



## Episode 6 – Purpose and leadership

**INTRO:** Welcome to Trailblazing with CorbettPrice, where we present new and fresh perspectives that challenge how you approach change to solve some of the biggest challenges faced by business and government leaders today. Here's our host, Andy Corbett, to introduce the 6th episode in our series on organisational health.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Hi. I'm Andy Corbett, Managing Director of CorbettPrice. Thanks once again for joining us for our podcast series on organisational health and the seven dimensions of wellness. So far in our series, we've spoken to trailblazers on the first five dimensions which have covered the organisational operating environment, agility and resilience. We've also spoken about employee experience and engagement, and also workplace culture as well. In this episode, we will cover the 6th dimension of organisational health, which is all about purpose and leadership.

In our last episode, we spoke to Cherie Canning about workplace culture and how it's possible to create a strong culture with employees regardless of where they are located. We also talked about what it means for organisations to be people-centric and the impact this approach has on how an organisation views success. This is the perfect prelude to our discussion today on purpose and how the leadership style of an organisation can profoundly impact the employee experience, engagement, performance, workplace culture, and the agility and resilience of teams to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

[Employment Hero reports](#) that 53% of Australian workers are feeling burnt out and worker productivity is declining. With only 57% of employees from the same report rating, their productivity is high in the past three months. With organisational leaders focusing on employer retention and agility to perform in continuing times of uncertainty, it's clear that how we lead and navigate employees through these times really, really matters. The leadership styles and behaviours reported recently through the Robodebt Royal Commission could certainly be better.

And further to that, the [Auditor General's Report on Managing Workforce Agility in the Queensland Public Sector](#) stated that only 37% of employees rated their workload and health positively. But changes afoot in the [APS with Katy Gallagher's speech initiatives on the APS Reform Agenda](#), which aim to put people first in everything that the APS does.

The prolific global expert in open and digital government and public and former public servant Pia Andrews joins us today to discuss this further. Pia has spent the last 20 years trying to make the world a better place, working within and around the public sector to transform public services, policies and culture through greater transparency, democratic engagement, citizen-centric design, open data, emerging technologies and real pragmatic actual innovation in the public sector and beyond. Pia was one of the Global Top 20 Most Influential in Digital Government in 2018 and 2019, and was awarded one of the Top 100 Most Influential Women in Australia in 2014. Now working as a strategic advisor to the public sector in AWS and a member of Apolitical's Advisory on 21st Century Government, Pia continues to be passionate about the APS's reform, renewal and rejuvenation. Pia, thank you very much for joining this episode of the podcast.

**PIA ANDREWS:** Thank you so much for having me. It's a delight.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Good, good. All right, well, let's get into it then, shall we? Have plenty to discuss on what is an extremely important subject. So you're currently involved in Apolitical's 21st Century Government Advisory Council, helping to build governments that work for people and the planet. What would you say are the most essential attributes that you think public sector leaders need in a 21st century government?

**PIA ANDREWS:** Look, it's a really important question. I think, and I think the first thing to acknowledge is that things have changed. We have seen a lot of change to the public sector itself, globally. But certainly here in Australia that happened back in the ninety's, and there's been a lot of shifts to the public sector, which took us possibly, a little too far in one direction. A little too politically responsive, a little too focused on business and efficiency outcomes rather than good governance, good public outcomes, good policy outcomes.

The other big shift, of course, is the digital age. We've shifted from an industrial age to a world which is highly changing, highly complex, very rapid paced, and probably more importantly, the use of technology creates greater impact at greater scale beyond anything we've ever known. So I think that there's a few things that public sector leaders need to do to try to resolve and both mitigate but also take advantage of those two different shifts.

The first one is we need to get back to servant leadership. So rather than a lot of the traditional management culture which has come through over the last couple of decades, where managers see their job as managing the tasks and outputs and productivity of their staff, this shift to adaptive leadership to servant leadership is about shifting to empowering teams, delegating down to teams, trusting teams, buying into and understanding and valuing internal expertise and bringing it into the room. So servant leadership, adaptive leadership, there's a fantastic set of courses run by [Professor Catherine Althaus](#) about [adaptive leadership through ANZSOG](#) right now that are very well worth looking at and getting that head space shift away from seeing people as resources to manage and starting to see people as your actual greatest asset.

