

Podcast recording - Scott and Tanya

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SPEAKERS

Tanya R, Scott Bowman

Hello, and welcome to the Student Experience podcast. Joining me today is Professor Scott Bowman. Now Professor Bowen began his professional life as a radiographer and he worked in several London hospitals before he started his teaching and lecturing career. Before moving to Australia, he worked at Southbank University and St. Martin's college Lancaster. In Australia. He's held senior positions at Charles Sturt University, University of South Australia and James Cook University. In 2019, he was appointed the Vice Chancellor and President of CQ University in Australia. In this position, he led an ambitious program of renewal with the aim to make seeking University Australia's most engaged university. Professor Bowman's vision and leadership helped transform CQu into one of Australia's largest and most engaged regional universities. In 2019, he was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia for his significant contributions to higher education, training and regional Australia. Professor Bowman is passionate ambassador of regional universities and their role in education industry community and the workforces for the future. Earlier this year, he took up the reins at Charles Darwin university with plans to grow the university and create a values led experience for students, staff, and community. Welcome, Scott.

Thanks, Tanya, if we got any time left, you know, after that,

as well, you know, I just want to make sure we've got everything covered.

Yeah. There's a bird in the background, obviously enjoyed it a lot.

Well, I guess, you know, we've come from having worked together at CQ University, and then you retired. And your plan was to travel the world. That was back in 2018. And obviously, in part to COVID Keeping you in country, you've now returned to higher education. And I know that that's because making a difference is so important to you. Can you share with us what the difference is that you seek to make and why it is so important?

Yeah, look, I think you're right, Tanya it is important. And it was a really interesting experience working for 10 years as the Vice Chancellor, and then really finishing with other plans in mind, which were very

much self centered, I guess it was about getting in a truck and driving around the world. And obviously, with COVID, finishing coming on that finished that plan to do that traveling. So that gave me an opportunity to sit where I am now in Cairns, in far north Queensland and sit for about 18 months, really thinking about things I was learning to knit, and to learn and to play the guitar, but also having a lot of time to think and just reflecting on how incredibly lucky we are in higher education, to have jobs that really matter. You know, they have real meanings. So there's a lot of meaning in the work we do. And definitely sit in there knitting didn't feel a very meaningful life. And it then struck me that even get in the truck and driving around the world. I don't think there would be enough meaning in that or maybe it's it's when you are becoming self centered that you know you if you really think about it, that there's not a lot of meaning. And the meaning comes from really working with other people and trying to, I mean, this sounds a bit namby pamby but trying to make the world a bit better place. And I think that's a real driving factor in our students. And I think I've woke up very clearly to that it was a driving factor in me as well.

Yeah, and I think, you know, it's interesting. And I know, students have always been a really important part of your journey. And from an outside perspective, it seems it could be easy to lose sight of students when you are busy running, what is essentially a business. So why is it important for the executive level to really keep connected with students as individuals and the student experience? And how do you manage it?

Yeah, that was a lot to that question. And, but first and foremost, I agree with you, you know, particularly when you're sitting in, you know, the chancellor, when you're managing these big businesses, you know, with some of them over a billion dollars of turnover. It's, it's can be easy to lose focus on what you're really all about. And you do see that quite frequently in university strategic plans, you know, university strategic plans that, you know, hardly ever mentioned the word student. And it's, it's quite interesting. If you have a look at universities, policies and plans, and you do a word search on the word student, it's remarkable how few times that word comes up. So I agree, it's very easy to lose sight of that. Why do I think it's important? Well, I guess it does come back to that meaning of what we do. And if the meaning isn't with the student, then what is it with now I think it's the meaning of our jobs does go outside of students, I think it goes to community. And I've always been very interested with community engagement and community connection, but also connection with the students. One of the biggest impacts that we can have on our communities and other societies general is through our students. So we often start thinking about engaging with our communities, and we start talking about our staff engaging, we talk about our facilities, we might talk about our money, and you know, being philanthropic with our own money. Again, we lose, we forget about the students the biggest force for change. And the area that we can really make the most difference is through our students. And by doing that, it's also something they want to do as well. Well, how do you, How do you keep in contact with these students? Well, yes, get out and have a walk around and talk to them. You go to student events. Years and years ago, when I was a radiographer, and I used to speak at radiography conferences, I found you could win the best conference presentation, there was an easy formula. All you did is you found a lot of patients that have been through medical examinations, particularly if things have gone wrong a little bit. And you just took a lot along to the conference. And the people in the audience would sit on the edge of their seats listening to these patients. And the reason they did that is because I never spoke to their patients, the stories they were hearing they could hear every day in every hospital in Australia, but they

