



TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE | EPISODE #114
ON THE EXECUTIVE SUPPORT TEAM

Zoe Scanlon (guest)

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DAVID PEMBROKE:

Hello, everyone and welcome to Work With Purpose, a podcast about the Australian public sector and how it serves the Australian people. My name is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me. As we begin today, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. And I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast today is joining us from.

Well, today's episode, we are going back to the classroom once again because many of you have asked us the question coming from and flowing from IPAA ACT's EA series. And a question that has been asked many times is how do you build and maintain a relationship between executive assistants and executive officers or chiefs of staff that supports an organisation's strategic mission?

I think people often look up to that executive floor and think what's going on up there and how can I play a role in understanding what's going on there and how in fact can we deliver on our organisation's mission? So today we're bringing you two excellent leaders in their respective areas from the public sector to investigate this very question and to discuss how together they can contribute to the strategic mission of an organisation.

My first guest is Lydia Milosavljevic. She's currently the executive assistant to Deputy Secretary Simon Duggan at the Department of Climate Change Energy, the Environment and Water. Prior to working with Simon, Lydia provided secretariat support to the regulatory reform division within PM&C, delivering the regulatory reform conference alongside IPAA back in early 2022. Now, a highlight for Lydia throughout 2020 was when she had the opportunity to be the executive assistant to Nev Power and Peter Harris of the National COVID-19 Commission. Lydia, welcome to Work with Purpose.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

Thank you so much for having me.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

My next guest is Zoe Scanlon, who is chief of staff to Katherine Jones, PSM, the secretary of the attorney general's department. Prior to this position, Zoe has worked in various government roles, principally in the area of international law. Zoe has also worked for the United Nations in academia and has taught at university. Zoe, welcome to Work with Purpose.

ZOE SCANLON: Thank you, David. Thanks for having me.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now, listen, before we get into the essence of this question as people really do want to know and understand, perhaps I might start with you, Lydia, what does a typical day look like for you?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: It's a great question because most EAs know that it's quite unpredictable, so it's hard to really identify what a typical day looks like, but that's what makes it fun. So, stripping it back, my main focus each day is supporting my boss through his day in any reasonable means possible. So generally, this can include keeping them on track for meetings, monitoring his inbox and his calendar and bringing anything urgent or pressing to his attention. After all, the boss is in meetings all day, so they don't have time to do that, and then they can trust me to do that for them and have peace of mind as well, making sure briefing has been tasked.

So, my boss has everything that he needs for his meetings, and usually I'll do that at the end of each week for the following week and at the end of every day preparing the day after just to make sure it's all ready to go. Organising meetings and calls as the boss needs. That means lots of talking to people and stakeholders, which means primarily my EO and my EAs who sit under me as well as the secretary's EA and secretary's office and other executive support staff, external stakeholders for any of the calls that my boss needs, as well as my boss's staff and often as well the minister's office.

It can also look like progressing the broader group initiatives and investing in the departmental EA network as well as my own EA and EO cohort. So, looks like a variety of things.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So, what time do you get to the office?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Normally, I will always make sure I'm in before my boss's first meeting, which for my current boss is normally around eight to 8:30. But yeah, it differs depending on who I'm working to at the time.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. And can you do your role from home, or do you have to be in the office?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Again, depends on the preference of the boss. My boss, Simon Duggan, he's an awesome boss. He is a hard copy man, and we find that working in the office just makes it more productive and easier to talk quickly because he's in back-to-back, so I can catch him in meetings as he quickly comes out or runs to the loo. So, we normally

are in the office a lot at a time, and that has been common with other SES I've worked to as well. But for today, my boss is travelling, so I was able to work from home.

