

**EPISODE 128**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:03] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to The Mentor List.

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**[00:00:18] ANNOUNCER:** The Mentor List specializes in interviews with top business minds; gather their advice for your career. This is The Mentor List.

[EPISODE]

**[00:00:32] SD:** Welcome to The Mentor List. I am Sharon Daly, Managing Director from Mentor List Talent. I am again hosting today's episode with a good friend and the Director of Mentor List and Advisory, Peter Jackowski.

**[00:00:45] PJ:** Thanks.

**[00:00:47] SD:** We are back once again with another episode focused on women in leadership. Speaking of women in leadership, on the show today we have Jennifer Rebeiro, who is CIO of Greater Western Water. Jennifer was named as one of the top 50 CIOs in Australia in 2020. Jennifer has managed a number of operational areas and projects ranging across a wide set of industries from banking and finance, transport, manufacturing, property services, telecommunications, and government. She has over 20 years' experience across diverse industries, where she has gained excellence in transformation, project management and change management.

Jennifer has a Master of IT Management, Master of Business Administration, a Bachelor of Business. She is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and has a range of ICT and project management industry accreditations. Jennifer sits on the IWN Executive Group, the SWA and Global Council and Windham Tech School Committee.

Jennifer's core strengths are her people focused, business mindset, and having the courage to bring bold ideas to life through determination, influence, cross organizational collaboration and hard work, continually learning from her own successes and challenges and those are for teams. And with over 10 years' experience in the public sector, Jennifer demonstrates her unwavering commitment to living the values of the public sector every day.

Wow, I need to get my breath back after that. Wow, Jennifer, really accomplished we can see already there as a woman in leadership, right? Which is what we're chatting about today. It's clear, you're very accomplished. So, we'll dive in a bit deeper, and get to know you a bit more. And I guess can you talk us through a little bit more about your career story and your career path?

**[00:02:40] JR:** Thank you, Sharon. Well, listening to all that, I'm feeling very old and a little bit tired. Where did it all begin? And I think how long have we got? So, I started in retail as a 15-year-old. And I think for me, that's where it really all began. So, learning about customers, learning about people, learning about service, learning about hard work. So, I would get to work at seven o'clock in the morning, and leave at seven o'clock at night as a Saturday job. So, it's probably built a really good foundation and that's sort of set me up for my corporate career being – went into A & Z, in the retail part of the business and then moving into the corporate part of the business. And it was probably there that, I went in from a view that I was going to do HR and which I did do for the first 10 years of my career, but really with a systems and process focus.

So, understanding how does an FTA calculate, which is that system, and then how can we model that out for the network. And that continued on through to all of the different industries that you just highlighted around. But it really wasn't until that I started working for a recruitment software company, that I started to really hone my skills around technology. So, 10 years in HR or HR associated work. So, transformation, business process, reengineering type of work

through to technology. So, managing software outcomes, working with clients, I started in a consulting role, but ended up managing the organization, small software company.

It was really, that was the beginning of my software or technology journey. Moving into then my government roles commencing with with police, project management, program delivery, systems delivery, department delivery, delivering on organizational outcomes, developing the modernization program for big poll. So, putting iPads in the hands of our police officers, which is with a really improvement business focus. So, say, what does a police officer require to do their job and to take away the paperwork? Because they spend 40% of their time doing paperwork. And so that's continued on through to CIO and then executive roles, and where I am now the CIO of Greater Western Water.

**[00:04:59] PJ:** That's amazing, Jennifer. I mean to hear that, that journey, that trajectory and understand the themes of work ethic, share with us a bit like, what drives you in that sense? So obviously, from a young age, you mentioned, you know, there was a dedication, a focus, obviously, through the academic pursuits. It's clear. Share with us a bit about what drives you.

**[00:05:18] JR:** Delivering great outcomes is probably what drives me and I like to get involved in problems. I have one of my colleagues who say to me all the time, you know what, when you're bored, you become dangerous, because you start to get into the detail. And she goes, sometimes I think I need you to step up again, go find something else to do. And it's really about trying to solve problems, trying to solve the real-world problems, understanding how can we make business better. As long as we can keep doing that, I will keep being driven.

**[00:05:45] PJ:** I love it.

**[00:05:45] SD:** Absolutely.

**[00:05:45] JR:** And also, people. So, I would say that having a really good team that is focused on their own career development, who want to be successful in their own right, who have aspirations in their own right also drives me.