I think the commitment to purpose and culture is a critical, essential attribute in public sector leaders today. A clear purpose will help unite a team, creating a culture that has a shared commitment to kindness, trust, mutual trust and calm, and being able to bring multidisciplinary and diversity of experience and all the systems into the room in a way that can be complementary towards that outcome. Look, I think digital awareness is a critical attribute around that shift, that global connectivity, high impact, et cetera, but also starting to have stewardship as a critical attribute. Of course, we've seen that come in through the APS Reform Agenda as a commitment to update the APS values. Stewardship, I think, will give us the opportunity to address that vacuum that's been created where people think that a lot of leaders, unfortunately, have been taught that their job is just to serve the Minister of the Day.

But there's so much more to the job. Of course. You're serving the government, the parliament and the people. You are accountable and responsible for implementing your mandate, your legislation, the Constitution, somewhat independently of what the Minister of the Day wants you to do. So being able to get people to feel a sense of stewardship, a sense of long term, sustainable commitment to public good, to better futures, to responding to and incorporating the values and expectations of the public in everything that we do. I've only just got one more, I promise.

I think that leaders also need to really think about and be brave about trying to connect to country in different ways, understand learning about Aboriginal knowledge systems, history, context and bringing both a personal sense of connection to country. As well as a system sense of connection to country so that we can be more authentically engaged with the communities that we serve and the place that we serve them from.

I do think, however, that leadership shouldn't just be in the executive understanding that every single public servant at every single level is a leader. They are a leader in their discipline, in their field, in their passion and starting to get a greater raised expectation. So my final attribute I'm sorry, it's a long list, but my final attribute is raised expectations. When every single person in a service, from the most junior to the most senior has a high expectation of what they can achieve, of what they are expected to do, then you start to see people having a race to the top rather than just trying to struggle or just cope every day. You start to say, well, hold on a second. Why is being nice to me considered enough for a secretary to be considered good? Actually, no. We should have our highest expectations at the highest levels. And if everyone raised their expectations of each other, of our systems, of how we work, I think that that raising of expectations rather than what has become a learned helplessness and cynicism I see a lot raised expectations will help us actually raise all boats and shift the sector as a whole.

**ANDY CORBETT:** That's great. And so I guess with going back to your first point, your first attribute, should I say, around servants, leadership and really empowering teams, really trusting teams, obviously a great way of really galvanising the staff to connect with the purpose. What other methods have you seen that sort of works really well? To help, to help really put the people first and sort of get them involved in sort of designing those futures and really connecting with purpose. What's worked well and what hasn't worked well in your experience?

**PIA ANDREWS:** Sure. Look, most teams that I've worked with over the years, when I have first joined them or started to build them, have had a sense of urgency, which has effectively created the noise through which you can't easily determine a new signal. So until you deal with the noise of urgency, it's impossible to be strategic. It's impossible for people to bring their best to the day. It's impossible for people to feel calm and hard to be kind.

So the very first strategy, really, for any leader is to look at what they and their teams are doing and to just slow things down. What are the things that are not actually driving the outcome? What are the things that are not necessary? What are the things that are automatable? What are the jobs that are taking a huge amount of time, but they are not actually important, and so therefore should be done with less time and possibly with not as much effort. Getting that prioritisation right and slowing things down as a leader. It's not just about saying, okay, let's slim down the agenda to what's really important. And by the way, it's when I say important, what I mean is what your actual mandate and purpose is, not just what you're being told to do.

When you slow things down, you are now giving the whole staff the opportunity to think, to breathe, and to themselves, be strategic in their everyday not just you being strategic. You have to create an environment where everyone can start to be a bit more strategic, a bit more thoughtful, and a bit more calm and kind in every interaction they're having with each other. So slowing things down is step one.