- DAVID PEMBROKE: What time do you get your morning coffee?
- LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: I don't drink coffee. I know, shock horror.
- ZOE SCANLON: Impressive.
- LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: I'm more of a tea girl, so I will bring and prepare my chai tea and have that, and eat breakfast
- DAVID PEMBROKE: At the desk?
- LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: At the desk. But that's just my preference.
- DAVID PEMBROKE: What about for you, Zoe? In the world of Katherine Jones, what's life like for you?
- ZOE SCANLON: Well, very similar to Lydia actually. I have to say every day is very different and it's part of the reason that I love being in the role so much. I think quite often I arrive at work on a particular morning thinking the day will look like something and it ends up looking like something completely different. But as you say, that's part of the fun of it.
- LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Exactly.
- ZOE SCANLON: One thing that is consistent though is that my mornings always begin with chaos, but once I've done breakfast, school drop off, daycare drop off.
- DAVID PEMBROKE: Not work at home, the kids.
- ZOE SCANLON: Oh no. And then I step into the office and there's a few moments to be honest of bliss before everyone else arrives where I can just centre myself for the day. It's actually quite an important part of the sort of daily ritual for me. So, it's the time when I read through the press clips, check if I need to chase anything up with anyone on account of what the media is reporting. I'll have a really good look like you through the secretary's calendar, both for that day in great detail, but also for the week, just so I know exactly where she's going to be at every minute of the day and when might be those opportunities to grab her for urgent matters and things like that. That's the point. Well,

I'll get onto my emails, have a look at what's going on, and the team will be coming in at that point.

So touching base with the team and just checking what's on their radars for the day. And I guess from there it can go anywhere. That's the point that my phone might start ringing. I spend a really, lucky you, Lydia, a large part of my day on the phone talking to everyone, seniors around the department who might need time with Katherine later in the day who might need me to put an issue on her radar, who might be checking on how something is progressing through the secretary's office, all of those kinds of things.

I might be seeking further information from them in relation to a decision that Katherine needs to make where she might not have everything she needs yet. So, a few things like that go on. I'm also speaking quite frequently to my counterpart chiefs of staff in other departments who are working for other departmental secretaries. So spend a lot of the day either on the phone or walking around as well. We're all collocated in the executive suite, the deputy secretaries and all their advisors. So always popping around to them speaking about various things that are going on.

Otherwise, I accompany Katherine to a lot of meetings, so I spend a lot of my day doing that, again, making sure she has all the briefing she needs, giving her any urgent up-to-date information that she'll need before she goes into those meetings. Then keeping a track of any taskings during meetings and following things up afterwards. That keeps me quite busy. Again, ducking to Katherine when needed to touch base on urgent matters. And then there's the document flow through the secretary's office. Like you, Lydia, she will receive a large volume of documents on any day for signature or clearance or decision.

So, we in the secretary's office keep that moving through to make sure she has everything she needs when she's doing that. Otherwise, I'm touching base consistently with the team. So always out just checking what's going on, where things are up to, try and get a few breaks in there. So coffee, catch-ups, try and get some lunch. The team and I all often have a 3:00 PM biscuit break when we're all of flagging after lunch and just need a little bit of that sugar hit to keep us going, which pretty much takes me to the end of the day when I run out the door to pick up the children. And the chaos really commences. And then I try not to log on too much in the evenings, but sometimes I do just have to-

DAVID PEMBROKE: You have to.

ZOE SCANLON: ... jump on to just get things ready for the next day.

DAVID PEMBROKE: It's an immensely important and powerful role, isn't it? Because in both of your answers there, you decide in many ways what gets escalated, what doesn't get escalated. The knock on the door of, actually, we'll let that run a bit longer. Actually, no, we're going to knock that. We're going to close that out. Do you feel that responsibility of being able to run these important roles, Lydia, for you?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Yeah, no, absolutely. I think our boss has so much on their plate that they don't have time to be... They need ultimate time to be focusing on those tasks, and then they're trusting us to organise their life and their calendar. So yeah, you were saying knowing when to let something run or not that. That happens frequently where sometimes I'll try and make sure there are gaps if I know that this is an important meeting that might run over given the stakeholders that are in the room, and then if it continues to run, it's letting that run and letting the next meeting know that.

And similarly with clearance items, if there's something that comes into the inbox that because the boss is in meetings all day, I'm on the inbox. If I see something that I know he needs to see right now, then it's catching him and trying to make that get cleared as soon as it can. And yeah, it's I guess a juggle of balancing all those priorities.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And for you, Zoe, it's an enormous responsibility.

