



GovComms
PODCAST

EP#151: CLIMATE
COMMUNICATION, COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC
STORYTELLING

WITH RUTH DEWSBURY

TRANSCRIPT

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Ruth Dewsbury:

... Especially if you come from a journalism background, your default position is reactive. If you're in a media team or a media advisor, you're constantly responding to external stimuli, and as you say, you just do not have the time to sit back, raise the head and be strategic, but I think it doesn't necessarily take a lot of time.

Disinformation has just gone wild, and different groups in the community are responding in different ways. There's huge climate anxiety with young people in particular, something like 67% of young people think climate change is affecting their mental health, so you need to be aware of those concerns when you're communicating about climate change, because those concerns are quite valid, and the last thing you want to do is be dismissive of these worries. Then the challenge is, well, how do you communicate? What do you tell people? How can you help?

Voiceover:

Welcome to the GovComms podcast, bringing you the latest insights and innovations from experts and thought leaders around the globe in government communication. Now, here is your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke:

Hello everyone and welcome to GovComms, a podcast about the world of communication in government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke, thanks for joining me.

Today a very special guest, but before we come to her, a special mention is required of our guest from the program a fortnight ago, Mr. Alex Aiken.

When we spoke, Alex had a secret, now, and that secret was that he was soon to become formally of the Cabinet Office in the UK, and he has indeed taken up a role as the Communication Advisor to the Foreign Ministry in the United Arab Emirates.

Now, the reason he couldn't speak was because his wife was tidying up her responsibilities at Westminster, but it has been confirmed, and indeed Alex did say in his resignation letter that was published in Politico, quote, after serving five prime ministers, four governments, and through three elections, two referendums, a pandemic and a war, I feel I have done my bit.

Indeed, Alex, you have. In terms of supporting the government's communication practise and field, you have certainly done a lot, and I'm sure you'll continue to do so there at the UAE. Congratulations to you on that role, and I hope you and the family enjoy your time in the United Arab Emirates.

Today, to our special guest, and someone who I've known for quite some time. Ruth Dewsbury is a communication strategist with more than 20 years experience in government communications.

She started in journalism as a cadet at The Western Australian, where among other things, she spent some time as a rock columnist, but she's been in print journalism, both general and political news, feature writing, section and page editing at The Sydney Morning Herald, but then she spring-boarded across to government communication, where she worked as a media advisor and speechwriter for two federal Ministers before moving into the bureaucracy.

For most of her career in the Australian public service, she's been a senior communications director for Departments responsible for the environment, climate change and energy, and in this diverse and often controversial portfolio she often oversaw media and issues management, major campaigns, international and

domestic events, as well as stakeholder engagement, both internal and external. She joins me in the studio.
Ruth Dewsbury, welcome to GovComms.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Thanks David. I'm very excited to be here.

David Pembroke:

Our relationship, friendship, goes back a long way, we were both in the press gallery way back in the '90s.

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's right, I was-

David Pembroke:

You were at The Sydney Morning Herald, I was at the ABC, correct?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yes, I actually wasn't in the press gallery with the Herald, I came to Canberra to be a media advisor, so I would've met you in that-

David Pembroke:

Oh, maybe in that role.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Also yeah, doing general journo circles.

David Pembroke:

Indeed.

Ruth Dewsbury:

I love harking back to the last millennium, and you'll probably find me doing that quite a bit.

David Pembroke:

Very good. What was life like when you transitioned from journalism into being an advisor for senior Ministers?

Ruth Dewsbury:

It was a huge change, absolutely massive. Then an even bigger change I think, moving from a Minister's office into the bureaucracy.

As a journo you're trained to think of things from a multiplicity of perspectives, but you don't have, you're not answerable directly to somebody whose job can live or die by what's happening out there in the media.

Also, you have no idea, frankly, when you join the government from media, about how it works. I mean, I wouldn't have known the difference between an assistant secretary and a secretary, I didn't.

It took me a long time to understand the machinery of government, and then moving from ... It was fantastic though, I loved, absolutely loved that job, particularly when I was working for the Immigration Minister at the time.