Step two has to be establishing a culture. Establishing a culture where everyone does have a shared purpose, does agree to the behaviours that are needed to achieve that purpose, and then everyone is holding each other effectively to, yes, we're going to all become and kind, and we're going to value the different disciplines and expertise that we all bring. Because I think that quite often you get a thing that I call discipline friction. If you get a data scientist and a designer in a room, there's so many things that naturally creates a friction between those disciplines because they work so differently. But if you can get people to realise that discipline friction is a real thing, and it's quite often not the individuals involved, it is actually a natural friction of the disciplines. You can say, okay, then let's come together in a kind of calm way, value the fact that we need each other and work through what is a very natural friction so that you can, in times of difficulty or challenge or disagreement or when there's lack of clarity, you can actually work together to get the best possible outcome with the knowledge that if you don't have both disciplines or all disciplines in the room, then you're not going to get the right outcome.

So there's something there about creating a culture of change, a culture of trust and mutual buy-in. Look, I think that there's something to be said for working openly when you actually have open planning and you say, okay, of course the senior leadership will be there to contribute to it, but anyone in the whole branch, in the whole department, if you like, can come along. If you have open planning, if you have open showcases, if you document openly, blog openly, share openly, it gives a greater sense of understanding what you're doing, trust people, feel a little bit less of a sense of fear, of missing out. And anyone across your whole team has the opportunity now to say, oh, you're starting work on that thing that I've got some contacts or some experience or maybe I could contribute to.

So you're also giving an opportunity when you work in the open for people to bring more of themselves into the room, when you slow things down and give people permission to focus on the right things, and when you create that sort of culture. And you explicitly delegate down and say to people, look, you don't need to bring me a first draft. Just go and talk to people. Go and test it with users, go and test it with the general public. I encourage you and support you to do it. And no, you shouldn't have to go through the communications team to just go and talk to real people. Just go and talk to real people. So creating that culture of engagement is only possible when you slow down the other things as well. So there's a couple of strategies.

I guess my other strategies are I tend to try to build 10% playtime into every single agenda that I have, whether you have \$1 or a million dollars, if you don't build some innovation time, some strategy time, some thinking testing time into the whole of the lifecycle, no one's going to give you more money to innovate. You need to innovate within your budget, within your delegation, within your program. And organising your program accordingly is really critical because you're never going to get 100% done of what anyone wants you to do. But taking that little bit of extra percentage will actually help you get to causal factors and such, which I think is critical.

And my final strategy I do have a whole lot but very difficult to get to in just one podcast, but is I like to divide programs into two streams of thinking what I call Fast Value. So the things that you need to have like a roadmap of what you are delivering this week, next week, next month and if you can show constant delivery, it doesn't matter whether you're doing policy or products like whatever you're doing, be able to show some form. Delivery as a bit of a roadmap will help build trust and give you authority. That's really how you keep people engaged. But if you don't also have a percentage of your program focused on long value, the 6, 12, 18-month, 5, 10, 20-year horizons that you're working towards, then if you only focus on Fast Value, then about two years in you'll lose credibility.

So having a proportion of your work program focused on Long Value, the long-term hard problems that of course all need to flow up into delivery at some point, then delivery of some sort will help you actually maintain credibility over long term. The other benefit of that Fast Value, Long Value model is it helps you with internal staff expectations as well because the sort of people that love to just deliver something today, right now you can say well that's great, but how do you know if it's having the right impact over the long term?

So let's look at ways to monitor for impact, to monitor for long-term understanding to ensure that it's actually driving a long-term benefit. Whereas the sort of people that want to spend three years researching something before they even put pen to paper, you can sort of say, are you seriously suggesting that my grandma, who's eligible for a benefits payment that she desperately need, should wait three years so that you can figure out whether it's exactly the best possible policy intervention? So it helps balance people and keep them focused on continuous delivery of value to the public, to our mandate, whilst also trying to keep one eye on the horizon and making sure you're walking in the right direction.

