TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

CARE, KINDNESS, AND RESPECT: A CONVERSATION WITH THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

WORK WITH PURPOSE | EPISODE #142

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Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC
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David Pembroke: Hello 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, I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we are broadcasting from today and recognise all people and families with connections to the lands of the ACT and region, and respect the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge and welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who may be listening to our podcast today.

Well, today marks the one year and one day anniversary of her Excellency, the Governor-General Sam Mostyn's appointment to this vitally important position, and I'm genuinely excited to be here at Government House with the Governor-General and looking forward to our conversation that will stretch well beyond the important practices of ceremony process and traditions, and onto the vital areas of values of vision and of relevance for one of Australia's most important and cherished institutions.

From her very first day in the job, the Governor-General has emphasised the importance of putting care, kindness, and respect at the core of her mission. Today, we'll not only explore that mantra and discuss the evolving role of civic institutions in a time of such great change and ongoing global instability, but we'll also look at the importance of transparency and accessibility in public administration and how behavioural insights and social capital can help shape a modern and tolerant Australia.

The Governor-General will also share her reflections on the story of our nation from our First Nations culture to multicultural success and how our achievements and aspirations should give us all cause for great optimism. Whether you work in the public sector or simply care about our democracy, I know this conversation will give you a deeper understanding of not just the role of the Governor-General, but who she is as a person.

Sam Mostyn AC was sworn in as Australia's 28th Governor-General on the 1st of July 2024. A businesswoman and community leader, the Governor-General is known for the exceptional service that she has given to the Australian people throughout both her personal life and professional career. She has a long and successful work history across sectors including business, sport, climate change, the arts, policy and not-for-profits. In 2024, the Governor-General was appointed a Companion of the order of Australia for her eminent service in social

justice, gender equity, sporting, cultural, business reconciliation, and environmental sustainability. She had previously been appointed an officer of the order in 2021 for her contribution to gender inclusion, equality, sustainability, and climate change action. The Governor-General was awarded the 2020 United Nations Day Honour Award and has an honorary Doctorate of Laws from the Australian National University. She also served on the Women's Economic Equality Task Force. She was the first female Commissioner of the Australian Football League, and for more than a decade served on the boards of the Go Foundation and Climate Works Australia. Your Excellency, welcome to Work with Purpose.

Governor-General: Well, David, thank you and welcome to Government House.

David Pembroke: So, Governor-General along with the accolades, you are also a mum, a wife, a sister, and you grew up in suburban Canberra, the daughter of an Australian army officer. Did a young Sam Mostyn ever dare to dream that you would one day be the Governor-General of Australia?

Governor-General: There's a simple answer to that, which is no, of course not. Although I was reminded yesterday on the physical anniversary, the day of the 12 months since I was sworn in, by going back to my year 11 and 12 school Narrabundah College. I had forgotten that I actually served on the school council and my name is up on the board from 1982 as being someone who was nerding out already I think on showing up. And I'd been a school captain at primary school at Curtin South Primary and had served on the school council at Woden Valley High when I was there. So if I look back and think about, I'm sure it wasn't any aspiration to Governor-Generalship at all, but probably showing up and wanting to be part of things when asked and always being a volunteer I guess when things need people to step up and be engaged. So there is a history there and it kind of made a bit of sense yesterday when I was back at Narrabundah College.

David Pembroke: But when you were young, what did you dream about? What were you aspirational about?

Governor-General: I'm not conscious of having a particular aspiration or plan. As you know, I was born here in Canberra. I'm the first Governor-General to be Canberra born, but with my dad's army career, we soon took off and we lived overseas and then lived in around the states, particularly in Victoria and Adelaide, South Australia. And we were in Adelaide for a year while my father was in Vietnam serving. So we came back to Canberra when I was finishing off primary school. And I'm the oldest of four children, four girls,

we're not children anymore, we're all very much grown up, but the oldest child in an army family, watching my mum give up so much of her career and I think she had probably thought she would be an army wife and a mother of four ultimately, and I didn't have a sense of where it was going.

I was a classic oldest kid, I think pretty sensible. Sometimes my sisters said they thought I was born 30. So clearly, I wasn't really the life of the party or the funster that might've come with some of them. My youngest sister was born with an intellectual disability, and from a very early age, I think as a family we were a very tight unit, but also, we were engaged in many things in communities and neighbourhood. My dad and mum volunteered for the Salvos and the Heart Foundation and did a lot of work for the Woden School here. And then my father, when he retired from the Australian army, he was the director of something then called the ACT Society for the Physically Handicapped. Awkward, terrible name. It said something about a time, but that went on to be Hartley Care. And so I guess as a family it was always about showing up in a neighbourly way, being part of community, not asking everyone else to do things, but doing it ourselves.

By the time I got to year 12, and I was reflecting on this again yesterday at Narrabundah, there was a school counsellor, and I say that advisedly because the counselling I was given for what to choose to do going off to university was, "Look, you're adequate in science and math, so you could probably get into dentistry and you do quite well in your arts and the social side so you could get into law." So the reference given to me was apply for dentistry at Sydney and law at ANU. Go figure. You want to be a dentist or a lawyer. So I had never thought about being a lawyer, there was no legal background in our family and I was able to-

David Pembroke: How long did you think about being a dentist?

