's going to come out soon enough.

Jane: You're looking for the inside scoop, is that the question?

Gordon: Yeah well there's a lot actually in the review, and around the public service. The thing ... I guess ... you go. I don't want to ...

Jane: That's right, just speak into this microphone Doctor de Brouwer.

Gordon: You go Jane. I'll respond, but you go.

Jane: I guess what I would say is, and again it's in a class. I don't think you can point to one particular thing, like some micro thing. What I would say is I would hope for a genuine embedding of a culture of continuous improvement, and I know that's language from the past, but a genuine capacity to continue to evolve how people do their jobs, the tools that they use to do their jobs, and actually having the capacity to keep, if you like, on the cutting edge.

Jane: So that means for example things like we know now that you can do IT systems much more effectively and efficiently and fast, if you adopt things like agile methodologies. So that's a kind of immediate example. We know that if you can mobilise the vast data that's held, recognising one needs to protect privacy, that you can probably provide a better [inaudible] experience in terms of service delivery. We know that you can probably craft policy advice to Ministers in a much more informed way if you use the modern technique, so if it were me, the one thing I would say is being able to be right at the forefront of using whatever skills technology, IT ideas are available and having the money sometimes to be able to do that, because we know it doesn't come cheap, but being able to do that, keeping the public service literally on the forefront of those developments, which means we could have confidence that our public services always at the dealing edge of public sectors globally, that would be the thing that I would want.

Gordon: So all of that, and there's lots in the review, you're looking at your watch, sorry. But I think it'd be just wonderful if the public service was the first point of call for a Minister in thinking

about, I've got a problem, how do I solve it? And that means that you've got the knowledge, you've got the data, you've got the technology, but really also you've got the relationships with the public, with the communities that are affected, and that it's not a master slave relationship of the public service to the public.

Gordon: Or it's not didactic or it's not patronising, it's actually genuinely engaged and community-driven, and it's one where ... it's all these things happening in the community, and the public service is a device to help or to support that being realised, and the Minister's saw that, so when they see a problem they know that you've got a framework, that you're credible, that you're working in a broader interest, and that you've got the relationships to achieve it. That, in my mind, would be a signal of success.

Gordon: All of that though, frankly, doesn't depend on a report. It depends on all of you.

Jane: Yeah, mindset.

Gordon: So it's how you conduct yourselves, and how you develop your own careers and how you behave and what you do that matters. So, all of that, if you have a similar vision, frankly, it's not up to any report, it's actually completely up to what you do.

Jane: And can I just add to that because I think Gordon's absolutely right? Essentially, and I made a comment earlier on about the important role of the public sector and an independent public sector, an expert public sector in our democracy. The public service is not the same as the government. It is not the same as the private sector. And I think as soon as we look like a blancmange, where there is no difference between us and everybody else, we've actually lost the plot.

Jane: However, we're no better than anybody else, but we have a craft that needs to be practised. It's a profession in some peoples view, understanding what that role is, being clear about how to practise it so it has value, that people will want to use it. And not simply subordinate it to other peoples' agenda, that's the art of continuing what I think is a very proud tradition of independent public service in Australia.

Lewis: Wonderful. I think on that note, there's just one sort of final question I'd like to ask, and it's with a view to answering sort of what I wish I'd known, which is the title of today's event. If you, as a mentor, were to take your younger self out for a coffee, and to have that chance to impart a piece of wisdom to that younger person, what do you think it would be? What would you like to tell them that you think would make, have made your career happier or more successful? That all of us here today could also perhaps benefit from?

Gordon: Enjoy it. Enjoy it. It's a fantastic thing, but enjoy each element, don't think about what the next step is necessarily all the time, while you're doing what you're doing. It's nice to have a sense of you want to achieve things, you want to do things in your life, you want to try different things, but just enjoy it. Enjoy each step. Concentrate on that, and frankly that's what's going to be the success that makes you have the next step, and take ... use the opportunity of serendipity, make use of that. When things come up, experiment. Try it out. And if it doesn't work, you can go back. But just try things. Try different things. But just enjoy it, frankly.

Jane: Yeah. Look I'd say something pretty similar. I think there are times when you have a particular view on who you are, what you're doing and what your trajectory is. And others will see you and your career and your potential contribution in a slightly different way, and

the thing I would probably have said to myself is be really open to that advice or that shepherding, or basically being managed into things.

Jane: Sometimes there will be people who will say to you, look I know that you think being a policy analyst in the Treasury is just the bees knees and the best thing, and you know is going to give you the biggest opportunity, but actually I can see an opportunity here for you to broaden your skills. If it's not in your frame of reference, your inclination may be to say look I just don't want to do that. That's not me. Whereas actually sometimes, being brave, being prepared to take yourself outside your comfort zone, you might hate it, in which case go back.

Jane: So that's really what I've said to myself. Sometimes, be prepared to step into a place that you haven't necessarily seen yourself, and just see what it does for you. Now I've made the odd occasion where I've done that and gone oh god no. Back out now. Wrong place, wrong people, bad choice, that's one of the mistakes you make. But actually, being prepared to do that I think is the hallmark of people who are going to grow and expand.

Gordon: If I can reframe what I said as well, just ... in enjoying it, often people, through their career, and you can see it, I saw it in myself and I can see it in a lot of people, they compare themselves to others and they think oh that persons doing that, or that person got that job, why didn't I? Or what about me?

Gordon: That stuff, is completely wasted time. It's completely wasted energy. That's the sort of thing where people get concerned about where they are in the scheme of things, it doesn't buy you anything frankly. It buys you nothing, it just wastes stuff. It's actually enjoying it and doing it that signals to others that you're good at your job and that you should be promoted, it's not trying to compete with someone, or compete with your cohort. Because I just think that's ... it doesn't give you anything.

Gordon: I would reflect for myself, and other people, it has no upside. There's nothing positive from it.

Lewis: Wonderful. Well, I cannot thank you enough for joining us here today, but I think one thing we can do is give a bit of a round of applause for Jane and Gordon.

Allyssa: Well thank you Lewis and thank you Gordon and Jane for being so honest and generous in sharing your insights with us. I think there was something that really stuck out for me today, and they were around thoughtfulness and diversity. Diversity in your experience, in your background, taking a step back, making mistakes but learning from it, and being thoughtful of the role of the APS in society, being thoughtful of industry and business and the various sectors, and how you conduct yourself, and being authentic in that.

Allyssa: You can find more of these takeaways on the IPAA future twitter page, so perhaps you might like to go back and share with your colleagues, we've got all of those and more. So back to Gordon and Jane, we'd really like to thank you for speaking today, and present you with this gift, it's a kachina from Bison Homewares, it's in the key lime which is the signature colour for the Future Leaders-

Jane: Oh, that's lovely, thank you.

Gordon: Thank you.