ZOE SCANLON: It is an enormous responsibility, yes. No, I definitely feel that as well. And I think as you say, that is one of the greatest challenges of this role. I think it's forming that strategic judgement and trying to work out what is going to be the priority for right now. Because everyone in the department thinks their thing is important.

DAVID PEMBROKE: That's right. Of course.

ZOE SCANLON: And they are all very important. But when people, very senior, people like Katherine have very limited time in their day and it needs to be spent very carefully. And so, it is a lot of responsibility to be planning out and deciding, "Well, sorry, your thing is not going to get up today, but your thing will." So, it's a lot of responsibility and it's a big privilege.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And so, do you sit with Katherine and with Simon to say, "Hey, what's important to you at the moment, or are you just picking this up on the run because you are there and you are around and you're making judgments? Lydia.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: I think it's a bit of both. And this is where for me, I work closely with my EO, my executive officer who, Zoe, you are attending Katherine's meetings, my EO attends Simon's meetings. So she has more of that ear to the ground. I naturally will also have a similar understanding because I'm watching the inbox and I'm setting up meetings, so I have a general understanding of my boss's priorities. But my EO, because she's actually in those meetings, she can feed it back to me as well, and then we can make those judgement calls. So it's a mix of talking with Simon, talking with my EO, and also just learning for myself.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And for you, Zoe?

ZOE SCANLON: Yeah. My experience is very similar actually. So sometimes we have direct discussions about it, but mostly it's just that exposure. So, I'm listening to everything that Katherine says in all of the meetings that she goes to. And I think that's a really important part of forming that judgement in this role is listening very actively and understanding very clearly what her priorities are, what her strategies are going to be, and where she's going to want to be spending her time. And I think you made a very important point, I think about sharing that information with the rest of the office and with the EA, which is something that, yeah, Maryanne, Katherine's EA and I do a lot because it's really critical for all of us being better at our jobs, I think.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah. How do you make that work, those small teams that are in support where you've got the executive officer, the chief of staff, and the executive assistant, how does that dynamic work for you, Zoe?

ZOE SCANLON: It works brilliantly for us. I think we are really lucky. We've gelled really well as a team, and we're a team. The team is just brilliant. I can't speak highly enough of them. Everyone has really switched on very collaborative. I think we all have a real sense that we all have the same ultimate goal, which is to support Katherine and make her as successful as she can be in her role. So, we're all sort of sharing that information and working towards the shared goal.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And everyone's understands their lane and what their responsibilities are, where it begins and ends, or is there an overlap?

ZOE SCANLON:

No, I think it is that role clarity is very important. I think there's an understanding and a respect for what each of us does. I mean, I think Maryanne, for example who's Katherine's EA, I have just enormous respect for the EA role. I think it's a really difficult job, and it's absolutely critical to keeping not only Katherine's office, but the whole department running. I think EAs just do a brilliant job. But Maryanne, I'm so lucky to work with her. I think she's incredible the way she goes about her role. And I think I just have enormous respect for the way that she does that. She's extremely collaborative. She's great at building relationships. She's really effective.

I guess it really reinforces for me that she's so brilliant at what she does that anything that I can just pass to her, and she can pass to me. I think that role clarity between us works very well.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

And so, Lydia, from your point of view, you've heard this notion that this criticality of these two roles and being able to work together. If you're new, a new EA starting out, what sort of recommendations might you have for those new EAs to start building the types of relationships that Zoe has just described between the EA and the chief of staff?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

I think, Zoe, you nailed it. When I think about an EA-EO relationship and what makes that work, it's at the crux of it, having that respect in each other's ability and trust that each other will get the job done. So in terms of building that, I guess it takes time like any kind of relationship. And because the SES-EA-EO relationship requires that ultimate level of trust, it can just take time to reach that kind of strong unit that you want to build that partnership.

For new EA's, I would say if you're brand new and you're stepping into a role where the SES and the EO have been working together for a while, then really utilise the EO and the source of knowledge that they are. Because if they've been working with this SES, they would know them inside out. So be a sponge and soak that all up.

