# Take on Board

Transcript – episode 46, Jocelyn Furlan

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the take on board podcast, I'm speaking with Jocelyn Furlan about being an effective board member about some governance challenges and the establishment of the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal Advisory Council and where that led. Now you might remember Jocelyn from just a couple of weeks ago, where we were supposed to have this conversation, but it was just at the start of the COVID crisis. And she's also the chair of Strathcona School. So we ended up talking about what was going on at the school and some of the governance decisions and operational decisions that were made at the time. So thank you, and welcome back to the take on board podcast. Jocelyn, it's great to have you here.

Jocelyn Furlan 0:41

Great to be back earlier. Thank you.

Helga Svendsen 0:43

So I promised today we will get into the establishment of the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal Advisory Council and where that led. I promise we will get there today. But before we do that, given the conversation we had last time about COVID-19 and about Strathcona I love to just get an update from you about where things are at.

Jocelyn Furlan 1:04

Thank you. Yes. So today is the first day of term for the Victorian schoolchildren. And it's fair to say that the messaging from the Commonwealth Government and the Victorian state government is not entirely consistent at this point about children attending school. The message from the Victorian Government quite clearly is that if you can learn at home, learn from home learn at home. But all the schools are open for students who can't learn at home. And the Commonwealth Government at this point is quite keen to keep schools open. For Strathcona, the school is open for essential workers, children at by and large, the school is still closed, which was the decision that was made by the principal with the support of the board at the end of last term, and the focus is very much on successful online learning. Schools have had to make various decisions in relation to fee relief in In relation to standing down staff and contain their costs, and I think my view as the Chair of the Board of a school is that each school needs to make its own decisions based on its own community. And although there's probably a lot of reporting about various decisions and a temptation to follow the herd, perhaps from a marketing perspective, the most important thing at a time like this is to make the right decisions for the parent community of the School of which you're, if you're on the board of a school, you're a governor of I am supportive of Strathcona and the management of Strathcona with the support of the Finance Committee and the board making, making the right decisions for the Strathcona community. And we've got a terrific finance committee who had an extra meeting and I attended that I'm not on the committee, but I attended that so that I was across what was going on in relation to the scenario planning for the financial survival. I think the other really important message for me which has nothing to do with me being on the board, but Because I have a passion for education and the sector is that school is not about childcare school is about educating students, and so very supportive of management's desire to ensure that online learning has a value, that the education community doesn't necessarily just give a discount because it's online rather than in person learning. And I think it's really important to respect teachers, the temptation to say would let's keep the schools open because essential workers can't have their kids at home undermines the value of the education that they're actually getting during this is. And I think that's a really important message about this is about education. It's not necessarily about childcare.

Helga Svendsen 3:44

It's interesting in thinking about, you know, we were talking just before about it’s fee reductions and so on. If schools are getting it right, in terms of the online delivery, the education should, I hope still be being delivered. That's right.

Jocelyn Furlan 3:58

So what we've done at Strathcona is we've put a COVID addendum to our bursary policy so that people who families that are suffering financial stress, there are some guidelines there, which was what we talked about in the last podcast. That's all that's all done that we've reduced to zero. They're charged for the composite fee, which is covers all the extracurricular activities, because we're obviously not offering them so things that we're not offering parents shouldn't pay for, obviously, family shouldn't pay for parents, guardians, and others shouldn't pay for. So we've done all of that. But it's still we're still offering quality online learning.

Helga Svendsen 4:30

Okay, well, thank you. Is there anything else that you wanted to update us about Strathcona and where things are at there?

Jocelyn Furlan 4:36

No, other than that is just moving, it's a really rapidly moving beast. And again, my focus is to make sure that as the board are offering the principal the support that she needs to make day to day decisions in a rapidly changing environment.

Helga Svendsen 4:49

Absolutely. And just for clarity for people. We are recording this on the 15th of April, by the time you hear it, it might be a week or two later, but things are rapidly changing. As you say, I am finding more and more than need to date when these recordings are done because often things have changed by the time they go to even if there's only a week later or a few days later.

Jocelyn Furlan 5:10

And everything I've just said might be completely irrelevant.

Helga Svendsen 5:15

Well, even so, it's great to get that update because when I spoke to you last time, we were right in the thick of things changing in some ways almost more rapidly, then we feel like we've got into a bit of a rhythm now about these four Victoria in Australia, the stage three restrictions. So yeah, it's great to hear where things are at now.