never listened. And it's the same with students. You know, if you have a Senior Leaders Conference, or any kind of conference, get a student panel together and get the students talking, and that's the bit that people enjoy most, the student voice. Well, I got news for you just go for a walk around the campus, there's 1000s of them, just stopping a yarn with them, and ask them how they go. And so you can get that real student voice coming back all the time. It's not always going to be what you want to hear. But it's probably stuff you should be hearing.

Yeah, and I think that's actually one of the risks of only listening to student's in, you know, formalized panel in a conference is it's, it's very much tailored and the people that you're speaking to, are ones that have interactions with staff, whereas if you're actually going out on campus, and you're just talking to the first person that you come to you get a very different perspective on what's going on.

Yeah, and a good place I found to hang out is in the Students Central, because the students central the Students discuss, go and sit and listen in on some of the conversations because in Students Central, that's where the students who have got problems that have got complaints, so of not finding the university a great place, that's where they come in and tell their stories. Now the people hearing those stories are often fantastic, incredible people, but often quite low down in the pecking order of a university. So it's really good to go and listen to that. So, yeah, just get up, get out and listen to students. And you're quite right. Yeah, not, not just in those formal set pieces, but just in general.

Hi, you've shared with me previously, how you see that there are three key things that students are seeking from their tertiary education experience. So one of them is obviously quality education. Another one is a job at the end. And the other one that you sort of touched on as well is that skills and experience to make the difference in the world that they want to make. So how do you see the third of these being facilitated, particularly in your current place at Charles Darwin uni?

Yeah. Look, yeah. So I think what I said to you is, look, I think students come to us for three reason, quality education, and a vocational outcome. And I think if you look at the quilt data, every university Australia is doing well at that I'm in comparison to the rest of the world. And we are really kicking ass, they may be, in some cases, 5% difference might be 10% difference between the top university and the lower one, but even the low ones doing a really good job. So we're all doing one of those three. And with that, we've been very focused on that. I think there's probably an over reliance on the vocational outcomes. But that's another story. But so we all do well at that. But it's back to what we started talking about, about meaning I think people need meaning in their life. And I think how students I used to say, our young students, but I've reevaluate that I think it's probably all students have this third need, not a want, a need to actually have meaning in what they do, and make the world a better place than they found it. And I think universities are in an incredible position to be able to give students the experiences and the set of skills they need to do that. Now, we just started on that journey, I think at CDU... at CQU, I think we went a bit further along that line. So we really were doing a lot of things around social innovation. We were really getting our students out there to do projects to make a difference. We have our students, you know, working in children's home in India, we have our students working with Engineers Without Borders, we were running clinics in the poor, what in the Annapurna range, but also closer to home, we were working with homeless people in Sydney, a whole range of stuff. And in fact, giving students the opportunity to study for stiff getting social innovation alongside their main degree,

and many of them took so at the end of the day, they got their degree and a qualification in social innovation. So we gave them a toolkit that they could use to make a difference. And some of the experiences I remember talking to a group of enrolled nurse students, so these one degree students are enrolled, and nurses and were given the opportunity to go to India. And that works in I think it's called the acid cafe. Where, you know, these there's women working in that you know, this dreadful they've they've been disfigured and maimed with acid thrown in their face, often by their arranged husband, for one reason and another. And those enrolled students have gone out and worked with that group and really got involved and they came back. And every one of them said, this was a life changing event. And what they really wanted to do was to do more work, either in Australia or outside, and that now become a focus for what they wanted to do. So I think there is this deep seated knee. And I think, you know, that time at university, we can do a lot to try and help students with that.