**ANDY CORBETT:** And I really like the concept of slowing things down. I think there's a huge burnout issue at the moment across public sector. I think one of the sort of drivers behind that is the

inability to prioritise and possibly therefore not been really clear on exactly what the purpose is of what they're trying to achieve. Because I think just reading some of your blogs, Pia, you've used the analogy of the sword and shield concepts where the swords of card pathway to getting to achieve your purpose, but at the same time, the purpose acts as a shield, so that there might be some new ideas and there might be some new things that come along, but if they don't really align with your purpose, then it's a good way of sort of stopping that from happening.

**PIA ANDREWS:** Absolutely.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Do you see that as one of the key challenges around burnout at the moment, this inability to prioritise?

**PIA ANDREWS:** I do think there's an inability, or at least quite often a disempowerment from prioritising. So quite often up the chain, someone will say, just do all of it. And so the people down the chain are not empowered to deprioritise things that are simply less important. So that comes back to the servant leadership and why it's so critical to push decision making and outcomes ownership down, not just tasks.

But I think it's more than that as well. There's also a bit of a learned helplessness. I was talking to a public servant friend just the other day about some of the excitement about the APS Reform Agenda and the opportunities to reshape how we work and all of the exciting stuff that we'll get to a bit later in this podcast. And she was really she sort of said, I've worked in public sector for 20 years and I do, you know, I'm so busy when I'm at work and then I go home and I keep working and I'm just too busy to think about how to change things. And I said and it was and you hear this story again and again and again.

The pattern to observe there is if you're too busy to address the cause or factors that have made you too busy then your backlog is exponentially growing but your capacity to respond to it is proportionately diminishing, right? So if we this goes to the long value short value as well or Fast Value, Long Value putting some percentage of your time it doesn't matter what level you're at, you can actually plan your own day, right? Putting some proportion of your time into what are the causal factors that are leading to this rather than just addressing everything as it comes up, every most urgent thing, what is the thing I could do to shut things down? Now.

When I first joined the public service, I went into a job that I knew I wouldn't like very much because it was sort of a coordination administration role. It was a senior one, but it was still going to be doing a lot of reporting, which I actually hate, but it was working in the right area for the right person on the right agenda and I knew that I'd be in a position to then do some of the important Gov 2.0 and data work that I wanted to do.

So two weeks, it took me two weeks to automate a whole chunk of the reporting work. I looked at it and said oh well, clearly there's a repeated pattern here, this data is coming from here. These five reports being generated are effectively the same report so I automated them. And that freed up a huge proportion of the time. I think a lot of people don't feel and frankly are not supported to innovate in their own jobs and if they were, they would be able to cut down on the less important stuff and be able to actually focus and the purpose stuff. But the predominant leadership culture is

do what I tell you rather than deliver an outcome. And that's why that shift in leadership culture is one of the key enablers to a more productive, joyful, effective approach to achieving public good.

**ANDY CORBETT:** And so do you think the APS is heading in the right direction to empower leaders with the attributes that you just mentioned? I mean, so how can we help them to continue that shift and how can we help them to evolve their leadership behaviours even more to help build and lead teams into the future?

**PIA ANDREWS:** Sure. So look, I think first of all, the APS Reform Agenda is magnificent. I've had a few people say to me, why are you so excited about the APS Reform Agenda? We've been here before. We've done reports. You look back into ahead of the game, you look back into several reports over the years about trying to address and improve things.

The key thing about the APS Reform Agenda is first of all, the scale of change that is being addressed is huge. They are looking at the structure and the behaviour and the attitudes. It is the first time ever in the history of the APS that there will be a purpose statement for the public service. And I think that for me, the reason that's so critical having a clear and shared purpose is the Australian Public Service of course, was built on the back of a penal colony in the very first instance. So are our structures and culture and purposes. And even the first Public Service Act if you want to go back and read it, as someone only as nerdy as I would probably, but the very first Public Service Act was all about crime and punishment. There was nothing in there about the purpose of the public service. There was nothing in there about the public service existing to help people live well or thrive or any of that that you find in a lot of other modern democracies, a lot of other modern public sectors.