Jocelyn Furlan 5:34

So now finally, we get to turn to the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal Advisory Council and your role there. Can you just talk us through the establishment of the Superannuation Complaints Tribunal Advisory Council and where that led I was chair of the superannuation complaints tribunal the superannuation compliance tribunal is a established by an act of the Commonwealth Parliament. The result? of complaints act. And it consists of the chair who's the executive officer, who's appointed by the Governor General and reports to the Australian Parliament and the chair is responsible for the overall operations of the tribunal. Then there's a deputy chair and part time members who are the people that they are appointed by the relevant minister, and they make decisions about the complaints that come to the tribunal that can't be resolved by conciliation. And the Secretariat is provided by ASIC. Tribunals close now, because all of the new complaints has been close to new complaints since November 2018, because of the establishment of the Australian Financial complaints authority, so it's currently winding down and dealing with the last of its compliance, and then it'll be it'll be shut and gone. One of the interesting things about that structure is that there is no board. The chair is responsible to the Australian Parliament, via the treasurer, and it was in real life delegated to the Minister for financial services, whoever was holding that role from time to time.

For some reason that will forever be great. But not quite sure how it happened. I was travelling overseas and I'm staying in my sister's house in Switzerland. And it occurred to me that the governance was not that great in that it was the chairs world, really, because the chair didn't really report to anybody on a regular basis and, conversely, didn't have a sounding board, discussed strategic issues with other than the Deputy Chair who was doing the Deputy Chair work. So I thought about establishing the Advisory Council. And I knew because the trivium was established by legislation that this body would have no legislative authority or proper authority, but I felt the need to have a group of people as support as an advocate for the tribunal, but also to bounce ideas off. And so I wrote the terms of reference on my sister's kitchen table, and it's only two pages was only two pages. Basically just sitting out what I was hoping to achieve from having an advisory council and then I thought about the membership offered. What I wanted to hear was the voices of The industry that tribunal was in so I looked at all of the sectors of the superannuation industry. So there's the industry, super there's public sector super. There's the insurers that are really big part. And then there's corporate superannuation as well. So I contacted people that I knew and said to them, I'd like to set up this Advisory Council and I wanted an independent Chair of it. I was so blessed earlier that everyone I contacted said yes, even though it was not paid. So I set up a framework, a chat or an app. And this is all kind of one page stuff. It was not a really big deal that we had a two page terms of reference, which set out the membership and then the purpose of the Advisory Council, which was to give strategic advice to me as the chair to make sure that the operations were the best they could be from a governance perspective, to give feedback to me, but and it wasn't written down but also to be advocates for the tribunal, with government with the funders with ASIC as the provider of our secretarial support, and so I invited the person that's now the customer advocate of the Commonwealth Bank is my retail person, the CEO of history as the industry fun person, the CEO first out super as the public sector fun person, the chair of the corporate super Association as the corporate super representative, the CEO of TAL life, my insurance representative. And I also asked the Commonwealth Ombudsman, if he would come as himself. And I asked the chair of the fund Executives Association, which is all of the superannuation funds, all of the CEOs belong to this body. I asked him to be the independent chair. And they all said yes. And so every quarter, we would do agenda, papers, all that sort of stuff for them to talk through the financial status of the financial state, you know, all that sort of stuff. And really, looking back on it now, I had seven mentors in the room with me every quarter to give me advice. And that was not why I set it up, but they were tremendous supporters and we had some difficult conversations with esic Because as you know, there was a tension to resolve adequate resourcing that kind of thing. They were incredibly supportive of their, the independent chair then became the chair first aid super. And so he didn't feel because I had first aid super already on the council. He didn't feel they could continue as independent chair. So the commerce ombudsman became the independent chair was terrific. We had a consumer rep too. I shouldn't have forgotten that, because that was really important to me as well. The consumer rep is a guy by the name of john barrel, who's probably the best known superannuation lawyer in Australia. He was from my partner, Mark Blackburn, and he's now at partner at Watson. So he brought the consumer perspective, which was really important. Interestingly, in Australia, it's always been curious to me that there hasn't been a consumer group for superannuation given that most Australians have it. And given that it's compulsory, it's curious to me that we don't have like a tax payers Association. We don't have a superannuation fund members association that I could draw around for my consumer rep. So the near the best thing I could do was John,

