

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE – PUBLIC SECTOR UNEARTHED

EPISODE #2

JAYDEN SWAIN'S PASSION FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Jayden Swain (guest)

Diversity and Inclusion Advisor
Austrade

Brock Phyland (host)

Director
Transform, Engage, Design (TED)
Department of Veterans' Affairs

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Enquiries should be directed to Caroline Walsh on 0413 139 427 or at caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au

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BROCK PHYLAND: Hello everyone. Before we get started with this podcast, we'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land in which we're meeting today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge their ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this beautiful region. We'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast is also joining us from.

JAYDEN SWAIN: I think here it's all about making the APS a standout employer, one that truly embraces diversity and inclusion. We're not just saying that we care, we're showing it by having a dedicated team that put these values into action. We want everyone to know when they come and work here that they're joining a team that not only celebrates the differences, but we see them as strengths to the team and to the work that the APS is doing.

BROCK PHYLAND: Welcome to Public Sector Unearthed, a Work with Purpose spinoff series about the people who drive grassroots change and reform in Australia's public sector. My name is Brock Phyland, and I currently work as a director at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I'll be your host for today's episode. On Public Sector Unearthed, we're putting people, and their stories front and centre. Our guests talk about their journeys in the public service and how they're making a difference through their work, mentoring, communities of practice, diversity and inclusion networks, and the effective promotion of the values and purpose of the public sector.

The voice you just heard is that of Jayden Swain, our very first guest. Jayden is a diversity and inclusion advisor at Austrade. I spoke with Jayden recently. Together we dived into the power of authenticity, lived experience, and making diversity and inclusion 1% better every day. Jayden's work is crucial for creating a diverse and innovative APS, and it was a true pleasure hearing their commitment to driving change on the ground. Let's hear a bit more from them now. Jayden, it's so great to have you for this Unearthed conversation, our very first one. Before we kick off, can I ask, what are your pronouns?

JAYDEN SWAIN: Yeah, yeah. My preferred pronouns are he, him, his.

BROCK PHYLAND: Now, before we launch a bit more into your public service story, can you tell us a bit about your backstory? Who is Jayden Swain?

JAYDEN SWAIN: Yeah, of course. So, I studied law at university, and while I was studying I did some work experience with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service here in Queensland, and this work kind of ignited my passion and started my journey on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, particularly within the realms of justice and education, and this passion basically served as my driving force for my work in my earlier career. I guess also I grew up in a very small country town in the Liverpool Plains region of New South Wales, and my nan and pop were pretty strong forces within the Aboriginal community where I

grew up. So I guess I've always tried to follow in their footsteps and make them proud. And then, yeah, so that's kind of been my backstory. Nothing too crazy, I'm still only 26 years young, so nothing too crazy, nothing out there, but that's definitely my story there.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Oh, I love it. No, I'm a fellow law grad so we've suffered together, but it's fantastic to hear. That's fantastic to hear, I guess, your background and some of those forces and figures in your life that have shaped you which is brilliant. And so, you're now a diversity and inclusion advisor at Austrade. So, what led you to this role?

JAYDEN SWAIN:

I guess I was really looking for a meaningful role, one where I could drive some serious and tangible change for my community. That's kind of what led me to this position. I was at a point where I felt like I had more to contribute. My previous job, while please don't get me wrong, was incredibly important, but it just didn't quite align with my career aspirations, I suppose. I had this urge to step up and make an impact in a different way. In essence, it was all about wanting to be at the forefront of change, really making waves for the community and finding a role that lets me do just that. So that's the journey that brought me here today, and I can very honestly say that this role has definitely allowed me to do that. So it was the right career choice, I suppose.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Oh, I love that. I love, I guess, the drive for meaningful work and meaningful change. And so I guess how was your personal experience shaping the way that you work now within that department?

JAYDEN SWAIN:

Yeah, of course. So for me, it's all about my own life experiences shaping the way that I approach my work. It's an irreplaceable resource of understanding and empathy. When you're in a room of 25 people, no amount of education or industry experience can overshadow the profound impact of lived experience. It is deeply personal. It's my life, it's my story, and it's something that no one can dispute. In my role as a diversity and inclusion advisor, my own lived experience holds incredible weight. It infuses my work with a unique depth of empathy and insight. Especially when it comes to connecting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, I guess understanding the common threads of discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion, and powerlessness really empowers me to forge those authentic connections. I guess crucially, I do want to point out that this doesn't diminish anyone else's experiences. Rather, I see it as enabling me to bridge that gap and provide the effective support.