So I guess I'm curious, I know you've worked in both regional and Metro university environments. To a certain degree and more regional Yes, but

yeah, I haven't worked that much. It was interesting, but so You know, I think you know, I didn't go to university I wasn't sure how to get into university or fail miserably school. So I went to try and did a diploma in radiography and then worked at Guys hospital teaching radiography, which then Southbank so it's just a few months at Southbank a little bit longer a Guy's hospital. And then really after that didn't work into in a an urban university for years and years. And then just last year, Barney Glover, the vice chancellor at Western asked me to go down and help out down there and I went down and sort of did a we don't call them locums... interims but the DVC stood in for VC for a while. And so that was right in Sydney. So that was really, you know, that seven months of experience working in Sydney was really, in some ways my only taste of Metro uni. And guess what I found out that Western Sydney University is a regional university. But anyway, that's another step.

And it's so comparative isn't it? Depends what perspective you're coming from. As to whether is seems like regional or... Yeah,

probably. And Western Sydney is a very special University. And I, I felt very at home there. So the kind of students at Western work with a very similar makeups of the students we work with in regions, and the university served a very well defined regional part of Sydney. So yeah, I felt very at home there

cool. Because I was interested if there was much of a difference, but

um, no, not actually in the universe is not an awful lot of different cities, it was a bit different every time I set a load to anyone, you know, because I used to walk to work along the river, the Parramatta River, and I'd say hello to someone that used to react in shock, as if I was about to mug them, you know, you say you're walking, you know, down the Esplanade in Darwin, and you say hello to anyone, and you're going to be stuck there for half an hour talking. So yeah, that was a bit funny. But now the university was very similar.

Yeah, awesome. Well, I mean, that's all the questions that I have for you, Scott, is there anything that you'd like to share about what you're doing at the moment? Anything you'd like to celebrate?

Oh, look, I think we're doing lots at the university, some really interesting things. You know, we've got some projects around an Academy of the Arts and medical schools. But, you know, most universities have that. I'm really interested in leadership as a way and we've worked together on leadership projects before haven't we. So very interested in leadership, and, and really trying to drive that in the university. And I think one of the things that we've talked about a lot in the past is, you know, if you've got an aspiration for everyone to be a leader, then everyone has to be a follower. And I'm, I'm kind of really still, you know, here we are, probably 10 years ago, we had that first conversation about this, it still really intrigues me that, you know, I've got bookcases all around me over there. And they're full of books on leadership. There's not one book, anywhere there. And I don't think there's any books in the library about followship. If you're going to be a leader, or if you aspire that everyone's going to be a leader then everyone has to be a follow up. And, you know, that's an interesting concept for vice chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors and directors of education and principals in school. How do you if you're really going to let people reach their full potential? You need to be a follower as much as a leader, and that that whole concept is still very intriguing to me.

Yeah, and I've always loved that. You've always had that approach. And it's not been about leadership as a senior position. Like it's not positional leadership. It's more more about behavior and attitude and action is how you define someone.

Yeah. And, you know, the other thing that I've loved in my career is basking in reflected glory. You know, I just find there's nothing worse is there when you meet someone and they're, they're kind of boastful and they're saying, I did this and I did that. And I like that. And the other word that I hate is my, my people did this. My a, my a, my, my, my, me, me me. That that I just great suddenly when I hear those words, And if I do ever slip and say, you, you know, I probably when we were setting this meeting up, I didn't talk about Rebecca my A, and I'd say, you know, our A in the office, we've we've talked Yeah, so that I think it's all about giving credit where it's due and one person in a big university does nothing on their own. It's all other people. So give that. And then that's that followship. I learned a lot about followship at CQU from the security people there one Christmas, you know, about this time of year, you know, just just about, like, with every other senior academic and that, you know, I was off on the bike. In fact, I was here again in Cairns. And suddenly had you know, that we had terrible floods, really big floods in Rockhampton and our sports hall, well, first of all given can they use it as the evacuations? And I said, Yes, of course. Then I got a phone call to say that the airport was flooded. And you perhaps remember back in those days, I have a little airplane to fly around. And they told me that was going to go underwater. So oh God, so I got in the car that was New Year's Day, New Year's Eve. So