Helga Svendsen 10:58

Hey, that is interesting. It's goodwill, it's an interesting reflection

Jocelyn Furlan 11:01

For years, I've thought that's something that I think needs attention. But anyway, and there's been various attempts to do it over the years hasn't quite landed in the right space place yet. But it's still worth thinking about. I think. The other thing I didn't realise at the time was that these people all had adversarial relationships outside of three Council, particularly CBA and john barrel, in storms in the strong financial matter. And yet, they put that all aside and came together for the purpose of the tribunal, and I suppose supporting me, and it was born out of an idea on travels. And I think for me, apart from the value that it gave me and my incredible gratitude to that group of people who stayed on after I lived and helped the chair of the tribunal when the tribunal was closed down by the government. In the Ramsey review, there was in rooms he was commissioned to write a review about whether all the dispute resolution bodies should merge. So there was three of us there was false The Financial Ombudsman Service, there was the causal, which was the credit Ombudsman Service, and there was the tribunal. And we were the only statutory one and in Ramsey was commissioned by the government to write a review about whether they should or merge and why. And in that report, he talks about the Advisory Council as if it has some, he refers to it as having a proper place in the superannuation compliance tribunal landscape. And I thought, you can use your influence and you can have ideas and you can make a difference. And the purpose was to do better dispute resolution for the complainant. So it was always for me, the real clarity of purpose was to improve the governance around the operations of the tribunal by having this feedback forum. And I think it worked. I think it made the tribunal a better place for complainants and I am we eternally grateful to those that group of people who gave us their time and energy to support that purpose.

Helga Svendsen 12:53

And it's of course, exactly the way a board in a way a board of independent directors should work although they weren't really intended. In a way, but leaving that aside, you know, to provide that different views and provide that wisdom and to be a mentor effectively to the CEO, you were the chair, but effectively the CEO in a way of an organisation. I'm interested, I just want to dig a bit more when you'd said they all come from their own interests in a way and we're sometimes adversarial outside the boardroom, well, the advisory council room, but when they came together, they put that aside and worked together. What was it that made that happen? Because that's key, really to effective discussions in the boardroom, what was it that helped them do that?

Jocelyn Furlan 13:38

I think it was having a defined shared purpose. I think it's a credit to the individuals concerned. And it was one of the lessons for me about wherever I am making sure that I'm in that room with that head on for that purpose and giving off my best for that, whatever that cause is, and I think they would just say Incredibly professional, wise leaders who were able to do that. But I do think that it is really important to have a purpose to galvanise around as well. So if you are a CEO or a chair of a board, ensuring that purpose is always front of mind will help people to put the right hat on in the room that they're in. And I think at first date, super that plays particularly well because our purpose we put members first and that's not unusual in the superannuation industry, the superannuation industry puts members first. One of the things that we do at first aid super one of the is we have a plastic, androgynous person. And that person sits on our board tables in all of our board meetings and all of our committee meetings and we've got a really big one that stands behind the CEO and the chair when we're doing public presentations. And it sounds gimmicky, but it's actually not because it really reminds Does that the purpose that we're there for which is we're there for our members and to maximise outcomes for our members. And, sorry, this is a bit off the track. But first, I super required the 40 year rights to the Victorian land title's office. And I went to sign the contract because I was in on the Investment Committee and because it was in Victoria, and I, and I'm a Victorian director, I went to sign the contract, and the treasurer of Victoria site was signing the contract as well. So there was a big meeting with all these people in the room. And it was on a Sunday and it was all hush hush until it was announced the next day. And I said to the head of direct assets bring Sam this person's name is Sam. I said, bring Sam with you. And we put Sam on the table in front of a wall with all of the folders of documents that had to be signed and we read this plastic same and the treasurer said What's that? I told him the story about how that reminds us why we're doing all of this and Sam is there why our member is there why it was a terrific story and but it's it was really real and it's really, really to us as a board effort.

Helga Svendsen 16:02

We hear a lot about bringing the consumer voice into the boardroom or the customer voice into the boardroom or the patient voice into the boardroom or whatever it may be. That's a really beautiful way of reminding what they've ever heard. I was going to ask if now I know Sam has a name, I was going to ask if Sam had a name Sam clearly does fabulous way of reminding us around whoever our ultimate purposes or ultimate responsibilities to that's a beautiful way of doing it.