David Pembroke:

Nick Bolkus?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah, it was Bolkus, yeah. He was a great boss, and we did lots of interesting travel. It was a really interesting time for immigration, because it was very focused on citizenship and multicultural and ethnic affairs.

Yeah, actually we had the International Year of Tolerance, which was a lot of United Nations work. It was really fantastic and it had a bit of everything, law, multicultural affairs, economic issues around business migration, etc.

David Pembroke:

What advice do you have for people going into Minister's offices, whether it be from the bureaucracy or indeed from journalism or anywhere else? How can they be prepared or get prepared for those roles?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Do a lot of research into-

David Pembroke:

Right, more than you did?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Well, no, I was lucky actually, I had good colleagues and friends who were already advisors and gave me lots of tips. Nothing, it is a bit sink or swim when you first move in, especially if you haven't followed politics in the gallery, from the gallery directly.

I just feel so lucky to have had that opportunity, and it did arm me very well to move into the bureaucracy, but again, that was an even bigger transition I think. Because, as a media advisor, you are literally the mouthpiece or a mouthpiece, spokesperson for the Minister, and you have cache and you have agency with the Department.

David Pembroke:

You certainly get people's attention, don't you?

Ruth Dewsbury:

You do, you do, and then when you move into the Department, and so you're in a completely different organisation, and you have a different role and there are many, many more issues to consider and bosses to negotiate with and hierarchy to navigate.

It's a really steep learning curve, but on the other hand, I found that most of the public servants I was working with were absolutely fabulous, especially the commerce people, and they were really keen to have some insights from the Minister's office, and they were also, many of the policy people were very keen to learn about how the media works, how to use it.

I found, looking back over the last 30 years of my career in toto, that really things have changed massively in the whole communications landscape with the digital revolution. I mean, I started with typewriter and carbon paper.

David Pembroke:

The same.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Hot metal, yeah.

David Pembroke:

Tipp-Ex.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Exactly, Tipp-Ex, that was yeah, doing it all on all the carbon copies was fun, wasn't it? Starting with that, and then having the huge digital revolution, where your communication channels and tools completely changed, and all of a sudden the 24 hour news cycle was upon us and there was no downtime whatsoever. Not to mention the explosion in channels that came out of social media and other digital opportunities.

Huge, huge changes, and you just learn as you go. I think probably communications degrees these days prepare people a lot better than you and I were prepared, Dave.

I was reflecting on this, knowing that we are going to have this chat today, and while there have been massive changes, a lot hasn't changed. The general approach to communications and strategic communications in its entirety, hasn't changed, and in some ways I think there's a real need to get back to basics, and we can get-

David Pembroke:

You are an advocate for that, for this back to basics. When you say back to basics, what does it mean?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Well, for me, I found that one of the things we struggled with in my most recent work, well, the last couple of years, is actually getting agreement across your clients and senior people in the Department about what exactly are your communications objectives? What are the outcomes you want to achieve?

That's absolutely essential, because until you've decided that, there's no way you can determine who your target audiences are, let alone the messages and the channels that you're going to use.

When I'm talking about outcomes and objectives, what I mean is, do we want to just ... The classic one is, they want to raise awareness and understanding across the general public. Great, okay, how many tens of millions of dollars do you have at your disposal?

Do you really want to raise awareness? Do you want to raise understanding? Do you want to actually achieve engagement with your stakeholders? Do you want to achieve behaviour change?

Quite often people haven't really given that a lot of thought, and they're thinking in terms of what outputs they want to achieve, what brochure they want to produce, or what new website they want to have, or they're thinking in terms of widgets and products. They're not thinking in terms of the changes that they'd like to see in the community, in the business, whatever your main policy stakeholder group is.

Similarly, we need to go right back and talk about, what's the difference between communications and stakeholder engagement? How do they intersect? What is it you're actually wanting to do with each of those disciplines?

Sometimes you can do comms, and it doesn't need in-depth stakeholder engagement. Sometimes it is just your stakeholder engagement. I found that we don't spend nearly enough time actually thinking deeply about what we want to see at the other end.