So the public service reform is introducing purpose, introducing a change to structure, incentives and behaviours of the SES and actually introducing a charter of partnership and engagement. These are fundamental shifts in the DNA of how the sector has worked for a long time.

Secondly, I think that there has been a shift in training. You look at some of the courses coming out like Catherine Althaus's [adaptive leadership course](#), which is leaders across the sector are taking this up. Now people realise that the deafening gap between policy and implementation has created a problem. Now, this was predicted 20 years ago when they first split policy and delivery, but people have now seen really the problem and want to change it. So there's an appetite for the reform across the service now there's an appetite for reform from the general public.

And frankly, various rural commissions and the negative impacts from programs has also created a pressure, an unprecedented pressure for change for the sector to get back to being purpose led and actually driving public outcomes. I might also say that I think that we have had a huge influx of public sector leaders who don't have any public service background and then are not taught the craft of public service, which has created, I think, a problem. Because, first of all, they don't understand their delegations, their authorities, and where the line is that they shouldn't cross.

Second of all, good is defined too often as efficiency expediency as opposed to public outcomes, policy outcomes or public good. And I think that what it's done is created this well, extremely well educated public sector below a certain level about the public craft, the craft public sector, but



unfortunately a relative expertise deficit in the executive layer of government where with a few really amazing exceptions, a lot of the senior executive service is trained and taught. That specialisation or expertise is a bit of a dirty word and that to get anywhere. Or if you're actually ambitious, then you want to become a generalist.

And what that has done is internalised a disregard or a disrespect for expertise as having intrinsic value. And unfortunately, that leads to then not being able to trust your staff because they're experts and experts are clearly not ambitious people according to this particular philosophy. And so it's created this downward spiral of expertise even where it exists. And it does exist in spades across the service. But even where it exists, it's not recognised, it's not valued, it's not upheld and it's not backed. And this has been addressed in the APS Reform Agenda. This has been addressed by the current government. I mean, we shouldn't need a political intervention to fix the political issues. But unfortunately, this is where we're at. And having this window of opportunity now to address and strengthen the sector is critical that all of us at every level, at every level uses this window of opportunity to reinstate good governance, responsible governance and ethical public service.

This is where the stewardship comes in, which is really exciting. This is where a shift away from the perspective and the mythology that our job is to just give frank and fearless advice, which I think is actually the more I've thought about it over the years, the more I've realised it's actually quite toxic. When you think the net nature of your job is to give advice, frank and fearless aside, then someone else making a bad decision you now don't feel accountable for. But I tell you what, if the decision that comes back is bad, it is unethical or illegal or whatever, your job as a public servant is to say, no, actually, your job is not just advice.

Your job is stewardship of the service, stewardship of public good and responsible implementation that is ethical, legal and meets all of the public expectations of the service. So if I was to go a little further than what they've put in place and the ambitious program, I do encourage people to go have a look at the [APS Reform website](#). They have actually published their program of work. It's a bit tricky to find, but if you go and have a look, it lists dozens of actual practical and powerful interventions that they're putting into place. If I was to go above and beyond what they're currently proposing, I'd love to see 360s introduced across the whole service. Because unfortunately the habit and ease of people being able to shine upwards but spit downwards has made it hard sometimes to understand where someone is being a great leader as opposed to a great talker. So if we got 360s included across the whole board, which I've seen were implemented in some governments, but if we saw that across the APS, that would just help provide another data point to the effectiveness of executive leaders. And if we can embed in our leadership training and understanding of and the incentives and the ability and the desire to empower their teams, then the huge amount of power that already exists in executives, in leaders and right down the public sector could be better used.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Yeah, absolutely. You mentioned there as well this idea of connecting policy with impacts and understanding the impacts of policy. I think that's really important, obviously as part of the purpose and really helping to connect people with why they're doing and what they're doing.