Governor-General: Not long. No offence to dentists at all, but that certainly didn't make the cut. But I chose law and arts law degree at ANU in that context. But then realised as I was doing it, what an extraordinary foundational degree it was. I really enjoyed studying the law and that range of things you learn in a law degree about how a country operates from constitutional administrative law, international law, trade law, contract law, tort law, really rather than thinking them all as hard things to do and to get through, I began to feel when I was studying that it was a structure and a bit of a framework for how our big systems operate. And when I was doing my degree two years in, I started to go part-time and I worked full-time as a research assistant for the Chief Magistrate here in the ACT, Ron Cahill.

So I was sitting in the local court, in the kids court, seeing and as a researcher and studying for my degree and able to see I guess the system at work at a very local level, how a community operates, what the policing system was like, what happens in the local court system while studying. And by the time I'd completed that together with my arts degree, which was mainly in English, political science and Bahasa Melayu, I think I had a pretty rounded view of things that I wouldn't have had if I had I not studied law. But it was never a driving ambition.

Certainly very different to our daughter. Our daughter is 25 now and at 10 we knew she would be a creative and she'd be an actor, and that is what she is today. There was a burning desire and a quite clear direction for her, but not for me. And really, my entire career, I have been moving around and adding to things and following my curiosity and saying yes to things that made sense.

David Pembroke: I think that's one thing that I have admired and observed you and your career from afar as you were coming through, you're obviously very accomplished, but you've moved. You've jumped from opportunity to opportunity. Where did the confidence come from to be able to do that?

Governor-General: It's interesting, I didn't think about it as confidence. It's interesting you say that. I think growing up in an army family where in my very early days we were on the move. So moving from school to school, making new friends, new environments, a new house, all of those things, I guess I was very much a creature of change was not a problem. It didn't throw me, it wasn't, that was the reason not to do something, if it meant moving a city or country or changing directions. And I'm not sure where it was that it first started, but my curiosity was constantly being piqued by things that I would see and then I'd get engaged and then someone would say, "Well would you like to do this or could you do this?" And for a reason, I don't really understand, I don't know where that confidence as you call it comes from. But I do say to the young students I meet today in big numbers that come and visit here at Government House. Sometimes it's important just to say yes to preposterous things. And there were many preposterous things I said yes to.

My dad said to me when I was asked if I would put myself forward as one of 10 women to be considered for the first woman on the AFL commission. And I said, "I'm not sure." And he said, "Well, what do you got to lose? Amazing process that you'll put yourself through. You'll learn a lot about yourself and the game and sport. What's the worst thing that can happen? You don't get it. Put it down to experience. You'll learn and what's the best thing, you get it, but you'll never know." And I think from

an early age I thought I wouldn't want to regret of not doing things, I'd rather look back and look at things I did say yes to and take the learnings, and I just don't know whether that's part of being a family that did get on and do things and didn't think about it too deeply about what the risk would be, but saying yes a lot of the time.

David Pembroke: But at the heart of it seems to me is that it's people though that intrigue you and really that piqued your curiosity as to where are they in a business sense, in a sporting sense, where do they sit into the community? So that curiosity you talk about seems to me driven very much by people.

Governor-General: I think that's right, David. What I've learned over many, many years and working inside large bureaucracies, whether they were private or public or not-for-profit and doing a lot of work in human resources and how things happen, I would never have described myself in this way back then, but I now think of myself as a systems thinker. So I think I naturally pull towards what's happening in this system, where are the connecting points? Of course that is very much about the people, but when I was asked if I would serve on the AFL commission, my first thought wasn't great, I'd love to be involved in the sport. It was thinking about, well, what does the AFL commission do? What is the AFL inside the Australian Society? Where does professional sports sit? Goodness me, look at all these connections and this is how as a sporting nation we describe ourselves, what would it be like to be in that system and see its crossover with the not-for-profit sector? Or with policy makers who think about sport driving development? So my mind generally in those moments goes to learning more about the system, which is why I love thinking about-

David Pembroke: And that’s interesting. So, I’m going-

Governor-General: And that's why I think I like thinking about public service and public servants and what goes on in our great bureaucracies, and is the machinery that sits behind how things get done, because that is a massive system that sits within a system of how a country and the world works. That is all about people, but also knowing where the connecting points are. And I learnt very early on something I will share with you once you come to it, but about how we make some presumptions at our risk and our cost about people who sit in different parts of a system, if we're not prepared to be a bit kinder and think about how those systems actually interact.

David Pembroke: Now I do want to come to that, but before we do, I want you to tell me the story about how you came to be, asked to be, the Governor-General?

Because I think people will be absolutely intrigued. So I'm sure that you just weren't up at the Deakin shop sort of way and the phone rings and the Prime Minister says, "Hey Sam, are you ready to take the job?" How did it start? What was the process?

Governor-General: Well, I love this question. I get it in different forms depending on the person asking.

David Pembroke: I'm sure lots of kids ask you all the time.