David Pembroke:

With that though, it is often such a high pressure environment. There is so much to do, there are so many competing pressures that there's just not the time to stop and think and plan, so how do you overcome that?

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's a great question. I think sometimes, especially if you come from a journalism background, your default position is reactive. When you're in the media, if you're in a media team or a media advisor, you're constantly responding to external stimuli, and as you say, you just do not have the time to sit back, raise the head and be strategic.

I think, it doesn't necessarily take a lot of time. I think you need to do your research, and when I say research, I'm talking not only about formal market research, attitudinal, behavioural, all the work that's done professionally by various bodies inside and outside government, but also the research in terms of who's already done this? Who's already done it in your organisation? What can you learn from other departments? What is under your nose?

People tend to reinvent the wheel and start from scratch way too often, and it doesn't actually take much time, especially in this world of Google, and better knowledge management in Departments, it doesn't take long to learn more about what has worked and lessons learned basically.

David Pembroke:

In terms of turning a senior leader's head and stopping them long enough to actually, once you've done your research and you have a reasonable view of what you think it is, but you need those propositions signed off effectively, by someone to say, "Yes, that's indeed what I want." How do you do that?

How do you grab that time and that attention, that really valuable asset for those busy, busy senior public servants, advisors in offices? How do you grab that attention? What's the best way to do that?

Ruth Dewsbury:

First of all, hopefully you would have a strong champion and advocate in your comms branch head and division head, and they should be able to prosecute a compelling case with their colleagues around the board table. Yeah, you'd really hope that that relationship exists at that level.

To get them interested, because they're also frantically busy across dozens of different issues. Examples, stories, case studies about what might be achieved, and make sure that you've done your homework in terms of the timing that you're looking at and your budget that you might want.

Whether you need an NPP, whether you need a new policy proposal. Talk to the budget colleagues, make sure that the comms people talk to the strategic policy people, because they need to be best friends and joined at the hip.

Then ideally, at the very beginning of policy development and program development, comms is there at the ground floor, and it should be a no-brainer that the senior executives can see the value.

David Pembroke:

Has that changed? Because it is the traditional and eternal lament of people working in communications, that we're just the colouring in department, the end of the line function, fix this, do this, make this look pretty.

Again, are you seeing that change? That there is this recognition that things have changed, technology has changed, it has changed the way people consume information, it's changed the way they listen, it's changed everything.

Do you think that there is that emerging awareness at the senior levels, that comms is a key enabler for them to achieve their objectives?

Ruth Dewsbury:

I think in principle, yes, in practise, not always, and I also think it's very varied across different departments.

Some departments live or die by their comms, and particularly service delivery. The big service delivery Departments like DSS and Health and others. Pure policy Departments and central agencies tend not to think first of comms, but I think that is changing, I think most SES running comms now have comms qualifications.

Not all of them, but definitely more than when I entered the APS, and there's much more of an appetite for the disciplines that underpin the comms profession, in terms of data analysis and evaluation and how to use behavioural science techniques, and a much more professional approach.

Yeah, I think it's a lot more improved, but there's still, nothing beats a really good pitch. Because really, there's no point in having ... You can have the best program and policy in the world, but if no one knows about it or understands how it affects them, then it's going to fail.

That's the starting point, I guess, but to do that back to research, because you've got to understand what you're trying to achieve, who with.

David Pembroke:

You've spent a lot of time in the environment, climate change, energy, water, in that particular space. Is there anything particular about that area that requires a different approach to communication, or is a story is a story is a story, and really the techniques and emphasis in constructing and distributing that and evaluating it are the same?

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's such a good question, because climate change affects everybody in so many different ways, and so many policies across government. I think it also is highly vulnerable to disinformation. It's highly contested. We thought that climate change wars were over, but they're not, and in fact, climate change and the environment are both being weaponized to exploit the dreaded FUD, fear, uncertainty and dread.

Disinformation has just gone wild, and different groups in the community are responding in different ways. There's huge climate anxiety with young people in particular, something like 67% of young people think climate change is affecting their mental health, and you need to be aware of those concerns when you're communicating about climate change, because those concerns are quite valid, and the last thing you want to do is be dismissive of these worries.

