



Ginna Webster

Secretary,
Department of Communities Tasmania

I started working in the public service when I was 19-years-old, as a drug dog handler with Customs, and I eventually became the Inspector of the New South Wales Dog Unit. In Tasmania, I have held a number of public sector roles in the Department of Justice, working with the Prison Service and Community Corrections. Eventually I became a Deputy Secretary in the Department of Justice, and three years later, the Deputy Secretary, Children in the Department of Health and Human Services. When this position came up, I thought, 'If not now, when?' In May this year I was appointed Secretary Designate of the new Department of Communities Tasmania.

I'm really passionate about trying to resolve issues at grassroots level, rather than being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. I have seen so many kids coming through the juvenile justice system, the child protection system, and then end up in prison. This whole new department will be about making that difference, intervening in people's lives to help them get what they deserve out of life. Giving young people and families opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise had. I love working with people. I particularly love working with people who haven't quite realised their potential – to see someone shine when perhaps no one has given them that encouragement before, or to turn a situation around. That's great.

As a leader in the State Service, I think you have to accept that you're going to draw some criticism. For women, that can sometimes be a bit harder

to soak up. One of my skills is that I can let it go. I don't take things personally and I don't hold grudges.

I think you also have to learn that it's OK to be emotional about things, and be passionate, but you can't wear your heart on your sleeve. You still have to make a logical argument. You need to be able to identify that you want to have a narrative and tell a passionate story, but coupled with that, you also need the backup of strong evidence.

Another piece of advice I give to future leaders is that you don't have to say yes to everything. When you're building up your career, you want to be successful, so you have a level of ambition. But it's important to be discerning about the role you're being offered, knowing what opportunities are good to do, and which are not. As a woman, sometimes you say, 'Oh someone noticed me, someone thinks I can do something really well. I have to say yes'. Actually, being able to say, 'No, that's not for me', is really important.

The thing that frustrates me the most about working in the public sector is that people outside the public sector are often very critical. They don't see the hard work that people in the public sector do. I find that very frustrating. No one else would want to do this job. Being a child safety officer, being a housing officer – there are people who do these jobs because they love it, and then they get a bad rap for what they do. There are very few good news stories about the public service. I am really passionate about getting people to understand what the public sector is really good at.

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