And then also, you don't have to bug your SES with all the silly questions, which we might think they're silly, but instead you can build that relationship already with your EO. And also, I would say let them to start with oversee your work to build that trust and confidence. And then over time, as you build confidence into your role, you can switch more into how, Zoe, you were saying that independent autonomous working dynamic, but you're still mucking in and you still, you're sitting in your own lanes, but you're not afraid to help each other out because you've got that trust and that respect.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

And, Zoe, people taking on your role as they coming in new, what advice would you give them as they start to work at that level?

ZOE SCANLON:

I would say think about how important that EA role is and understand what that role is. And I think similar to what Lydia was saying about use the experience of the EA, I've learned so much from Maryanne. For example, she's worked with really senior people including ministers, and so I'm constantly going to her and testing things in the way that you were saying you might test with an EO. I'm testing with her. "How do you think Katherine to do this? Should we be approaching it this way?"

So, I think just valuing that expertise that the other person brings and being able to share information, bounce ideas off each other, something that I think works really well, certainly.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

What about more broadly for people who are actually working in the departments at lower levels, and as I mentioned in the opening that they look at that, the mysterious level of at the top of the building, what goes on up there? What advice do you have for them as to how they should interact to learn and to grow their skills? Now, I'm sure you don't want everyone walking through the top, the executive suite all the time, but how do people know and understand how they can be effective not just at an SES level or a band one level, but even down at those EL levels and even down to APS? How should they be thinking about how they can work effectively with the executive leadership team?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

I think if we jump off what Zoe was saying earlier about everyone has their priorities, I guess from EL staff, a lot of the time we are receiving briefs or things for Simon's clearance. I guess the trust kind of needs to extend both ways where we still, we know this is a key priority of work that needs to be delivered, but then trusting us being the EA and the EO that we're going to get to it and we're working with you and vice versa. And so-

DAVID PEMBROKE:

Be patient.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

Be patient, but also its understanding that, yeah, I guess there's a lot of things happening, but also come to us earlier and flag things with us. And our staff already do this really well where they know Simon is a busy man, so we've got to book things in advance. And that helps with, if we've got our ear to the ground, we can also know when things are probably going to come up and then we can plan for that. Of course, there'll be the odd one, which it's like, "Okay, we need a really

quick turnaround and then we'll work with you." But establishing that relationship with us and we want to establish that with staff as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

Okay. So, I was going to ask that question. So, do you want people to be talking?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

Oh, yes. Goodness, yes.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

And do you want people seeking your advice as to what's the best way?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

Absolutely. Absolutely. The thing is, we're all in it for this common goal of if we talk about strategic goals with the department, everyone is playing some kind of part. I'm a cog in that machine, and so is this other person writing a brief. So, it's just about how we all come to work together to make that as efficient and seamless as possible. Sometimes that might mean that things take a bit more time, but at other times if something is a bigger priority, then that's fast tracked.

So, we want to be talking with staff and we want that relationship so then they can test things with us too. "Oh, Simon, can he do this right now?" I know there are other things on his plate, or actually, no, this is something really important. And the thing is, I might not even be aware of something new that could have happened. And then by the staff being open with me and saying, actually, this has come about in this conversation, maybe just test it with Simon or test it with your EO, Dominique who's awesome. Then it's like, "Oh, okay. We're all in this together. It's just lots of communication and please talk to us."

DAVID PEMBROKE:

Okay. Very good. And for you, Zoe? What's your-

ZOE SCANLON:

Yeah, I agree with your point about the shared goal. I think the whole department is working together, the SEC office exactly the same, just wanting to get the best possible product in front of Katherine for her decision, make sure she has everything that she needs. So, I completely agree as well with the idea that please come to us as early as possible. We try to be as friendly and approachable as possible up in secretary's office, but the more that you can give me or the team a heads up that something is coming particularly if it's something significant, the more that we can prepare and make sure it's going to get into her in a timely fashion. She'll be in the best frame of mind and have the best opportunity to get across and make the decision. So, I'd say as early as possible is definitely a great idea.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But I'm sure for some people it's intimidating dealing with the secretary's office and now you are both very nice and charming now, but-

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: I would hope not.