Governor-General: Kids say very honestly, "How did you apply? And when did you know you wanted to do it and how did you go about getting the job?" Adults though, do come up to me and just say, "I have no idea, is there an application? What happened behind the scenes?" And this is why, and we'll talk about it later, why I'm so convinced that civics education is a foundational role for the Governor-General.

So, it's a very simple concept. The Governor-General role has never been one that anyone could apply for. It's not one that is advertised. It is in the entire gift of the serving Prime Minister of the Day when the term of a former Governor-General is coming up. So in my case, General Hurley's five-year term was coming towards its natural end, they're generally five-year terms, sometimes extended to help with passing through electoral periods, but General Hurley's term was coming to a conclusion and the Prime Minister of the Day, being Prime Minister Albanese, was looking for who he would uniquely, and arguably he can do by himself. He doesn't need to consult anyone in the process of choosing the person.

Some prime ministers have, some people have shared that with their cabinets or had a list drawn up for them. I'm pretty sure that in the case of a Prime Minister Albanese, he spoke to very few people by himself and I was one of those people he called. In the month before that, I just completed chairing the Women's Economic Equality Task Force. I'd done a lot of policy work back to government at arm's length and I was chairing a number of organisations, very much happy in the work I was doing. He called during January of 2024 and said, could I meet him at Kirribilli house the next day? Now, I immediately jumped to-

David Pembroke: I was going to say, what was your first thought when that happened?

Governor-General: I said, "Do I need to bring anything?" And my thought was that he wanted to talk about some of the recommendations-

David Pembroke: Sort of what you've been doing.

Governor-General: ... in the wheat process or the Economic Task Force. And he said, "No, no, don't bring anything, just need an hour of your time." And I let my mind wander and think, goodness, I've got no idea. One thing I do need to dispel is Anthony and I have been professional colleagues, we've known each other and been in that sort of orbit of government and policy advising, but I wouldn't have ever said I was a mate of Anthony's, I'd never been to his house, I'd never had a beer with him or gone to the Rabbitohs or none of that kind of stuff. So a professional colleague.

And so this is where the Prime Minister has the opportunity to do some due diligence himself about someone he thinks might be able to do the job. So I turned up at Kirribilli House and we had some niceties. We were the only people there. And then he just said, "Would you consider serving as the next Governor-General?" And I think I misheard him because again, that was totally preposterous. So what I think I heard was I'm thinking of appointing someone to the Governor-General-

David Pembroke: Governor-General, yeah.

Governor-General: ... and I thought what he must have then said is, "Do you have any ideas?" So I really did go into that fog of something's just happened, but I think I've misheard.

And I started to talk as if he'd asked me for suggestions and he stopped me and said, "No, no, I'm asking if you would consider living next door?" And I again looked somewhat dim. And he said, "Admiralty House, Governor-General, would you let me consider you? I'm not offering you this at the moment, I just want to know whether you would be prepared for me to consider you?" In that moment things got very serious because every sort of atom of my body was moving around and thinking, I'm sorry, the Prime Minister just asked me if I'll be the next, well would I be prepared to be the next Governor-General of Australia? And of course he said, "I'll give you a little bit of time, not a lot, but I need to know fairly swiftly. So you can talk to your husband and your daughter, but that's it. No one else can know. Go and have a talk about that. But I am in a process of wanting to make a recommendation to his Majesty."

So the process is an Australian Prime minister chooses the person they think should fulfil the role and if there is a consent given and everything else is met, there's a lot of background checking. Once I'd said yes, having discussed it very deeply with my husband and my daughter, then very few people in PM&C are advised and they start doing a due diligence.

They checked everything about my background, everything I'd ever spoken about and any financial issues. And then the Prime Minister's in a position, he confirms once more and says, "I will now make a recommendation to his Majesty." And in that recommendation, he would be doing whatever a Prime Minister has done, which is he is now in the hands of the Crown, the Monarch. And at no time in modern history has the Queen before him or the King declined the choice of the Australian Prime Minister.

So that then became, it went to Buckingham Palace, the King was happy to approve, and then he makes the appointment under Letters Patent and then it comes back. And that is all part of the paperwork that sits behind everything that the Prime Minister and Cabinet needs. Then for the Prime Minister and I to walk out into the Prime Minister's courtyard and announce that I would be the future Governor-General.

Now, that's a long story short, and there were many months that passed by and there were times when I thought I might be it but might not be and couldn't speak a word of it to anyone other than my husband. So it was quite tense, and we had to start thinking about how our lives would change and exactly what this would mean. But that's the process. And in this case, I'm not sure Prime Minister Albanese spoke to many people at all. So it was very tightly held.

David Pembroke: Now, I don't want to be too intrusive, but I would love to know what were some of the things that you spoke to your family about the role and did you have any idea about the role or any thoughts about the role? Had you ever thought about the Governor-General up to that point?

Governor-General: So I had never thought about myself in the role. Never, ever, ever. That had never been in contemplation. It wouldn't have occurred to me in any scenario.

David Pembroke: No.

Governor-General: I had often thought about-

David Pembroke: And clearly it didn’t.