Then the challenge is, well, what do you tell people? How can you help? Really, I just keep coming back, in all the work I've done across the various pieces of the portfolio, you come back to stories and you come back to people, and you come back to case studies that show how there is hope, there are things people can do, and there are things people are doing already and now, and you can learn from.

I think we're well passed the Al Gore period of the hockey stick graph, where people first realised the impact of climate, the extent of global warming. That was hugely successful in raising awareness, but now we're into a much more integrated, holistic and joined up approach I think.

Recently, in the Department, we were looking at how to literally have a whole of government approach and set up a community of practise for climate change comms. We set up a GovTeams site, which is notoriously difficult to manage, but it's there, so that we could share resources, insights and planning tools like events, calendars, and a consultation tracker, because everyone's been consulted within an inch of their life. Yeah, how do you stop duplication? How do you address stakeholder fatigue?

Now, I found a huge appetite for whole of government collaboration with comms people and policy people, and it was terrific, because we found that comms and policy people, these are mainly at EL2 and 1 level, and it was great, because they just could not get enough of talking to each other about learning and sharing.

David Pembroke:

That's good to hear.

Ruth Dewsbury:

It was terrific, everyone was keen to make sure that we had consistency in our messaging, that we were on the same page, and that we knew what each other were doing. Also, I mentioned earlier, using what's under your nose and not reinventing the wheel.

We have, I mean the Australian government has lots of regional networks out there, in places in Australia that are most impacted by climate change, whether it's flood, fire, heat. These people are really already feeling it, and at the same time, communities like coal communities in places like Singleton are going to see massive changes in the future, the economy will change dramatically.

Meanwhile, transmission lines, hopefully they'll stay up, but at the moment they're getting blown over in Victoria. We need to lay massive, massive lengths of transmission lines to deliver renewable energy to people and to industry.

It's in regional Australia that the changes are happening, and where the government hopes that we'll see a renewable energy superpower, so let's use the networks and the outreach that we already have.

We know we have people who are doing great work in these towns, whether it's for agriculture or emergency management, or as a representative of AusIndustry in the regional office. There's so many good people doing good things, we need to make sure that they have access to the information they need, so that they can tackle this information and they can help be part of an informed part of the debate.

We need to learn from them about what's going on in their communities, because we just need to listen more, and that's all part of doing your research before you embark on your comm strategy.

David Pembroke:

It's interesting you mentioned this whole of government approach, because whether it's climate change, it could be artificial intelligence, it could be cyber security, it could be-

Ruth Dewsbury:

The pandemic.

David Pembroke:

National defence. It was the pandemic. It really needs to become baked in, doesn't it?

Ruth Dewsbury:

It absolutely does.

David Pembroke:

As a way of building alignment and coherence and clarity.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah, and I think the pandemic contributed a lot to that. I'm sure colleagues in the Health Department who've worked on it would have a lot to say about that. You're absolutely right, with AI, and everything's interconnected. I mean there's disinformation risks that-

David Pembroke:

Yeah, I was going to ask you about that. As somebody who has been, as you say, working against the FUD principle, and seeing examples of artificially generated synthetic media, and the volumes that can be achieved and the spread.

What have you been thinking about that? As you've observed it, as you've seen it, as you've seen its impact, what thoughts have you been having as to what the government can do to combat that?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Another really good question. That's one area in which I'm glad there are so many really skilled young people coming in, who can recognise a bot at 50 paces. They can tell often, when something's a bot.

David Pembroke:

It's much more than media literacy, isn't it?

Ruth Dewsbury:

It's not media. Yeah, it's, look, and it's concerted campaigns being driven often from overseas, multinationals, whatever, wherever they're coming from. I think there's a lot of work happening there to try and address it internationally and domestically. I think the United Nations is onto it.

David Pembroke:

Oh yeah, everybody's on to it. Everybody's onto it. Trying to understand how do we track and know and understand when something is

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

Authentic or synthetic.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Tracking is one thing, yeah

David Pembroke:

Watermarking and all this sort of stuff. I don't know, what I've observed from the technology and how it's improving and the cycles of improvement that you're seeing-

Ruth Dewsbury:

It's tough.