Could you just elaborate on some of the kind of things that you'd expect to see to really, truly understand the impact of policy?

**PIA ANDREWS:** I would love to see, and I have seen in small part and I'm seeing a shift towards a position where we actually manage policy over its entire lifecycle. So right now policy makers are completely separate from implementation. There is very little subject matter expertise, let alone experience diverse experience, let alone own experience from people who are impacted by various policies. None of that's actually in the room when the policy is being made right now. And yes, there's a lot of a shift to let's get more user centric policy design. So that shift has already started, which is great, but normalising that and making that normal is important, but it's also not enough.

If you have the best design policy in the world but you're still throwing it over the fence to implementation, you still lose that line of sight. So imagine a world where all of the techniques that we've taken into shifting from a set and forget approach to service delivery we've now shifted to service delivery methods which are co-designed, which have constant design, constant test. And implementation, constant improvement to the service, constant monitoring of the impact and effectiveness of service and feedback and user experience measures and satisfaction measures. We've created a constant feedback loop into service delivery so that you can continuously improve service. Even if it started as a terrible service, it will very rapidly become a great service because the feedback loops and continuous improvement cycles actually drive better service outcomes.

Imagine if we took all of those lessons, technologies, methodologies, and applied them to policy end-to-end. Policy management, where your design and delivery is being test driven, is being continuously improved, where you get feedback loops that are not just the feedback loops you expect. Okay, are we tracking to our policy outcome? Yes or no? But also, what is the intended human impact? What is the unintended human impacts that we are monitoring for? Or look, this policy, even though it's meeting its objectives, is driving an unintended impact on homelessness or debt or mental health challenges. Okay, then we now need to pause or change or stop this policy.

If you take a holistic whole of policy life, bring all of the minimum viable capabilities working together from the very beginning of that, right through the implementation of that and the continuous improvement and monitoring of that, you now almost have, like, a product team approach to policy management and a continuous improvement and adaptive approach to policy.

Now, any one policy might have several interventions, but you want to be able to be monitoring for flexible in and continuously adapting and improving how well those interventions are driving the outcome. And you never, never, never want to lose track of what the actual policy intent originally was, because otherwise we've fallen into the trap. Now, of a lot of government systems and services are measured according to their performance, are measured according to user feedback. But you could have a perfectly performing and well received product or service that is not meeting its policy objective. But even if you take that third measurement framework of policy, it could be meeting its policy objectives, but creating harm.

I think one of the highest things in government is that we really have a duty of care to the general public and if you can't detect harm then how can you mitigate it? So taking that next step into impact monitoring and understanding is going to be a critical combined with an adaptive and whole

of lifecycle approach to policy is going to be critical to us actually shifting into not just driving better policy outcomes but doing it in a way that drives better public good.

**ANDY CORBETT:** And have you seen some good examples of that out in the public across the world whether Australia or beyond?

**PIA ANDREWS:** Look, I can certainly refer to some of the programs I've been involved in in Canada. I was very proud that we built a four-tiered approach to our infrastructure where we said we're not just going to measure for performance or customer satisfaction, user satisfaction, client satisfaction measures. We're going to also look for and build policy monitoring and measuring into our framework and human impact monitoring and measuring into our framework. So that I was very proud to have to be able to build that effectively from scratch and be able to build an appetite for that.

I've certainly seen lots of policy teams and policy labs emerge that are trying to take a more user-centric approach to just the design phase at the very beginning. I can see a lot of desire for people to work across policy and delivery and some if you look at taxation departments, they tend to have policy design and delivery in the room at the same time actually doing continuous iteration and improvement of policy. So I've seen a pattern across the world where most taxation departments actually naturally do this a bit more.