Governor-General: No, look, I had often thought about who should be in those roles, the character of people in those roles. I'd been a policy advisor, I'd been able to do advice work on people for appointments for other things. So I always think about what are the skills and attributes of people who serve in high public office. And having been a policy advisor, I'd seen ministers

and heads of departments. So I had I guess a way of thinking about things that would tell me about what the features of it was. I had enjoyed studying law, I'd enjoyed studying constitutional law. And one of my dearest friends from the ANU who I studied with, turns out to be someone who was most recently appointed to the High Court Justice, Robert Beech-Jones.

And so Robert and I've known each other forever and whilst I couldn't talk to him about this before the announcement, having a friend who is a High Court Judge makes you pay attention to how things end up in the High Court, particularly matters involving the commonwealth and matters of state. And I knew many Governors-General. I'd known Dame Quentin Bryce, I knew Sir Peter Cosgrove, I knew General Hurley, I wouldn't say well, but in Sir Peter and David Hurley's perspective in that case, my father having served in the Australian army for 40 years, he was older and a head class-wise from those two gentlemen, but I'd known them in the military sense in their roles. And my brother-in-law had served under Sir Peter in one of the peacekeeping missions. These were not characters who were unknown to me. And I'd come to Government House many times for Roundtables for matters that the former Governor's-General had thought these places were good to have interesting people to come and be part of. And General Hurley had presented me with my order of Australia and then my companion of the Order of Australia.

So I had been in and out of these places, but very much as one of those that participate when invited as a member of the community. But I knew what the job was. So my reflection, I knew almost immediately in myself that I could do the job. I knew the features of it that I thought were important. I felt confident that legally trained. And then there was a very important part of it. And I'm not sure, I don't know whether the Prime Minister had thought about this in considering me, but having been raised in a military family, there's something about growing up when one of your parents is in the act of service of the country and as a family you are really co-opted into that. And so the values of service, as I've explained, showing up and being a member of a community.

If I thought about some of the most important componentry of a Governor-General, it is showing up. It is on behalf of the nation, paying attention, turning up, watching, observing, and then using the various opportunities and advantages of the office, the power of the office to do the right thing and ensure that you're playing into a system from the right angle and can do things that almost no one else can do because of the unique and privileged role that it is.

So I was kind of aware of all that, so I felt I could do it in myself, but the bigger question was what would this do to my family? What would it do to my husband and his career at the Bar? And what would it do for our daughter as a 25-year-old? They were the hardest conversations because had either of them said, "We can't do this," then I wouldn't have said yes. And we had to do it quite rapidly. We had probably about 48 hours to really get into that and discuss it as a family. And Simeon couldn't talk to his family, his sister, I couldn't talk to my father or any of my sisters. Lottie couldn't talk to her cousins or her friends. So we were as a little unit, trying to work this all out as to what would happen next should I say yes. Pretty intense-

David Pembroke: Was it exciting? Was it exciting or was it sort of up and down?

Governor-General: It was up and down. I think any moment that might've been exciting was trying to think about goodness, imagine. But then every time I went there it was like, but think about this. Hang on, what's this going to mean for us? And for Simeon, for his work, we knew straight away that he wouldn't be able to act for the Commonwealth or act against the Commonwealth and there'd be conflicts throughout his practice. And what would that mean for him? Just he had only recently been elevated to a senior council at the Bar of the New South Wales, at New South Wales Bar.

And then Lottie was the most interesting. She kept agitating and she was sitting in these conversations saying, "Yeah, but do you want to do it?" And I kept answering, "Well, I was raised with service and I show up and I think it's an important role and someone could do it in a way. And the Prime Minister has indicated he wants someone to do it in a modern, optimistic and visible way. I think I can do that." And she kept saying, "Do you want to? Do you really want to Mum?" And I said, "I think." No, really seriously, and when I wasn't answering, she said, "I don't want to hear about service or duty. I really don't want to hear. No one should ever do a job for that reason."

She decoupled everything about the significance of the job with something far more fundamental and as it turns out, foundational. So her last question to me was, "Is it going to make you happy? Will you be happy in that job as my mum?" And honestly, that was the moment where I had to sit there and really dig deep and I said, "I think this would make me happy. I don't know that it will, but I think it makes sense if I think about doing it the way the Prime Minister has suggested, I think I could do a good job. I hope I could do that. I think it would make me happy, but it's not going to be happiness in the way you're thinking about it. It would be maybe a deep sense of contentedness at contribution. And

being asked, I typically say, yes, I'll serve. And I've generally done that. So I think she asked the most profound and interesting question and the one that guides me to this day about making sure.

David Pembroke: Well, I'll ask the obvious follow up, one year and one day into the job, are you happy?

Governor-General: So I'd give you the similar answer to the one I gave her at the beginning. It's not running around the place with streamers and whooping it up and thinking I'm happy every day in that kind of overt sense. But the first year in office together with a remarkable team that is here at Government House that supports me and the opportunities we've had, I think we've got a deep sense of pride in doing things that are achieving things. And that sense of purpose and achieving things does make me deeply happy in a fundamental sense. Happy that I have showed up, that we're making a difference, that we're onto the right things and I feel a sense of accomplishment. So we are very careful though there is an absolute fidelity here with what the job requires with me and my team, and humility has got to be a big part of that.