**[00:05:59] SD:** You mentioned that your journey started out in retail, and you worked your way through all these different areas and industries and all that. When you look back at your former self, what's kind of like the thing or things you wish you knew back then? And what advice would you give your former self?

**[00:06:16] JR:** Look, probably to be flexible and nimble and not be set. So, in my mind, I wanted to go into HR and I was going to be the best person in HR. And what I found was, firstly, it was difficult to get in, so I had to look through a different pathway to get into it. But once I found that I was into it, what I kept going back to was system and process. So, in my mind, I'm going, "I should be an HR and I should know about industrial relations or general policies and things like that." But I kept coming back to the people quantification. I kept coming back to systems. I keep coming back to efficiency. I'm going, "Maybe that's actually where I need to head, because that's where I'm obviously getting a lot of my enjoyment out of my work." So, what what I would say is, don't be fixated. Let the market or let your work take you in the direction that gives you joy. Because if you work in an area that's not giving you joy, then you're not going to be a bit standard.

**[00:07:18] SD:** And what would you say then, in addition to what you've learned there, and that advice that you give your former self, what do you feel that the habits that served you well?

**[00:07:27] JR:** Probably asking lots of questions. So, having that inquiring mind, problem solving, the five why's, why, why, why.

**[00:07:35] SD:** Please explain to me.

**[00:07:38] JR:** I feel sometimes a little bit like Pauline Hanson with the please explain. But it's very much about that inquiring mind listening. So, what are you saying? What should I be hearing? Taking a gut approach? So, what am I feeling here? What do I need to ask questions about to really understand what's going on? Because sometimes it's not what you see on paper or not what you hear, sometimes you got to dig a little bit and go, "Well, actually, that's not your problem. Your problem sits over here." How can we solve that problem, which will end up solving this problem?

So, they're probably the things. Evidence based would be the other one. Where is the evidence that supports the change that we're trying to make, or the problem that we're trying to solve? Or the opportunity that we're trying to take?

**[00:08:23] PJ:** That's fascinating, like flexibility in mindset, professional curiosity, not accepting that face value and really probing deeper to understand. That's really interesting. I think that's sort of evident throughout your career journey, as well, Jennifer, in terms of being able to, again, deliver on huge initiatives in complex environments, and being able to sort of galvanize people. I think it's fascinating hearing that.

**[00:08:50] SD:** Definitely. I guess for our listeners as well, through your journey, was there anyone you looked at or looked up to, that inspired you to be a leader, so anyone that kind of geared you in that direction, or you wanted to be like?

**[00:09:05] JR:** Many. There are many people and I say I've been very lucky throughout my career to have really good leaders, of which I can model myself off. In terms of probably two women that I worked with, when I was doing some consulting, and for me, I was in my late 20s, at the time, probably a bit early for consulting, but my late 20s at the time, and they were really capable. Had had children continued, to build a company and build brand around themselves. And I was just in awe of their ability to have it all.

I had a mindset, we talked about before, what would I do differently, had that flexible mindset that you can actually have it all. And so, they were really instrumental in me saying what I just all I need to do is apply my goals in accordance with what I want. So, if I want to have a family, then I can have a family and I can have a career. Whereas I was thinking that it was very much I can have a career, but I can't have a family. So, I'm going to work hard. One of the themes that you'll probably find is that it's like, you've got to continue to work hard. But it doesn't mean that you have to stop your living. So, they were really instrumental.

Again, I went into police, and had two awesome leaders there who really showed the way around, dedication, hard work, and also being bolshie. It's okay, you can ask your questions, you can go forth and be a little bit more challenging. You don't have to conform in an organization that is very much around rules and regulations.

**[00:10:39] PJ:** Yeah, absolutely. I like that. So, sort of challenge your mindset in some respects, that's really interesting.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

**[00:11:28] SD:** Thanks so much for that, Jen, actually, because it's refreshing to hear someone say, and I'm sure that listeners will agree that you can have it all, and why do we put these boundaries up in particular, when your mom and all this kind of stuff, you can have it all. You can have the family and you can have the work in the career as well. So, thank you for that. I'm sure our listeners will be delighted that you have done all of this and achieved what you've achieved. And you're saying you can't have it all. So, it's really refreshing and nice to hear that. Thank you.

