

Dr Hannah Graham on Australian leadership: Integrity, relational leadership and tenacious courage of conviction

Interview, 3rd January 2018, the Australian Leadership Project <http://www.australianleadership.com/>

Criminologist, author and university lecturer [Dr Hannah Graham](#) was born in Tasmania and studied and worked at the University of Tasmania, before moving to Scotland to work in [the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research](#) at the University of Stirling. Hannah has worked on justice and health-related projects with the EU, the Scottish Government, the Australian Government and Tasmanian Government, and she does ongoing research and writing on innovation and justice. Twitter: @DrHannahGraham and @Innovative_Just

Victor Perton: What are the unique qualities about Australian leadership?

Hannah Graham: Australian leadership is characterised by a few distinctive features and values, but these aren't exclusively unique to Australians, nor are they wholly generalisable as our diversity is a leitmotif of health and freedom.

Many Australian leaders are strong and calm, relaxed and hard-working. This mixture is distinctive and I think it's widely valued. Strong leadership needs to involve a balance of head, heart and hands because leaders often have to be catalytic in influencing how people think, feel and act. I recently heard former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd speak in Glasgow and he described being a leader in Australia as "not for the fainthearted", which is apt.

Leaders need to show a patient respect for plurality and navigating complexity to realise real change. An arrogant 'my way or the highway' mentality will only get so far. Change takes place in relationships. Communities and consensus is best fostered through connectedness, not control and micro-managing, nor facile attempts at uniformity and silencing difference – these will be met with resistance. Relational leadership engages with people where they are at; it's not about conditionality.

Some Australian leaders engender an amalgamation of characteristics. For example, as a former student and then academic colleague working at the University of Tasmania, I first knew Kate Warner as an award-winning criminologist and expert in law. In her academic career and her current role as the Governor of Tasmania, [Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Kate Warner AC](#) can be described as elegant and intelligent, having integrity and tenacious in pursuit of justice, hardworking, friendly and rather funny. She hasn't shied away from actively tackling thorny social issues and injustices, ranging from gambling harms to family violence, sexual violence and women's rights.

Victor Perton: What do Australians seek from their leaders?

Hannah: Integrity and wisdom. Both of these things engender people's trust and respect. A capacity to act on instinctive discernment and the humility to ask and listen, including seeking out critical friends. If a leader is dodgy or disingenuous, foolish or unethical, these things will show and people are likely to vote with their feet, if they can.

A sense of camaraderie and community is essential to relational leadership. People need to feel they can relate to leaders, and that leaders are looking out for them. Kindness and thoughtfulness builds community. We also have a high value for a good sense of humour and laughing together.

We tend to respect those who show tenacious courage to the point of costliness in the face of adversity – moral courage, physical courage, political courage. This means having the courage of your convictions.

Australians tend to rise to the fore in emergencies and tragedies. In harrowing circumstances, like a serious bushfire, attack or accident, we expect leaders to demonstrate the best of what citizens and communities are capable of – a strong backbone, kindness and generosity, camaraderie and solidarity with those affected, and truth and justice in the wake of harm. You *must* be willing to answer for what happens on your watch and be able to show legitimate uses of authority.

In the wake of long-standing harms and issues – like going to war, the stolen generations and its intergenerational impact on Indigenous Australians, or institutional responses to child abuse – good leaders listen, bear witness and have the courage to act, rather than distancing themselves from people's stories and evidence that's hard to hear. In terms of speaking truth to power and showing integrity and courage, people like [Andrew Wilkie](#) come to mind – a former Australian intelligence official turned whistleblower on the invasion and war in Iraq, author, and independent federal MP for the Tasmanian seat of Denison. People respect his decision to speak up about Iraq.

Another inspiring example is the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons \(ICAN\)](#), a global coalition [originally founded by activists in Melbourne in 2007](#), including the late [Dr Bill Williams](#), [Prof Tilman Ruff](#) AM and [Dimitry Hawkins](#). ICAN and its founders [won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017](#) and have also been recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission for its international activism and awareness-raising about the 'catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons' and efforts to help realise a 2017 UN treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons.

Victor Pertou: *What are your favourite stories or examples of Australian leadership?*

Hannah: Two remarkable examples of Australian leadership and influential legacy come to mind. The first is the poignant moral and political leadership shown in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre. Like other Tasmanians, I can vividly remember where I was on Sunday 28 April, 1996 when we first heard of the mass shootings by a man with a semi-automatic weapon, the fire and siege stand-off with Police. The Port Arthur massacre happened just six weeks after the Dunblane gun massacre in Scotland (which is located close to the university where I now work). In both contexts, gun violence of this magnitude demanded a response. It would have been cowardly not to act, given the deeply painful and marring nature of these violent crimes. In Australia, decisive action by then Prime Minister John Howard and the Australian Parliament, as well as the State and Territory Parliaments delivered that. Making significant changes to gun ownership, licensing and importation laws, and initiating a costly, large-scale gun buyback scheme wasn't easy, but it was the right thing to do. The lack of mass shootings in Australia in the two decades since speaks for itself. Also, researchers have credited the [gun buyback and controls with cutting the rate of firearm suicides in Australia by 74% in the first ten years](#). This was a defining moment in our history as a nation.

The second story has also had an influential legacy on a large scale. In the 1990s, researchers Dr John O'Sullivan, Dr Terry Percival, Diet Ostry, Graham Daniels and John Deane worked with the CSIRO to [carefully design and patent an entrepreneurial invention](#) that has gone on to be implicated in people's everyday lives, globally – they made Wi-Fi possible. Talk about a eureka discovery! A significant number of Australian researchers and inventors in the CSIRO, universities and businesses are world class leaders in their fields. Australia has [an amazing history of innovative inventions](#) – black box flight recorders, spray on skin for burns victims, cochlear implants (bionic ears), electronic pacemakers, Google maps and the list goes on. This needs to be better recognised and more generously sustained into the future, not jeopardised by Australian Government cuts to research funding and higher education. It is my strong hope that Australians continue to lead in finding innovative solutions to the challenges and injustices of the future in ways that demonstrate integrity, relational leadership and authenticity to inspire those they lead.