I guess moreover, to take it back to the law side of things, I did work in criminal law and family and domestic violence law as well, and this work has instilled in me a trauma-informed perspective, and this is an absolute game changer in my current role. My primary objective is to nurture a culture of psychological safety within Austrade, and when our staff feel secure enough to share their experiences with me, my team, their team, their managers,

whoever it may be, it empowers us to address the potential trauma that may stem from discrimination and exclusion. It also paves the way for resilience and healing. So my personal experiences are not just a backdrop, but act as a driving force that infuses my approach with unparalleled impact in fostering diversity and inclusion within Austrade and hopefully a wider community as well.

BROCK PHYLAND:

That is just so profoundly powerful to hear, Jayden, and I think I a hundred percent agree with your take on lived experience. You can never argue with someone's lived experience, the way that they have undergone whatever, an incident or a journey or a challenge has. You can't argue with that. That's the way that they experienced it. So you've spoken really powerfully to that. Are there any guiding principles that you use, and I guess if so, can you talk us through maybe an example of when you had to use those principles?

JAYDEN SWAIN:

Yeah, absolutely. My guiding principle in my work is the unwavering belief of the power of authenticity. I firmly stand by the idea that when you unapologetically embrace your true self, it sets an example for others to follow. This approach promotes authenticity, and by openly sharing my own experiences, I aim to foster trust and genuineness both within and among individuals. The ultimate goal is to create an environment that encourages meaningful connections and conversations, while also championing the concept of bringing your whole self to work. This principle has proven instrumental in my life. Just a couple of ideas that come to mind, I've received several messages from team members who felt safe enough to express their true selves, whether this looks like reaching out to me saying that they feel comfortable enough to come out within their team, or whether it was one of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who has previously decided not to identify because they were afraid of the discrimination or the, I guess, connotations that come with identifying within the workplace who now identifies within their team and the wider organisation.

I think myself, I stand very firmly behind that be unapologetically yourself and other people want to do the exact same thing. So I think it's evident that my commitment to authenticity has been a real driving force in these positive transformations. Also, another one that my team likes to use a fair bit is we're always aiming to be 1% better every day. So obviously diversity and inclusion is a really unique sphere to work in, and everyone has different, I guess, understandings or different, I guess, perceptions about what diversity and inclusion is, but only us real D&I practitioners know that we can't change the world overnight so we always aim to be that 1% better. Whether it's using pronouns or introducing ourselves when we're talking in team meetings, there's always something that we can do to really make such a big impact, and I'll touch a little bit further on the impact soon, but I think that's also another really important guiding principle that we try to use every day.

BROCK PHYLAND: Oh, you've touched on so many things that I just, I love hearing about, Jayden, honestly. So the power of authenticity, creating an environment for your whole self to come to work which I think is... I'm feeling so much more comfortable with you. You know what I mean? I feel like you're obviously such an empathetic person, a trustworthy person, you can have these convos and people can come to you and I can... I'm already feeling that through the screen. Yeah, The 1% better every day-

JAYDEN SWAIN: Wonderful, wonderful.

BROCK PHYLAND: Yeah. The 1% better every day as well is just a principal I really, really agree with as well. So I think you've probably already started talking a little bit about this and whether it's building on of your own personality, but how is your work contributing to make the APS more broadly a model employer, do you think?

JAYDEN SWAIN: Yeah, no. Well, firstly, I want to say thank you for that. As much as it inspires people to hear talking about diversity and inclusion, I get a real kick out of talking about diversity and inclusion as well. But I think here it's all about making the APS a standout employer, one that truly embraces diversity and inclusion. We're not just saying that we care, we're showing it by having a dedicated team that put these values into action. We want everyone to know when they come and work here that they're joining a team that not only celebrates the differences, but we see them as strengths to the team and to the work that the APS is doing. I also think it's not just for us, it's for the whole community. We want other organisations to look at the work we're doing and say, "Hey, we can do that too."