**[00:11:59] JR:** You're welcome.

**[00:12:00] PJ:** How about like, I'm interested, Jennifer, you strike me as someone with boundless energy. Like you're an energetic, bubbly, engaging person, where does that come from? How do you maintain that?

**[00:12:11] SD:** And do all of what we just mentioned in your bio as well.

**[00:12:15] JR:** Look, I think if you ask my family that say I'm incredibly lazy, but it's about just being interested. So, I will have lots of energy, if I'm interested in it. Like if I say something, I'll go, "That's really awesome." I'm interested in people, the stories that they have to tell. I live this experiential life, or I live vicariously through others as well. So, when I get to hear people and what they've done, that gives me energy. So classic extrovert. I get energy from others, that drives me. So, I go, "Oh, that's a really great idea." How can we do that, as well? So that's where my energy comes from.

**[00:12:51] PJ:** So, an interesting segue, like in the context of we were chatting earlier, in the context of COVID right now and remote working or distributed workforces, how do you, as a leader, galvanize people and bring them on that journey, when you're not able to sort of conjure that energy in a physical boardroom or in on the floor in an office sense?

**[00:13:10] JR:** I would say, it's common purpose. So, always being clear about what outcome we're trying to achieve. We've been working from home for nearly 18 months now. And we have embraced the working from home. But we had to change the way we did things. Engaging with our people differently. So, having check ins and having conversations that had absolutely nothing to do with work sometimes. I don't think there was a check in that we had where we talked about the way you fold your toilet paper. And they're the little things that helped to bring about our personalities –

**[00:13:44] PJ:** Yeah. Making a connection.

**[00:13:45] JR:** – into our workplace. So, having a good laugh every now and then, but never losing focus on why we're there, and also having respect for each other's skills, talents, environments that they're working in, and being really embracing of the environment, embracing of the change that's going on, and utilizing just people's personal desire to do the right thing.

**[00:14:11] PJ:** Yeah, also, the common purpose is a great response. I think that's interesting.

**[00:14:16] SD:** Yeah. Jenny, you are CIO now of Greater Western Water. I just wanted to ask you there, how have you stayed ahead of the curve in technology and digital, given the fact that it's an ever-changing nature of the industry? How do you keep on top of that?

**[00:14:32] JR:** Honestly, can you ever keep up with the curve? Probably, never ahead of the curve, but what can we do around being aware of our contemporary activity? So, what are other water companies doing locally? What are our other water companies doing globally? What does the research say? So, reading, talking to people, understanding, looking at other industries, understanding what's going on in other industries? So, seeing there's thought leadership and saying, "How can I take what they're doing over there and apply it to my sector?" Because we haven't thought about that yet. Or "How do we be the best in a particular type of activity?" Because that's what we want to be in.

So, it's really about reading a lot. I mean, we have to stay abreast by just looking at the research, but there are pockets of brilliance in places, and it's picking up that pocket of brilliance, and understanding how you can apply it back in your business. Because you can't – I always say, that bright, shiny thing over there doesn't always work in our organization. That what it is, is about what makes that bright and shiny and how can we make that bright, shiny work over here? Because we have to apply it.

**[00:15:44] PJ:** That's interesting. So, that's sort of applying it in a specific context, but being open to taking insights from other sectors and learning from them. And then as you said, that sort of application in your particular organizational context is really interesting.

**[00:15:57] SD:** And Jen, as a champion in diversity, what is your perspective on one thing businesses and individuals can focus on to maximize their impact?

**[00:16:13] JR:** So, diversity is a really interesting one. And what I'm going to say is probably a little controversial, in the sense that I think I get all the diversity boxes. I'm a woman in tech, I am a leader, I'm a parent, I'm a woman of color. So, I take all the diversity boxes. But what is really impactful, I think, is thinking about diversity forward, thinking about building a team that is diverse in personality traits, in skill sets, I always say. We need the analysts, and we need the big thinker, people, because that gives us a really good opportunity to have constructive, challenging conversations.

So, have you thought about these, when the big person, big picture person's going, "Hey, I think we should do X, we need those others to bring forward the difference, so that we can get the whole picture rather than part of the picture." So, if you take that principle of diversity of thinking, diversity of personality, therefore you need diversity in race, you need diversity in gender, you need diversity in sexual preference, all of that, because that will give you different thinking, which gives you different, constructive, challenging conversation.