DAVID PEMBROKE: I'm sure there's a part of you that we've got to get this done in this particular way. But again, I imagine particularly for more junior people, they'd be like, "Oh God, I don't want..." It's up there. It's those guys.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: I can understand that point of view because I used to be in that point of view. There was a time in my career where I was still in EA but doing more secretariat work. So I was in a team, in a branch, and there were times where I had to approach the dep sec office and who was ironically Simon at the time, and his lovely office. And even though they were really lovely, there was that I guess intimidation, but I don't know. Now being on the other side, we don't want that. It's not there. I think it can be just scary walking up to the floor. But not at all. And we tried to make that not a thing as well.

ZOE SCANLON: We also try very hard not to make that a thing, and I think that's really important part of our team dynamic actually. If you come up, you'll hear us laughing together and chatting and just out of our office speaking to one another. And I think that's all part of creating this dynamic that the secretary's office doesn't have to be an intimidating place. We'd love you to come to us early and let us know that something is coming and then have a conversation with us about any contextual sensitivities that might be going on.

I think it's interesting you say be patient. I'm probably on the other end of that. I'd probably prefer a little follow-up please, just in case I've forgotten your thing because it's entirely possible.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Good point.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So, another key relationship, particularly for you is up into the minister's offices, and I'm sure the contacts between the two is many frequent and varied on every particular day. Just give us your reflections on that, Lydia, about how do you make that work effectively? You've obviously observed it over time. How do you make it work? What's your best advice to the teams out there who are working in that dynamic to be effective?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Yeah. I think it just kind of comes down to respecting that it's a minister's office and they're very busy and they're one of our key stakeholders, but also that they're just people just like the secretary's office. Because I work in a deputy secretary office, so we've got that next step, secretary's office then the ministers. I am still working with the minister's office, but it's the same thing, and it goes down to all the levels, like div head offices and then branch head offices. We're all in it together.

So, it's just building those relationships and investing in the people because they're the ones that'll help you and get your things through because we're all on the same goal.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. And for you, Zoe?

ZOE SCANLON: Yeah, I think it's the same thing, just building up those relationships. It's a critical relationship, as you say. Very important. So just making sure that we have a strong foundation in place that we're spending the time to build the relationships with the relevant counterparts up there and keeping things moving.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Excellent. Now we are in the classroom for our audience. What are your top three tips for building and maintaining a supportive relationship between the EA and the chief of staff under pressure? So, you both got the opportunity to pass on three tips that you would like people to take with them as they work into these important roles. So, Lydia, I might start with you first. What's on your tip sheet?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Yeah, sure. Three tips. Okay, here we go. I would think the first one, which we touched on earlier is just basing a relationship on respect and trust. Again, it's respect in each other's ability and trusting that you'll each get the job done. And especially when you come under pressure, you don't have time to be checking in on if someone has done their job. You just have to do the job and just trust that you're all running towards that goal and it's going to work because you've got the ability. And likewise, if you complete your task, then you can help and pitch in and muck in and jump in that other person's lane because you respect each other in your ability. So that's tip number one. Tip number two, I would say to know your worth and your value add as well, because like Zoe was saying, Maryann was it?

ZOE SCANLON: Yeah.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Your EA, she has a unique perspective. And likewise, with me, my current EO Dominique, she has a unique perspective, and so we both

have these different experiences that we are bringing to the table, ways to better improve or the functioning of the office or the group and make things better, all towards this common goal of working for our boss and making his day and week and month as best as possible. So, knowing your job and knowing your value add, that's number two. And then finally, just being kind and friendly. You guys are working together so closely all the time.

I think you were saying, Zoe, you sit in the same kind of space. I'm the same with Dominique. We sit right next to each other, so we need to get along, but thankfully, we do. We are kind and we are friendly to each other, and we are investing in each other as well because, again, it goes back to the common goal of our boss. And so, if we can help each other out, we are in the long-term helping our boss out as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

Got it. Zoe?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

They're great tips.