But if you look at social service policy and a lot of other environmental policy and such and a lot of regulation, the gap between is really problematic. But just a quick call out to some extraordinary people in New South Wales Department of Education who are doing an extraordinary thing. They've brought together the service design of their services with the policy design function into the one team and what they're trying to do is exactly this. They're trying to ensure that design and policy management and monitoring is all happening as part of one lifecycle. And I'm watching very closely and very supportive of what they're trying to do because I think that structural shift is going to be a critical part of this as well.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Yeah. Excellent. So in terms of how leaders engage employees and build a strong workforce culture, I suppose there's some aspects of that approach that you just mentioned around policy that could be applied there to help sort of continuously improve and understand the impact of how they're actually leading their teams. And one of the sort of key skills that could really enable that, according to research, is empathy. How do you feel leaders could use sort of human centered design approaches to lead their teams more empathetically and effectively in the workforce?

**PIA ANDREWS:** I might just step back one step first, because I think that actually just bringing empathy into the workplace is step one. Because if people adopt human-centered design as a pure methodology but still don't bring themselves into the room, then it will help, but it won't really fix some of these challenges. So I think that recognising and to be honest, I actually learned a lot of this working in New Zealand, more so than in Australia, is in Australia, I think we've taken an approach where professionalism is defined as being somewhat emotionally vacant, right? People's sort of being professional is seen as doing being arm's length from someone, being not emotionally invested, being not vulnerable. You're polite, right? Working in countries and in places where

actually trust is built by being a little bit vulnerable. Trust is built by having genuine empathy, not just employing an empathy based framework, as it were.

So I think that the first thing is that leaders and everyone actually, in any job, feeling more confident and comfortable. To define your professionalism as part of being humane or bringing your humanity into your professionalism, I think is a really important starting point. It's not complicated to care for your staff. It's not complicated to trust your staff and encourage them to own outcomes, encouraging them to innovate, supporting them when they need it. Actually caring about people is very different from having a care framework, as it were. So I think the first part is getting people to really think about if a job is just a job, then it easy to act in some pretty appalling ways. But if we see a job as a place where everyone should be able to have joy. Where everyone should feel the right support and trust and have the opportunities at their disposal to make a meaningful impact that brings them joy. And if everyone treats the workplace as somewhere that you should come out of, every workplace a better person than when you started there.

We spend so much time at work and yet people then switch off their human to go to work. If you switch off your humanity, how can you possibly get human services or human-centered outcomes? So I think step one is just redefining your sense of professionalism as being vulnerable. Being human, actually caring is a huge, huge step for me personally. I was a woman in it for a decade before I came into the public sector. So I had learned, tragically, to just completely cut myself off emotionally. I had learned to put a big steel chamber around myself to protect my heart. And I thought that being vulnerable was a threat and a risk and was too scary and had no value. And it really took a lot of learning on my part that actually being vulnerable is how you build trust and the sort of person that tries to use is something against you, is good litmus test. They're probably on their own journey themselves. But people can only hurt you as much as you let them.

The point is, human-centered approaches, whether it's design, whether it's anything, require you to come from a position of modeling being your best human in the first place. So part of that is also not just bringing that in your own professionalism, but also modeling the change that you see. If you want a workforce which is kind and calm and empathetic, you yourself need to be kind and calm and empathetic. You want your workforce to innovate. You need to innovate. If you want your workforce to take charge and make decisions, you need to give them the opportunity to do so.

So I think there's an interesting idea here in leaders recognising that they don't want to make themselves the single point of value or the single point of breaking actually. You yourself should work productive but reasonable hours. You shouldn't send emails at 11:00 p.m. You should model that change that you want to see. And you need to be the kindest, calmest person in the room. Because if you walk into a room and generate busyness, then you're not part of that problem.

I think the final part of that is, of course, there's going to be methods that will help. Human-centered design helps. I think impact monitoring helps. I think that design thinking there's lots and lots of methodologies, but seeing them all as part of a toolkit rather than a checklist to just work your way through is important because at the end of the day, you are accountable to the outcome, you are accountable to the actual impact. So you need to use it. And it's not about you using all of these technology or these methods. It's about you hiring a diverse team that can bring these

methods to the table and then trust them to use the methods rather than you trying to make all the decisions, delegate the decisions down. I hope that makes sense.