**[00:17:33] SD:** Absolutely, Jen. I just want to say for the listeners, people don't realize but the body language of when you kick that off, the all three of us were just like, lifted and the passion just lifted out of us. I saw PJ, you just lifted in your chair, and I lifted at the same time. And it was kind of like this, "Yes", moment, you know? So, I really enjoyed that. Just for the listeners, they needed to know that. It's quite funny to have that happen.

**[00:17:55] PJ:** Well, also the thing coming through Jen is having very different perspectives, generates better outcomes. And so that diversity of thought, different perspectives, different experiences, ultimately will deliver a richer conversation and hopefully a better outcome for an organization or whatever it is that your common purpose is like. I think that's a really interesting takeaway from that point.

**[00:18:17] JR:** And it builds a great leadership team. Because if we're all muddled in their own likeness, we're going to be quite boring, aren't we?

**[00:18:25] SD:** Yep. Completely agree on that. And, Jen, we've touched on a few things and areas on your journey and leadership and all that, if you were to put that into a compact scenario for listeners, could you pick three attributes you think a good leader should possess?

**[00:18:42] JR:** Yeah, absolutely. So, for me, it's humility. So, it's not me that delivers, it's everybody else. It is the team that delivers. I just had the privilege and the honor of leading a team of individuals who come together as groups and come together as teams to deliver awesome outcomes. So, for me, it's like always constantly checking in with myself to go, how wonderful are the people that I work with. And that has been the case through all my jobs, which is I have worked with some really brilliant people. Today, I still go back and have a chat with my colleagues at **[inaudible 00:19:19]**.

Again, we had a little bit of a conversation earlier today about our AZ days, and it was quite lovely to go, “Yeah, okay, I remember you. Didn't we have some great times together, but also just that brilliance that I learned so much from you.” The ability to listen, is probably the other thing. What did you say? Actually, what am I hearing? is what you're saying and what I'm hearing the same thing to want to delve a little bit deeper, because sometimes what's being said isn't really what's at the heart of it. And then the other thing is probably connecting the dots. So, making sure that it's really easy to be a silo in technology, but we are enabling functions. So, we have to be able to understand how the business works, connect the dots, and then provide the solutions to enable our organization to be what our strategic goals are.

**[00:20:13] SD:** Absolutely. And following on from that, Jen, is there any quote that you live by, in your life to get you through?

**[00:20:22] JR:** So, I mentioned that I started my life in retail, and that happened to be music retail. So, I don't necessarily live by quotes, but I do absolutely live by song lyrics. And every now and then people say to me, “Where did you pull that one from?” And so, if I had to go, what do I live by? And it's probably the Supergroup song, the lyric you've got to know to understand. I think I mentioned before, it's about that inquiring mind. So, I need to understand, I need to know what's driving you or what the problem is or what the opportunity is. So, that's what would be, not my quote, but my lyric. And I'm sure there are many times that I'll pop something out, and only people that know the song will go, “Did you just quote a song?” “Yeah, I did.”

**[00:21:08] PJ:** And then sort of relic of the past, how great are music retailers? I missed that. Wow!

**[00:21:14] JR:** Yeah. So, I'm going to just go off in a complete diversion. But the ability to form relationships with your clients is no longer there. I remember the days like, I remember the days, but we you would actually have customers come in and go tell me what's new. Let me play something for you. I think your libraries, et cetera. You don't have that relationship building, that connection anymore in some of these homogenous surfaces. Spotify doesn't say, “Let me teach you some of these things that I've heard.” They probably do suggest, but they're suggesting in your own likeness, as opposed to suggesting something quite different.

**[00:21:48] PJ:** Yeah. The algorithms called, it's not warm in that respect. And then as you said, it doesn't necessarily bring in different perspectives, it just reinforces a bit more of the same. So, that's a fascinating point.

**[00:22:01] SD:** Definitely. Well, Jen, it has been an absolute pleasure to have you on the show today. And I just want to say your energy is infectious. It's been just an honor to sit here with you and just the vibe from you is amazing. Thank you for coming on the show today. We look forward to oversee following your journey further.

**[00:22:18] JR:** Thank you. Thank you for having me. It's been lots of fun.

**[00:22:22] PJ:** Thank you, Jen. It's been amazing. Thank you so much.

**[00:22:24] JR:** Thank you.

**[00:22:26] SD:** Thanks for joining us on the show. Until next time, listeners, this is the Mentor List.

[END OF EPISODE]

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