But I think as well as the APS, it says it in our name. We are the Australian Public Service. We're here to represent Australia. Australia is a very wide, very big multicultural country that our organisations need to identify, respect, and show that, and I think that, like I said just before, having a team dedicated to this work really showcases the APS's, I guess, commitment to that. I think that kind of showcases, or I guess shows to people who may be a little bit scared to join the APS because of their history or because of their culture or their background that we really are trying our very, very best to become an employer of choice for everyone. So I think the work that I do hopefully contributes to that.

BROCK PHYLAND: Absolutely. And just even the fact that there are now dedicated teams across different government departments I think really showed the commitment, maybe how far we've come with still more to go. I wonder for you, what's been the most surprising thing about working in the diversity and inclusion space?

JAYDEN SWAIN: It is without a doubt how the tiniest things can have such a huge impact. I mean, when I started out, I knew it was important, but I didn't realise just how game changing little things can be. It's crazy. Like a casual chat, a tiny policy tweak, or just showing some real empathy, these small things can totally shake up things in an

organisation. They can shift how people see things, make people feel like they really belong, and reshape the whole vibe.

And it's not just at work. It spills over into people's lives, their families, and even the whole community. It's a reminder that what we do in diversity and inclusion isn't just about the workplace. It's about making the world fairer and more inclusive. Just a really quick point on that, Austrade recently celebrated our Wear It Purple Day and we had a plethora of purple across our organisation, and while it was important, we had a information session delivered to us by our friends at Pride in Diversity. That gave our staff the ability to go out into the streets and to talk to their family. If their daughter was like, "Why are you wearing purple today? I don't quite understand," it was the conversations that they were able to have. A teenager saw a bunch of Austraders walk out of our building in Sydney wearing purple, they might google why are people wearing purple today and they understand the meaning behind that. So yeah, the biggest eyeopener for me was that in this field small steps can lead to a giant leap towards a better, fairer world.

BROCK PHYLAND: I just, I love that, Jayden. It's the vibe, it's belonging, it's the real impact on lives from those small steps so I just, I love it.

JAYDEN SWAIN: Yeah, good.

BROCK PHYLAND: And just one final question from me as well. I wish we could talk all day actually, but one more from me. How is your work affecting communities on the ground?

JAYDEN SWAIN: Yeah, so my role at Austrade is quite unique in the sense that we operate on a global scale. So when we talk about the communities my work affects, it's not just limited to a specific geographic location. It extends to our vast network of employees worldwide. I view this impact of my work as a chain reaction that starts from within. By cultivating a diverse and inclusive environments within our organisation, we're essentially sowing the seeds of change. Our employees who are out there interacting with diverse communities around the world become ambassadors of this mindset. So our employees, they're the ones out there in different corners of the world connecting with all sorts of communities. When they feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within our team, they carry that attitude into the work with their communities. So my work is not just about Austrade, it's about empowering our global workforce to be catalysts for positive change, making the world a more inclusive place one connection at a time.

BROCK PHYLAND: Brilliant. Thank you so much, Jayden, for joining us on Unearthed today. It's such a powerful but a really important conversation. It's been a real pleasure hearing your story, how your work is helping people across the public service, but not only that, on a much larger scale just be more aware of diversity and inclusion, and I'll be 1% better every day. I'm going to commit to you, I'll try and make 1%

better each day. But thank you so much for your time today, Jayden. It's been great.

JAYDEN SWAIN:

No, thank you so much for having me. And like you said, I think the message that I was really trying to push across the world, that whole 1% better every day, and you've taken it away so other listeners might also take that away. So that's definitely the most important thing. But like I said, thank you so much for inviting me along. This is such an important, I guess, conversation to be having, and it was really nice to be invited. Thank you.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Listeners, we hope you enjoyed hearing Jayden's story. What really struck me was improving small steps to achieve big change, that 1% better every day, and I'm going to take that one with me. What did you enjoy about this story? Let us know by leaving a comment on our social media channels or even better writing a review. We're on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms. And Work With Purpose is produced in collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration Australia ACT, supported by the Australian Public Service Commission. Public Sector Unearthed is a monthly series and will return to your headphones soon. And this podcast is produced in partnership with contentgroup and the APS Reform Office. Thanks for listening. See you soon.