So getting too ahead of ourselves and just getting happy about my circumstances or these great privileges would not be a good thing. It's a conscious, deliberate reminder every time that why I'm here, what my responsibilities are on behalf of the country and on behalf of the Crown and the weight of that and showing up in that well and keeping a very strong eye on my family and the impact that it has had. And we've not seen each other as a family in the way that I would have if I wasn't in this job. I've put lots of pressure back on my family and on my friendships, the ones that have probably taken the greatest strain of my deepest, longest friends who I've seen almost nothing of and have asked them to be patient with me because the job does demand 100% of my time, and it's my friends and family that are often those that will miss out. So going into my second year, I want to make sure we get the balance of that right, but it has been a big first year.

David Pembroke: You set a very clear path from the beginning and you've emphasised it from day one all the way through one year and one day. And this is this notion of embedding care, kindness and respect in all of its forms into the fabric of our community and to the core of our public service. How did you arrive at that thought and why is it so important that care, kindness and respect be at the mission of the work of you as the Governor-General of Australia?

Governor-General: So I was fortunate enough prior to the Prime Minister springing the request of the Governor-General on me. To have spent a number of years post Covid or in Covid and post Covid working on some pretty significant issues. I'd spoken at the National Press Club as the President of Chief Executive Women, about what had happened to women and women's work and the value of women, particularly about the caring roles that was most obviously exemplified by who did the caring through Covid, who had showed up. And there was a lot we learned about Covid. And it kind of impressed upon me what we'd always known about the inequality of where caring work is done and the gender splitting of professions and those that got paid and those that didn't, that in this country had fallen very much down gender lines.

I'd experienced that in most of my professional life. I'd seen it in the public service, I'd seen it almost everywhere where I'd worked, and I certainly saw it in sport. And so I was on a path I think, of building a picture with good data and good insight into the Australian community about care in it's probably rawest form. Who was doing the caring? How do we reward it? Were we paying attention? And Covid was the kind of flashpoint to say we didn't value it in an economic or financial sense. We say nice things about people who care during those moments, but they were typically in the lowest paid, lowest professional development areas. And that really had struck me.

And I'd given a speech at the Press Club, which Matt Kean, who was then the Liberal Treasurer of New South Wales was watching. And a day later I received a call from Matt Kean, who I hadn't met before, and he said, "Look, I just watched your thing with my staff. We are doing a big review in New South Wales about the economy. Could I encourage you to come and do a piece of work where we look at women's economic opportunities for the state?" And I went and saw him and his team. I was so impressed that a Treasurer of a State had happened to pick up on this thematic and said, "I'd like an independent group. You choose the group, you're supported by Treasury. Let's see what we can do and we will pay very clear attention to your recommendations."

So the Women's Economic Opportunities Panel was set up, it was very small, mostly women. But we also had Blair Comley who was then the Secretary of Premiers I think, or Treasury, I can't remember at the time. But he was a member of the committee and I wanted someone who had served at the federal level in a senior position in the public service in policy. And then we had a group of women who represented both diversity in all its forms, and really clever, smart women and lots of data behind us. And most of those recommendations, the Premier accepted

in full. And in the next budget of the New South Wales government, Dominic Perrottet and Matt were able to convince their cabinet to spend hundreds of millions of dollars boosting childcare and support for women and work, to lift women's workforce participation. Quite extraordinary.

And on the back of that, Senator Katie Gallagher asked me if I would come and do a similar thing, convene a group of a larger group of women to do an economic review of women's economic potential in this country. So in all of that work, care had been coming up again and again and again. Who does the caring? How do we value care? Why do we not put a financial or economic value to it? And what are we missing out on? Where's this muscle of care that we say we have as a country if we treat it so shabbily when it comes to paying for it and respecting it? So that had been sitting behind my thinking by the time the Prime Minister had asked me the question about serving. Then he used the words modern, visible and optimistic. And it just immediately struck me.

I brought together a group of people I really trusted. Deep friends who'd been involved in policy for various areas where I'd worked in the past from very disparate areas and said, "What do you think about the idea that care, kindness and respect is the form of modernity for a high public office and underpinned by kindness and respect?" The other thing that was happening was the increasing level of misinformation, disinformation. There was increasing tension for many communities around various terrible disputes and issues going on around the world. We were descending into our various parts of community and fighting. We were losing track, I think, of the respect that good argument and good debate could lead to.

And so it seemed to me the most natural thing to do in the office of the Governor-General that has no politics, does not control any policies and has no money to give and dispense, that what if we set the tone for the highest office holder representing the very best of Australian values around these things that had come up again and again in every community consultation that I'd done in that work. Everywhere I went, when you use the word care or kindness, I had people who would come to me after meetings and say, "Could you please keep using the word kindness? Can we just be kind to one another? And could kindness and care be turned into a sense of driving policy and outcomes? Because at the moment, the inequality or the viciousness of some of the things going on across policy debates is ripping us apart and we are not getting good outcomes. But when we talk about kindness and valuing it or care, something else is happening."