**ANDY CORBETT:** It does. It does. Yeah. That's great. Thanks, Pia. And just another question, really. You've studied Gung Fu and Chan Buddhism for over 20 years. How can the philosophies of these practices apply to creating purpose and leading teams today?

**PIA ANDREWS:** It's such a wonderful question. Thank you. So I started martial arts when I was eleven, which is actually over 30 years ago now, but I started Shaolin Gung Fu. Yeah, I need to go and update it about 25 years ago now. Look, there's three things that come to mind. Chan Buddhism is the kind of the mother of Zen Buddhism for those who've heard, because everyone's heard of Zen, but very few people heard of Chan.

One of the key things that Zen and Chan teach you, which is so, I think, and it's been such an important part of my public service journey, they teach you to be 100% accountable for the full impact of everything that you do right. Regardless of your intentions. If you had the best of intentions, but you broke someone's leg, their leg is still broken, and you're still accountable for that, which is quite different to some other philosophies where if you meant well, then you're probably all right.

So what that teaches me is daily to look for, to take responsibility for the whole impact of my choices and of my non choices. It creates a discipline in not putting off choices. It creates a discipline in not feeling like, well, that's above my pay grade or out of my domain of responsibility. It actually teaches a sense of trying to actively take accountability for and improve things, and not unintentionally or intentionally lead to things being worse off.

I think the second one is that Buddhism more broadly is about the middle way. It's about finding, walking an authentic path. And so I try to always have my checks and balances around myself to make sure that I am being true to my values and to myself and to my strengths and my own weaknesses. And to that point, I guess the martial arts part of this, most martial arts teach you explicitly to know yourself. They teach you to know your strengths, to know your weaknesses, to continuously evolve yourself.

And one of the lesser known purposes of martial arts is to actually help you work through trauma. So being able to see everything that happens, rather than seeing it as necessarily good or bad or evil or good, actually seeing everything that happens as a potential gift, a punch is thrown at you, rather than thinking, why am I being punched? Being able to redirect that energy into something else, something potentially that has a net good, something that maybe gives the other person a choice, a chance to think, do I want my arm broken or not?

Martial arts and Chan Buddhism have given me certain tools. I mean, the way that my parents raised me is also a big part of it. And of course, my privilege is a part of it as well, which I try to be aware of and try to try to share and try to devolve that as well. But, yeah, I think that from a public sector perspective, what it's helped me to do is to never feel constrained to a job title or to a level or to a portfolio or to a mandate in looking at, reaching for, and trying to deliver the best possible public good and public outcomes.

**ANDY CORBETT:** That's great. Thank you very much, Pia. Yeah, this has all been truly insightful, so I really appreciate you coming on the podcast today. I think that's all, unfortunately, that's all we've got time for. But I've learned an awful lot. Hopefully the listeners have as well. So, yeah. Thank you very much, Pia, for taking time out of your day to join us on the podcast.

**PIA ANDREWS:** Thank you so much for having me, and I can't wait to see the rest of the podcast and learn a whole lot myself too.

**ANDY CORBETT:** Thank you once again, Pia, appreciate you coming on the podcast today for discussing the important topic of purpose and leadership. If you want to read more about Pia's thoughts on public sector, you can visit her website, which is Pipka.org. That's pipka.org.

In addition, there are a number of related articles that have been published on The Mandarin. We'll include a link to that as well within the notes for this podcast. **Link:**

<https://www.themandarin.com.au/author/pia-waughgmail-com/>

We hope you enjoyed today and found Pia's thoughts and insights extremely valuable. I know I certainly did. A transcript of our episode today is available to download from our website at [www.corbetsprice.com.au/podcast](http://www.corbetsprice.com.au/podcast) that's [www.corbetsprice.com.au/podcast](http://www.corbetsprice.com.au/podcast)

Tune in next week as we conclude our series by talking to David Powell from The Golden Thread on the 7<sup>th</sup> dimension of organisational health, which is all about learning and development.