ZOE SCANLON:

They overlap slightly. So, I might say your last one was very similar to probably my first one, which is, I think it's really important to put active effort into investing in and building the relationship because as you say, we sit very closely together. We work on everything together all day. So, you might assume that, and often they do, these relationships just kind of grow organically and develop really well, and often they do. But I think this kind of close relationship is like any important friendship or relationship in your life. You need to invest in it and take the time. So, I think spending time, getting to know one another's interests outside of work lives, outside of work so that not every interaction between you is just a transactional interaction that's work related. So, I think that's really important, really helps to build that trust and set a really strong foundation for a long-term relationship.

My second would be communicate as much as possible. I think these roles, the volume of work that comes over our desks every day is enormous, and the pace at which you have to work to be effective in these roles is incredibly fast. And I think things are changing constantly and really quickly. So, there's constantly new information coming to light about various things that are going on across the office. And I just think communicating that information to one another and sharing information as much as possible, it really arms each of you to be better in your roles and to be able to support the secretary as well as possible.

So, for example, if I know some information that mean it's going to affect Maryanne in the sense that she's going to have to change a series of meetings and going to create a huge amount of work for her. The earlier I can let her know, the better. Similarly, if she learns some information that's going to potentially impact the way that Katherine is going to make a decision, it's important to let me know as soon as possible because I might get the opportunity to stick my head in and say, "This has happened. Does that affect the way you're thinking about this, for example?"

So, I think that communication is really critical. The third for me would be don't underestimate the amount of support that you can provide each other, because I think these roles... There's a lot of pressure in these roles and not always, but sometimes I think they can feel a little bit lonely. You're not working with a big team with people who are doing the same things as you. You're doing often things in an individualistic way, even though you do have your team around.

I think there's probably a small group of people who really understand what it's like to be under that kind of pressure. When things are moving really fast, you're having to make decisions really quickly. And I think the added pressure is if things do go wrong, you're dealing with some of the most important issues that government is dealing with at any particular day, and you're dealing with extremely senior people. So, when things do go wrong, sometimes the implications are not that great.

I guess that's all to say, there's a small group of people who can appreciate and understand what you're going through if you're having a bad morning. So, I'd say be there for each other and celebrate each other's wins, but also I think make sure you're checking in on each other and that you're there to talk to one another and provide each other that support. That's something me and Maryanne thankfully have it also a really great relationship, but it's something that I do rely on her from time to time to just be able to talk about some of these things and we're able to support each other.

It's really part of that resilience of just saying, "Well, that happened and we're learning from it and we're moving on." It just provides a bit of comfort, I think. Someone with that kind of understanding.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

So, a final question to both of you because people listening now be thinking, "EA, yep, that sounds pretty good. Chief of staff, wouldn't mind doing that." Maybe first to you, Lydia, for people out there

thinking, "I might like to have a crack at that, what message do you have for them?"

ZOE SCANLON:

I love that question because I cannot advocate enough for the EA role. It has opened so many doors and opportunities for me and has also really strengthened my skills. And yeah, it provides you with so many cool opportunities. You get to work with incredible and senior level people, and you get to influence workplaces and contribute your own ideas. As EAs and EOs, we get our bosses delegated authority to an extent, which means we can be creative and influence and innovate.

We get to take on leadership roles and invest in our departmental networks or build our own networks and lead our cohorts. You get to engage in a diversity of work because we support... You could be an EA to someone one day and then an EA to someone the next depending on what you want and also what is happening in the department. So, the kind of work that you get to oversee, you can choose, or you can be thrust into it as well, which is exciting and a challenge.

But it's awesome. I also want to highlight the EA role can be expanded. So, I know there can sometimes be views about the traditional EA secretariat kind of role, but it can look like a variety of things. Like I touched on earlier, I was a secretariat and an EA. I was able to try something else out. And then when I was done with that, I could go back into the EA role. And you could also study and train as well. I study part-time, so you don't have to be limited to an idea. It can give you so much.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

What are you studying?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

International security, part-time at ANU.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

And in terms of the role, do you have to be a bit of an adrenaline junkie?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

I mean, I am. Well, no, I shouldn't say that because I don't drink coffee anyway. But no, I think it can fluctuate and I love when it is fast paced because it's fun. That's a challenge. I don't like being bored, but no, you don't have to be. And I think different roles can have different fluctuations.