Jocelyn Furlan 16:32

And I do think that was the super complaints tribunal Advisory Council. I think there was a real shared purpose there too, which made it which helped people to remember what they were in the room for and put the you know, all the other bits and pieces like all non executive directors have four or five different jobs. It's really important to be able to focus on the why that you're doing a particular role and it's not about my career, or and I'm not in the Y is not about me, the Y is about the purpose of that organisation

Helga Svendsen 17:01

With the original question about how do you bring people together, whether it's your superannuation stakeholders who are at odds outside the boardroom, or, you know, even around diversity in the boardroom, we need diversity in the boardroom have different experiences and different attributes. And so on. That tip, I guess around, staying true to purpose helps bring people together, regardless of different views or different interests or whatever it may be.

Jocelyn Furlan 17:28

And that those different views are really important to your visions, but the decision that the purpose of the decision is really important as well.

Helga Svendsen 17:36

Absolutely. So bringing people together around that, okay, so that that's a great tip, I guess, for people on bringing those diverse views together and something that worked for you by the sounds of things in bringing that group together. A they all say yes to you. I also noted that, in fact, interestingly, what was the magic there that just meant when you picked up the phone to all of these people? They said

Jocelyn Furlan 17:56

Yes, I really don't know and some of them travelled into state at their own expense to come to Melbourne. To meet with us, I guess they must have thought it was a worthwhile purpose. Yeah, yes, they were making a difference as well, and that they were providing supporting in a way that they was tangible. They understood it was a limited time. So it was it was I think we met for two hours, once a quarter, they probably had a couple of hours preparation and thinking time, it wasn't a huge impost. And presumably, somebody found like their organisations funded them to travel and that kind of thing. I do think a lot of people if you give them an easy way to give back, we'll be prepared to give back.

Helga Svendsen 18:38

Absolutely, yeah, it's true. It is certainly the case that I'm often saying to people, you know, pick up the phone and just ask person x. Well, in a way you are here because that's exactly what I did. picked up the phone to somebody else. My intermediary. Thank you, Julie big no who did the introduction. So you know, Julie, can you introduce me to Jocelyn I'd like her to be on a plane. Cast because somebody else's said she heard her speak and was fantastic. Mostly people will say yes, unless there is good reason not to.

Jocelyn Furlan 19:08

I think you do have to be clear about what you're asking for and be clear that it's not for your own aggrandisement as well, because I was asking for support for the tribunal. Yes, it was personal support. Probably you'd have to ask them why they said yes, I guess. But I was clear about what I was asking what the time commitment was, what the purpose was, what I was hoping to achieve. And I think you have to you have to go to some effort to make it easy for people to say, Yes, we all get lots of invitations to connect on LinkedIn. I'm always really curious about the why. Yes, often often, I think they're asking me to connect for them. And it's apparent that they're asking me to connect for them because they've seen something in your profile that they think can be it's also them very hard to get a yes answer to that.

Helga Svendsen 19:58

I can't remember I've spoken about before on the podcast, but I'm very strict on LinkedIn. And if people send me an invitation to connect, I always go back to them and say, What is it about me? Why do you want to connect with me, and I actually won't connect with you until we've met. That can be a zoom call, as is the case for everybody these days. And interestingly, about every single person I respond to saying, happy to connect, but we need to make first, about 10% of people respond, and probably only about half of those that even respond in the first instance, go ahead and make a time to have a chat to me. But she's such a shame because I love it. I had two conversations yesterday with people who had just sought to connect over LinkedIn and then we had a conversation and it was fabulous. You could actually find out about that person and find out what they're about and find out about each other. Anyway, that's bothered by Okay, so the other thing I wanted to touch on with you is around executive leadership coaching and your experience They are and what you've learned from that. What can you tell us there?