David Pembroke:

It's got a pretty decent head start as everybody-

Ruth Dewsbury:

It has.

David Pembroke:

Else chases off after it.

Ruth Dewsbury:

It has, it has.

David Pembroke:

The impacts, do you worry about the impacts? You must.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Oh, definitely, definitely. I mean, I think this is where, in response, there's no way that you're going to be able to track absolutely everything out there, because the volume is just too much.

In terms of tackling it, finding, first of all, direct access to the good information, the facts. People have to be able to get it straight away, and if you are monitoring and tracking, you need to get on and address the disinformation straight away. That raises the question of who does it, and you need trusted voices.

David Pembroke:

Very interestingly, I think the Australian Electoral Commission, in the last election in particular, were very good in terms of doing that. Having those trusted voices prepared, ready, skilled and able, and as soon as the moles stuck their head up, they were whacking them as quickly as they could.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yes, absolutely.

David Pembroke:

Flooding the zone pretty much with content, and being able to very quickly stand up volumes of content, to be able to move it quickly to that point where it was required. It's fascinating, isn't it, to observe how this space is evolving and changing?

Because again, as we mentioned from the Tipp-Ex to where we are today, it's not that long ago, but where to next? Where do you see it all heading, and what do you see as the necessary skills for people to make a contribution in this space?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Well, I think we've touched on quite a few of them, in terms of having access to up-to-date and accurate data and evaluation and tracking, make sure that you're across. I mean, we've been notoriously bad at doing that in the past.

Identifying the champions and the trusted voices who can help prosecute, help reach your audiences. Understanding, listening to your stakeholders and your target audiences.

In terms of actually managing the channels, I don't know how, I'm not a social media or digital expert, but I would love to see how you get out of your own bubble and out of, if you're a Conversation and Guardian reader, how, you're not going to be sharing things with the block probably or Survivor, so how do you get into those communities that aren't the usual suspects?

How do you get into the church groups and the sporting groups and the people who are interested in lots and lots of things, interested in climate change, but they don't have that in their group name?

David Pembroke:

It's interesting, you mentioned there before, whole of government, and I think whole of government is one part of it, but I think the other emerging piece of all of this is whole of nation.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yes.

David Pembroke:

It's that too, that everyone's now talking about, particularly in the security space. If you look at the Defence Strategic Review, they talk about the security of Australia and looking at whole of government, whole of nation approach.

That fascinates me, because I think there's something to that. I think that there's a way of joining the pieces together, and it's great to know that in that climate change space we're already seeing that in terms of whole of government.

How do you take that sense of mission and engagement and I suppose optimism, and breed it out into the community, into the nation, such that people see that there is a responsibility to communicate and act in this space?

Because the networks are there, they're joined up, it's just, how do you earn permission for your story to find its way into those places?

Ruth Dewsbury:

One would hope that they tell their own stories.

David Pembroke:

Yeah.

Ruth Dewsbury:

You empower the people and the community group and the business groups.

David Pembroke:

That are probably thinking, "Well, my story's not that," but then they tell you the story and you go, "Well, actually that's a great example of one."

Ruth Dewsbury:

Precisely, and if they're telling their own stories, and they're being promoted and championed by their community supporters, and not necessarily by their local MP or by a political party, then it will resonate.

I think sadly, the response to extreme weather events does build that community strength, when people rally around together to meet a common challenge, but-

David Pembroke:

We often drop off, don't we? Everyone rushes to-

Ruth Dewsbury:

We forget. Look how much have we've forgotten after the bushfires.

David Pembroke:

We all get busy and away we go-

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah, that's right.

David Pembroke:

A lot of those networks that emerge, that are there, but then they come up, that we don't keep them up. Maybe that's a job for government as well, to maybe seed and strengthen and somehow-

Ruth Dewsbury:

I think so, yeah, it needs to become just a standard way of life, so that these stories don't become extraordinary, they become the norm.