DAVID PEMBROKE:

And is your study taking you in a particular direction there? Do you want to be working in policy at some time? Is that what you-

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC:

Potentially.

DAVID PEMBROKE: That's what you're thinking of?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Yeah. I started studying a few years ago and I still have a few years to go, and that's the great thing about being an EA. I can take the time to study and figure it out. And because of the oversight I have over my boss's work, I can see like, "Oh, maybe that's what I want to end up doing." I don't know, I'm just doing it in parallel and building that while seeking advice and talking to staff. And that goes back, I guess, to building those relationships with staff to find out what they're interested in.

DAVID PEMBROKE: What do they do.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: What do they do, yeah.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Unique workplace, not only the adrenaline, but clearly there's a degree of curiosity that drive, must drive every day is so much going on, so much that you've got to try to keep your head across to be able to give the best possible advice to these very busy people in these important jobs.

ZOE SCANLON: I feel you have to be on all the time.

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Exactly.

ZOE SCANLON: Well, it goes back to the first question, what does a day look like? It's like that. On all the time.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But how do you go? And obviously, you've got kids, so you don't have any choice but to knock off at a particular time. And for you, Lydia, you can switch off well enough?

LYDIA MILOSAVLJEVIC: Yeah, no, I can, I mean, I'm very lucky. My boss is quite respectful about that too. But in saying that, sometimes you do like things happen and that comes with the role and the seniority of being in a dep sec or a secretary's office or a minister's office that can happen where you have to work after hours. But generally speaking, it's great. I can switch off and he knows that if it is urgent, he can text me and that's our way of, "Okay. I've got to switch back on."

ZOE SCANLON: I think just jumping in on one thing that you said earlier about the agency you have about shaping a role, I think these kinds of roles are really fantastic because no XO, or cause, or EA does their role the same. Everyone brings something different to it. And I think if people are thinking about stepping into a role like this, I think it's such an exciting opportunity you have ahead because you have this

opportunity to really shape the role and grow into the role and make of it what you want. I think everyone brings their own unique skills and experience and strengths and creates this role that's really reflective of them. So, I'd say, yeah, think about how you want to shape it and what you want to do with it.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, it sounds very appealing and I'm sure-

ZOE SCANLON: It is.

DAVID PEMBROKE: ... people are sitting out there thinking, "Okay, I might have a go at that because, yeah, it's important, but it's dynamic, it's challenging. It's varied." As you say, no two days the same.

ZOE SCANLON: That's right. And you get a perspective. Sorry, David, but you get a perspective I think at that sort of level of the department that you just can't get in particular policy areas or legal areas. I think sometimes there's a reluctance from people who are on this policy path to step out and do a role like this, but I think what you can learn getting this different perspective is so incredible.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah. Fantastic. Zoe, Lydia, thank you so much for coming in and talking to us today on Work with Purpose. And I know that the audience would have really enjoyed that because they asked the questions they wanted to know, and you've been very articulate in your answers. So, thank you. And certainly I've enjoyed the conversations.

So, to all of you out there, there are 114 episodes of Work with Purpose that are sitting there in the archive and there are all sorts of conversations dating back to the days of COVID when this podcast began. So, wherever you get your podcast, go back and have a listen to those past episodes. And if you do have any ideas for future guests or future topics, please be in contact with IPAA ACT on LinkedIn and you can also stay up to date with all of the latest on Work with Purpose by following IPAA ACT and also contentgroup.

And indeed, if you could leave us a rating or a review, it does help the program to be found. And we do have lots of ratings and review and happily, many of them are positive. Work with Purpose is produced as a collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration of Australia, ACT, and supported by our very good friends at the Australian Public Service Commission. We'll be back at the same time in a fortnight. My name is David Pembroke and it's bye for now.

VOICE OVER:

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