And so it was almost the most natural thing to do. But I tested it and I tested it. I tested my speech that I gave on swearing in day. I went back down to a place I'd spent a lot of time in the Addison Road Community Centre where I'd volunteered for about four or five years leading up to my appointment. And I asked all the volunteers, I sat and read them my incoming speech and asked them to critique it. Mostly people who'd become Australian citizens who had come through the refugee system, those that were still very highly dependent on social services or the goodness of community organisations. All of us completely anonymous to one another, packing boxes of food, that's how it started in Covid. But I'm a very strong part of that community.

And the Addie Road Community Centre where the first childcare Centre with multicultural basis created by Al Grassby back in '75, was created this sort of centre of community in an otherwise thriving city of Sydney, was the place I then tested the words of my incoming speech and my promises. And they gave me some very good feedback. So there was some slight adjustments and alterations. But then they were watching a few days later when I delivered that address and they knew that the last people to actually help me edit the speech was the community from which I had practically and personally seen and been the beneficiary of what it means to show up and put care at the centre of everything you do.

David Pembroke: You travel enormously, you speak in a lot of places. You are around Australia, you are visible, you are very, very busy getting out and about. How are we going around care? What sort of impacts are you seeing and what do we need to do more of to embed it even more deeply into the society?

Governor-General: David, in the period when the Prime Minister announced my appointment and prior to swearing in, I went and met all of the former living Governors-General and the Prime Ministers who had worked with Governors-General to ask them for their advice and counsel on the role and how it had been performed over time. And I look back at those that were no longer with us, Sir Zelman Cowen who talked about the reflection of light and shade in this role back to the Australian community because of the incredible privilege of seeing that up close as Governor-General. And I'd spent quite a long conversation with Sir William Deane here in Canberra whose now 93, could be even 94, sharp as a tack, who welcomed me into his office in Manuka. And we talked about what he saw as the essential part of the role and he said compassion.

He said, "Compassion in everything you do. Show up with compassion. You have to be a compassionate person for a compassionate country." And so I use that lead in to say, what have I discovered? Wherever I go and I have a panoramic view and a fine grain view. So we get to see everything at a national level or in a global level through so many opportunities in this office and then a fine grain based on the places we choose to go and visit, and the organisations that welcome us and communities that welcome us to see them and visit them and listen to them. And by bringing a compassionate heart and an interest in care, always talking about care and kindness, I think the absolute strongest and most innovative things are going on in this country responding to our greatest need are all completely rooted in care.

And so I see that in the innovation in little social enterprises that fill the gaps where government and the private sector doesn't work. I see it in the way that good policy makers have worked out how to work with community and putting people at the centre of their policies and are prepared to face up when the policy hasn't worked and to adjust and take feedback from community. I think as a nation, we're doing far, far better than we let ourselves tell ourselves or let ourselves understand. I think it's been far easier to tell the nation that there's all these problems that divide us, that we're in bad shape, and all those things that we read about every day, I now look at from a very different perspective.

And what I see is a nation that should it choose to tell the story of care back to itself over and over and elevate the stories of where care is an innovator, care is a strength, it's a muscle to exercise, to pull out good policy, to work out who should be leading, what we do as a nation and the care we take with our interaction with those that are our partners, our near neighbours, however we think about our role in the world. For me, we are ready to do that in a way that I don't think we recognise. I see it most profoundly in the story that Noel Pearson really first spoke about and I used in my swearing in speech, about the three-part story. And what we've done with that here is make that much more of a braiding story, not just a three hefty parts that sit on top of each other, but constantly in discussion with one another.

So 65,000 years of First Nations attachment to the continent and culture and language and eldership always offered to everyone that came subsequently. Through difficult periods, so we then arrive at the Colonisation and at the arrival of the British and the systems, which of course I represent as the Representative of the Crown. But the stability of that system and one that was brought here, one of the oldest successful systems of government and democracy in the world at that time brought

here, and then modified through Federation to be uniquely Australian. And then this next period that I've grown up through, which is the period which we talk about incredibly successful multiculturalism, but for me is the opening chapter of where we are today.

And I guess if there's one thing I now see where the care piece comes right into focus, is I think we are now, we may not be quite ready to tell the story to ourselves, but we are in modern Australia, which is underpinned by care that comes through those three braided stories. Where we don't need to keep telling ourselves about the separateness of those three things or have to have definitions like multicultural, multiethnic, multi-faith, or try to work out how these things fit together or not like a Jenga set, whatever it's called, but actually braided together at the moment.

If you look at the composition of our demography and who it is that is the future of the country, we have got some of the greatest, most extraordinary advantages and privileges because of the eight million people that came from somewhere else to become Australian citizen. The million, or almost a million, well we are very close to the millionth refugee to arrive in Australia and then take on Australian citizenship. And I now see it through these various new lenses where those that arrived in that form or their children are now showing up profoundly as our representatives in DFAT. So I see so many of our outgoing ambassadors and high commissioners as they're leaving, it's so frequent and I'll meet one and hear the story of how they came to Australia as a child, because they came as economic migrants with their families or refugees.What did they want to do? They cared so much about this country and the advantages and the civil democracy with care for them coming that they decide to have a career in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and what then represent us on the world stage.