David Pembroke:

Ruth, you've spent a lot of time working in this space. What are your favourite campaigns?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Campaigns that I haven't worked on, but I would hark back to the last millennium perhaps. My favourite of all time I think was probably the Grim Reaper AIDS HIV campaign, because while the TV ads, you'll never forget the bowling alley, it raised awareness that it wasn't just an issue that affected gay men, it was the whole community.

That achieved that objective, but underneath that, there was so much integration of stakeholder engagement and media and other comms. Every target audience had their own, every stakeholder group had their own strategy, from needle sharing for the drug community, haemophiliacs and people who would be at risk for blood products, sick kids, kids that got HIV. The whole community was involved and it was a very sophisticated campaign that I think set world standards.

I've always looked at that as a touchstone of how to handle a crisis, a global crisis or a national crisis. On a much, much smaller scale, one I did work on, in the Environment Department was the little Green Army campaign.

It was a very cute little campaign, and so easy. It sailed through the various committees because it was based on testimonials from real people. These were young people who would be recruited to the Green Army to work on hundreds of environmental projects around the country, 11,000 young people.

We had representatives of about five or six that were the human face of the program, and their stories were terrific. They were young, unemployed people, some of them had mental health issues. They learned a lot, they got jobs at the end of it, they made friends. They were in regional TV ads, but they were also great, beautiful media stories.

In a way, we're talking about 2016-ish, I think, well, the program ran for some years, and in a way, I think of that whenever I am scrolling through Instagram or videos on social media with people's personal stories about how they're living their lives, what's changed their lives.

People can't get enough of learning about other people's lives, and as much as you can draw that into your communications, to bring your programs and policies to life, then just go for it.

You can do it with, not just with people, we had a very popular character in the Environment Department called Mr. Blobby the blobfish, and he was a particularly unattractive marine species that lived about two and a half kilometres under the sea.

It was a way in to talk about science with kids. It was a way in to talk about threatened species, although I don't think the blobfish was threatened, but lots of marine species were. Just finding those, bringing things to life, literally bringing things to life for people, just makes all the difference.

Countless other examples, and often it's even better when you can find the people that you least expect. If you can find, if there's somebody who was a timber worker in a former logging community who's now doing wildlife rescue or something like that, or has found a new job in a different part of the industry.

The same with people who are transitioning out of coal and gas. They might get jobs in critical minerals. The human stories, all those little stories are just, they're so great. Again, you have to get out there, you have to get out there to get them.

David Pembroke:

They don't walk in the door do they?

Ruth Dewsbury:

They don't, they don't.

David Pembroke:

Just a bit of advice then to people, on how best to find those stories. What questions do you need to ask to find the gold?

Ruth Dewsbury:

I think, again, you actually have to go to the communities themselves, use your stakeholder networks and ask them, "Who do you know? Who's doing amazing things?" Because they will know. Whether they're peak bodies or local or regional, it doesn't matter, just put your feelers out.

Also, just in your normal life, when you're out there as a citizen, keep your eyes and ears open. I guess that's where the journalism skills come into play, your radar is out.

David Pembroke:

It has to be, and I think that is one of the great skills now, that everyone can be the media. Technology has gifted everyone the ability to be the media, so how then do we use that to explain policy, program, services and regulations? That's really the simple essence, isn't it?

Ruth Dewsbury:

It is.

David Pembroke:

Of where we're at, as to how do you tell those stories?

Ruth Dewsbury:

It is. I know it's always been a passion of yours at contentgroup.

David Pembroke:

It is, it is. That's the business that we're in.

Ruth Dewsbury:

It is.

David Pembroke:

What's next for Ruth Dewsbury?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Who knows, David. As you can tell, I'm really interested in this area, and there's so much going on there, there are so many groups doing amazing things. I'm still learning.

David Pembroke:

You'll be banging the drum for the basics. Just keep doing the basics.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Well, my advice, yeah, to GovComms people would be, yeah, get back to basics. Just be really clear about what it is you want to do. Because often strategic communications, you get told to write a strategy, and it's not a box ticking exercise. You've really got to take it seriously, and not just go through the template and filling in the bits and pieces.