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yes, got in the car at about 910 o'clock in the morning and drove to Rockhampton and move the plane to high. But I went on to the campus and the security guards sees the security people, you know that they're not the heads of security, they're just the guys that you normally see wandering around. And what they've done, they had taken over the situation, they'd sorted out the sports hall, they'd got it all organized, they're organized, where these people that are, you know, weren't in their homes where they could go and do their washing, they'd worked out, evolutions and showers, they'd worked out where the

pets were going to go, you know, and they were just running in the thing. And I walked in, and the first thing they said was all okay, over to you now, you know that you're, you know, you're here to take over. And I said, No, you're doing a fantastic job. Why would I want to take over the leadership of this thing? You know, I said, what I said, Look, what do you want me to do? What you know, now, of course, because of my position of the university, I had more probably access to resources, more authority, more power. But in that situation, I they were the leaders, and it was what I will follow you What do you want me to do, I can use all this resources, but you have to tell me how I do it. And that was kind of that clicked, when that really clicked that followship. And you've got to be willing, if you're really into this, you got to be willing to follow one of the security guards, so you got to be willing to if a... you know, a level a lecturer sociate, he comes up with a really good idea. You don't say, Okay, stand back. I'm going to take this forward. Now you don't say, you know, stand back, I'm going to get the PVC teaching and learning to drive this, you actually get behind them. And every time you know, then it goes on and it gets public acclaim, you always give that acclaim you always give that credit to that person. And the funny thing is, if you do that, you know, people forbade to take that and say I did it, you know. But if you actually say no, it was, you know, Freda Smith that actually did it. You bask in reflected glory, you don't lose anything, but a lot of people just don't get that. Yeah. Anyway, that's, that's what I think.

I love it. I love it. So anything else that you wanted to share?

Anything you think I need to share?

I can't think of anything except that I really wanted to say thank you for that.

I want to say one more thing, I'll probably be here all day.. The other thing I feel really important is about fun, you know, the the element of finding work. And you know, one of I think how favorite science around the places. Look, we do serious work. This is serious stuff. You know, we're training people to be lawyers and engineers and doctors. This is serious stuff. We're doing research, you know, and we run in a billion dollar business. This is serious stuff, but let's not take ourselves too seriously. So very much into fun. That's a big thing of what I'm doing at CDU. Now just just you know, so we have kids party again, you've been to the kids so you You know, this year again, I had 250 kids sit in on middle and given them presents or, you know, terrified toddlers coming up to Father Christmas

Like mine.

I seem to remember yours. But the scariest thing these four week old babies, and people are passing them to you and you. Oh, and I'm thinking you haven't seen me with a cup of coffee first thing in the morning, four week old baby. So, I think that element of fun, you know, it's, you know, these places can be really stuffy. But you know, and it should be fun for everyone. And I know, you know, some universes, it's not been a fun time over the last year or so. But you know, I think humor and fun, even in those really tough times out now, I will shut up, I promise.

But, you know, the funny thing is, the irony is that our brains learn so much better when we are having fun. So it makes absolute sense in a learning environment, that there is a bit of enjoyment and a bit of fun, as well as the serious stuff.

And I think it also you get much better loyalty, you know, it shows that the university care. So, you know, you have a kids party, and those young families, you know, those young, professional staff and academics. Yeah, they kind of say, you know, I am willing, you know, this is this is a thank you from the university to my kids, because I've given up so much of their time to the university in someone's bothered to thank them for that. And I think that message kind of gets out there, yeah,

definitely. And talking about Christmas, and all things fun. I will let you get back to you're starting your holiday, which must be soon.

I'm actually working this week, so I'm just on Zoom means for the other and the normal 5 million but yeah, so I drove from home for the weekend. I drove here from Darwin, which was good, fun book, and I only got I'm very proud of the whole way and only got one infringement notice. Pretty good for me.

Well done. Awesome. Well, thank you again, so much for being part of the podcast, guys. It's been an absolute pleasure having a chat with you today.

And great speaking to you, Tanya.

Thank you.