Penny Wong's a good example of that at the most elevated level as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, but it's now happening throughout DFAT and then it's happening in the public service. So those that actually understand that becoming a public servant, serving the public in departments that are in areas where these are people who've come from families who understand absolutely personally, what that care that was taken on their arrival and settling has meant to them and what that means to the country. So it's a long answer to say, if we spent more time revelling in that strength that is absolutely and fundamentally built on care for each other, care for those that have come, care for those that have done the caring, and care for the way we handle these moments, I think were extraordinary. But I do think we've got a bit of that sort of tall

poppy problem. We're telling us that story people think is a little bit Pollyanna-ish or a little bit too optimistic. And so we resist. And in that moment of resistance, I think we're seeing where we hold ourselves back or we tell ourselves a story that's divisive.

David Pembroke: So this is a podcast for largely the public sector and for the Australian public service. What message would you have for the Australian public service around this theme of care as they go to work each day in service of the Australian people?

Governor-General: I think what you've said is terribly important. That is exactly what public servants do. And I referred earlier on in our conversation to what I learnt by moving across all sectors of the Australian economy and society. I would sit in meetings in public companies and I'd hear public servants described as shiny bums. "All that money being wasted in Canberra or in the state bureaucracy and what would they know? They should come into this kind of place and know what it really is to create value for the country." I'd go to meetings in Canberra or in a bureaucracy in a state and I'd hear about those capitalists who didn't care about a return to community or return on investment that had a social benefit. And I'd know, well that's not true. I knew the description of the public servants was wrong, but I'd heard the reverse.

I'd go to arts communities and hear how this obsession with sport was killing us and why didn't we kill it? And people who loved sport were somehow deficient in that they weren't really understanding the great intellectual ambition of our cultural institutions. And I go into sporting organisations and hear how all of those cultural people just had no idea how the world worked, and everything happens on a sporting field and we're a sporting nation. And everywhere I went the way I would turn up as someone curious and open to what it meant for the work that people were doing, I'd see this collision of compartmentalising rather than collaborating. And saying, if I just put aside what I think are some tropes, we were pretty tropey country. I got a lot of that when I was appointed the tropes about who I was with no-one really knowing or giving me the time to show who I was and understanding my background.

But we do that regularly. We go into our quarters. And I think your question for public servants is one; be proud about the act of public service. It matters at whatever level. From local government, state, federal, across our regulators, it really matters. And people who show up in public service do so when they could go and do things for more money or with less stress, with more reward, but do keep showing up. And I think that is something to be very proud of. The public service is something

that I think is about a care for the country and its future. But I'd say to public servants, there are people just like you who are in these other sectors, they're the people who do try to make social enterprises or are sitting in the private sector confounded by the things that hold them back for shareholder return, but actually are as interested in great public outcomes as you are. They just don't hold the levers in the same way that the public servant does or the policy maker does.

And unless these groups of people are speaking to one another with a sense of generosity and engagement and genuine curiosity, you never get the best of the intellectual horsepower and ideas that are sitting around the country. And so I despair when people end up saying, "Well I can't do it here so I'm just going to run the charity or I'm going to just do volunteer work," instead of staying with the principal. How do I take what I understand by my world and share that with those and let's see if we can do things in a collaborative way. And for public servants, particularly in senior policymaking areas, that says to me, go and look for where the people are that aren't sitting around your table today who hold a piece of the puzzle to what you are trying to solve. And go in with a degree of curiosity and humility because the place-based things that are going on in this country that could help inform policy is extraordinary.

David Pembroke: A final question. You are really the storyteller in chief for Australia in many ways. When you look at the numbers of speeches that you give, the numbers of events that you're there, and you have a great enthusiasm which you can feel when you speak to you and you have a great passion for the country and where it wants to go. And clearly you want to achieve great things. How can people help you achieve your mission? What can they actually do to help the Governor-General achieve her vision for Australia?

Governor-General: Well thank you for asking that. No one has actually asked me that question in the first year. So I'm very grateful for the offer of help because every office holder but particularly high office holder, we are always in need of help from those that are seeing things that we don't see or we miss. And before I answer that, I want to add one feature to my last answer to your question about what do public servants do? Go and put yourself at some risk or at some discomfort going into the areas where you think you know what's going on and experience what others and try to find those that share your values but in a different part of the system, and work out whether you've actually got a relationship that might help you in your role. And that might come back to what I'm going to ask you on the help side.

The first thing I'd say is the most distressing thing to learn in this office above all else is the chronic, chronic, shortage of people who care about our civics. So ACARA, the Curriculum Authority has issued its report for 2024, '25 I think, that says that by the time our kids get to year 10, it's about 24% of them understand our civics and the underpinnings of democracy. I think it's far worse for older people and people I see all the time who don't know who the Governor-General is, don't know how our parliaments are formed, would criticise public servants because they don't understand what a public servant is or what the federal bureaucracy is or how we fit together.

So where I need help is people coming along a journey with me and my team and those that care in telling the story about what makes Australia one of the great democracies of the world and why we should care very deeply about the education, not just basic civics and not just thinking about it for our kids, but when we are asked as a country ever to do things that go to the amendment of our constitution in whatever form that might take, if the people ever wanted that to happen about any matter in our constitution, this document was built around federation to be adjusted and changed over time creatively by the people.