David Pembroke:

It's also having the courage also, and I think the confidence to just keep asking the questions until you're clear, and be confident enough to go, "I still don't understand what you're talking about." "It's not in my, I don't quite land it yet." A few more why's-

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's right, yeah.

David Pembroke:

Might get you to the point of, "Oh, okay, I get it. I know what you're looking for now." You can then go and apply your knowledge and your skill, your behaviour and your attitude to find those stories and to get that.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah, that's right.

David Pembroke:

To move in the right direction.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Ask your colleagues, ask around, especially if you ... There's so many great new people, young people joining the APS at the moment, and they've got fantastic skills. If they can find a mentor with some corporate knowledge, who can point them to a bit of history in that area, grab it.

David Pembroke:

Years ago I had a great conversation with a gentleman by the name of Conrad Bird, who worked for Alex Aitken actually at the government communication service, and he was a more senior person, but his big advice was about getting up and walking around. He said, "In the comms teams, if I see you at your desk, you're in the wrong place."

Ruth Dewsbury:

Absolutely.

David Pembroke:

"You have got to get out and you've got to learn, you've got to build those relationships because that's your job."

Ruth Dewsbury:

Absolutely.

David Pembroke:

Your job is to be that connector and to know where people are and to be able to keep the high-level concepts and objectives in your mind, but go out and build those relationships, so that you can then deliver-

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's true.

David Pembroke:

Value and take advantage of that serendipity and be that person who joins it all up.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah, and actually, one great thing to come out of the pandemic was the number of remote offices and opportunities that we have now, to work elsewhere in Australia. If you have, DKU has people all over the continent, pretty much, so get out of the office.

You're right there, you're there. Go along to the next council meeting, meet your local government comms people. Get out, see what's happening in your community, and don't just sit behind the computer. It's really quite exciting.

David Pembroke:

It's an emerging powerhouse, really, the role and function of communication, because of the impact of technology, and winning a share of a person's time and attention off the screen.

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

We are the people who can deliver that for the organisations that we work for, but again, I think it's a nice point that you raise, about getting it clear, about-

Ruth Dewsbury:

What it is, yeah, what you're trying to do.

David Pembroke:

What is it that you're trying to find? Get clear about that, get that signed off, get all the heads nodding in the room, and then go, "Okay, leave it with me and I'll see if I can come back with an idea and some plans," and as you say, come back with something.

It might not always be about a big long planning process, where we take five days to sit around and, just get on with it.

Ruth Dewsbury:

No, it shouldn't be really. In fact, sometimes there's nothing like a deadline for sharpening your focus.

David Pembroke:

That's it, and test and learn. It's one of these things, isn't it? Nothing's ever too late to change.

Ruth Dewsbury:

That's right.

David Pembroke:

If it's not going to work, and how often is it that we make decisions that aren't working?

Ruth Dewsbury:

Yeah. Well, if you can find examples and case studies, the more the better.

David Pembroke:

There's that word again, examples and case studies. Take that with you people, examples and case studies.

Well, Ruth, hard up against time, but thank you so much for coming into the GovComms studio here in the heart of Canberra, it's great to share some time with you, share some experiences with you.

I'm sure you've got plenty more to offer, you'll be there or thereabouts, in and around this very important social, economic, everything issue of climate change and the environment, so all the very best for you and for your future endeavours.

Ruth Dewsbury:

Thanks David, and to you, I've thoroughly enjoyed myself.

David Pembroke:

Great, and to you the audience, thank you for spending a little bit of time with us today, both myself and Ruth. It was great to have you along for the conversation.

We'll be back in two weeks with the next episode of GovComms, but before then, if you do get a chance to pause and go and find a rating or review on your podcasting app, five star reviews always, they help the program to be found, and we would be certainly very grateful if you would be able to do that.

Thank you for spending some time with us today. Thanks again to Ruth Dewsbury, and thank you, the audience of GovComms. We'll be back at the same time in two weeks, but for the moment, it's bye for now.

Voiceover:

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