You can only do that and care about this document and our future if you know we have a constitution or you know why it is that I exist, and that whilst I exercise the powers of the Crown through the Constitution, that in this role there is no interference and no advice and counsel given to me by the King to do my job and nor would I seek it from him, nor would any of my predecessors. And so not understanding that we have a uniquely Australian model that is so stable, that is so much part of how we're able to do all the other things as we grow as a nation. I need people to lean in to what makes us great, to share their stories with us, to engage with the stories we're telling and to invite the office of Governor-General and everyone in to have this discussion about how would we retell these stories to ourselves in a way that would make us very proud.

It wouldn't be without its challenges, and it's not to be Pollyanna as I said, but I'd love people to engage thoughtfully, generously, without a preoccupation on politics, left versus right or any of that, to actually say what could we do better altogether and what would their advice be to me as to how I would in this role supported by an incredible team with all of the great advantage we have, how would we do this in a way that would become world-leading for a nation to better show our strength at the moment with humility, but with the capacity to show the world what all of the things we've discussed about could be, should we choose to accept that caring about it really matters.

It's a fairly wild and woolly idea. I guess I could be more specific on tactics, but it's having conversations like this. It's encouraging others to think, all right, what does it mean to have a modern Governor-General? What is modernity in our democracy and how does that sit so comfortably with care? How is care and diversity a unity ticket, not one that's divisive? Let's have that conversation. And the last thing I'd say, David, is when I talk about care, I always end by saying, we need to care about the way in which we discuss the most difficult issues of our time, and showing care in the argument and the respect for a difference of opinion versus let's get to an outcome we can generally agree on without descending into some kind of chaos that stops either of us having an idea that makes its way to fruition.

Caring about how we argue, Debating, well Respecting one another at the end of a difficult conversation. I hope people can do more and more of that because when I see it happening at a local level, it's a bit like going to a footy game and seeing two opposing sides that you're fully in it in the moment, but you wander out, arm-in-arm, happy that the game was on, it was played fairly. I'd love to see that exercise, that muscle exercised around the country and I'll come and look at it, promote it, Amplify it, and be so proud of everything this country could be.

David Pembroke: Governor-general, thank you so much for being so generous with your time and on behalf of the audience, thank you for your articulation of really your ambition for the country. And I think there is so much there that we can work towards, be inspired by in our daily work really, because I think that's the nub of it, isn't it? Is really to apply ourselves to these higher purpose but do so in such a way in the small ways and care. I really am inspired by the aspiration and the direction and the consistency and the ease of the way that these conversations can be had. So it's a great rubric that you've landed on, I think, and one that could have considerable impacts.

Governor-General: I hope so, because wherever I go, because I've had this role and because I don't have politics and people know they can't ask me for the things they ask politicians to do, there is such a craving for this. There's an outpouring of relief that someone is using the language that communities understand and communities admire and know that is what has always got us through. And it doesn't matter what the community is, what the background, what the cultural background is, where people started. Once you into a discussion on care as the fundamental piece as to why we do things, everything else opens up. And I just want to say thank you to you for inviting me into the conversation and to this podcast, and also

to those that do generally listen to you and actually cherish public service. It really, really matters.

And where I go, I try to encourage everyone that has any kind of disdain or misunderstanding about the act of public service, I carry a message to say, "How do you think this whole system works?" Think sometimes about those that are so easy to talk about. As a flippant sidebar, this matters. Public service matters. Public servants matter in a way we're all in the business of acting for the public in different ways and learning to do that in a way that shows respect and doesn't dismiss the other, and that we all belong this great debate and this great plan for the country. That's what gives me confidence that this is a job that I hope people do. You said at the beginning they cherish. I'd like them to know what the job is and how it fits within our system and then they might cherish it. At the moment, I think they don't know quite what it is. And so that's part of the job, and so I'm really grateful that you've given me the chance to have this conversation.

David Pembroke: Well, thank you again for your time, and thanks to you the audience for coming up once again to listen to Work with Purpose. We are now 140 plus episodes into what has been really a celebration of the great work of the Australian Public Service. And when you think of the numbers of people who we feature on a regular basis and the work that they're doing, I think the Governor-General articulated it beautifully there about the importance of the work. And I think why it's so popular is because we hear from you the people who are doing the stories. And if you do have any suggestions as to other people who we should be putting a focus on and talking to, please be in touch with the team at IPA ACT on LinkedIn, or indeed you can email questions to events at act.ippa.org.au.

Work with Purpose is produced as a collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration of Australia, ACT. And indeed, if you do have time to give us a rating or a review on your favourite podcast platform, be it Spotify, Apple, Stitcher, wherever you listen to your podcasts, it does help us to be found. And we do have lots of nice reviews out there. People have been very kind to us over the years, so please, those ratings and reviews do help.

Now, a highlight really, there's no question to be here today with the Governor-General in her office. Absolutely thrilled to be here. So grateful for her time and really what a thrill for Work with Purpose to be able to have had this time today with the Governor-General of Australia, Sam Mostyn, AC. Anyway, there we go. My name is David Pembroke. We'll be

at the same time in about a fortnight with another edition of Work with Purpose. But for the moment, it's bye for now.