Jocelyn Furlan 21:03

When I first got the role of Chair of the, I was actually Deputy Chair of the super compliance tribunal. And then about 18 months later, I became the chair because the chair, retired or I became acting chair, then there was a process of appointment. And it was a much bigger role than I'd been used to, and required significantly more emotional intelligence and significantly higher levels of interaction than I had before because this was a roll appointed by the Governor General, there's only one of them in Australia reports Australian calm and you get to hang out with really cool people. And I was very untrained in the ways of hanging out with really cool, really senior people and I thought I need some executive coaching. And I ran into this guy and I started executive coaching with him. So that would have been around about 2006 I guess, or maybe 2007. And I've always paid for my executive coaching myself, nobody's ever paid for me. And I still have it today. But I interestingly, that person after a while, I realised I needed something slightly more senior. And so I went, I knew someone who was an executive coach who I'd known for years and years. And she and I read, I reconnected with her for the purpose of talking to her about becoming my coach, and she has been absolutely fabulous. I was with him for a couple of years and then I went to her. What I love about executive good executive coaching is that it teaches you about what behaviours you need to learn which core behaviours are holding you back. And also it's a safe space to talk through the things that are that you're finding difficult. So I've been with her now probably since about 2009, so maybe 1011 years, and I intend to stay with her for the rest of my working life because I'm learning all the time about there are some behaviours that will always be learned behaviours for me and For instance, to learn how to pause, and stop and listen. And also the transactional analysis about having adult conversations and the knowing and seeing when a conversation stops being an adult to adult conversation and starts being a critical parent or a vulnerable child or whatever those aspects and, and the skill of bringing, if I'm still in adult space and the other person's moved, or vice versa, the skills to bring both of us back into adult space so we can actually get whatever it is that we're talking about sorted. And you have to practice those things for the rest of your life to be a leader. I think so I know that I will always have to have learned behaviours and the skill is when I walk out of a meeting and regret how the meeting when it you know, if I've lost my call or something's happened, actually leaning into that and learning from it. And that's where I think an executive coach can be such a great help because they bring their learning about how human thinking works. I don't know much about that. But they also will She will challenge me to actually experiment, and to actually take risks and to actually do things differently. And if it doesn't work to stop them to assess, I wouldn't be where I am today without executive coaching, there's no question in my mind, the value of that, and it's not true. But the value of that in terms of me being able to be a person of influence, and a senior leader is partly because of who I am, but partly because of my willingness to learn for the rest of my life, about myself and about other people and about effective interactions and influence and what, what influence actually looks like. And there's nothing better than you say something to somebody that, you know, you feel is important. And you see it reflected back in something that they've told someone and suddenly it's on in an article or or, you know, in the news or anything. Yeah, I see that, you know, and that path of influence and being able to grasp those things and being able to constantly learn, it's good to have a coach with you on that journey, I think,

Helga Svendsen 24:59

Oh, it's always music to my ears Jocelyn, as somebody who is had a coach in the past, and who actually practices coaching now I'm loving over the last kind of 10 to 15 years, I feel like coaching has really become, it used to be seen as remedial, you know, you got a coach and people thought, oops, you know, Haley has got a coach, that can't be good. Whereas now it's really seen more and more as an essential tool in the toolkit for helping people around awareness and self reflection and learning and leading and leadership, more and more, which is exactly what I'm hearing from your experience of it.

Jocelyn Furlan 25:34

And the whole changing conversation from intelligence to emotional intelligence, and what emotional intelligence looks like and how you can you know, how you can point to someone and say, gee, they've got really good EQ. Well, I don't think that just happens naturally. I think you do need to practice. When I do the sad course last year. You know, one of the things that really resonated with me is that one of the most important skills of a board director is self awareness. You can only get self awareness by opening yourself up To someone that you trust in a safe place to say, Tell me what the perception of me is from someone else, and be open to learning. Actually, you don't come across that great when you say XYZ or when you do XYZ. And also the appreciation of different personality types. I don't think I ever really thought about the fact that people are different from me and respond differently from me, given the same set of facts. And what's fascinating to me about this whole COVID-19 thing is, I'm really hoping that someone does a study about it, that all of the world's leaders have been given exactly the same problem, and a study of all of their reactions, and what they've done about it. So you look at Donald Trump's reaction compared to just Cinder Jones reaction. It's fascinating to me and people's reflections about being open to other people telling them actually you don't look that great, or have you thought about doing this in a different way or what outcome you're trying to achieve. So outcome for the setting up the ICT Advisory Council was to get To improve the governance and to get as a group of people to sanity check the way I was running the place really outcome, which I didn't expect it was when I decided that I wasn't going to apply for another term at the tribunal was the two of those people come to me and say we want to work with you. And that was fabulous. And I've worked with, I've worked with both of them subsequent to that, and I, and I didn't do it as a marketing exercise at all. And it turned out that they've seen me operate. they'd seen me every quarter for four or five years, and I wanted to work with me, and that was just fantastic.

Helga Svendsen 27:36

Oh, so some of those lessons I'm hearing also reinforced for me, you know, that reflection and how other people perceive you and so on also reinforces for me, the importance of regular board evaluations and having those board evaluations done externally as well. And also just the importance of it's going to say executive leadership coaching, maybe it's not executive leadership coaching, because it's about Not just when you're in those executive roles, but also in non executive roles and independent roles, that this reflection is just as important, if not more important, because you don't have colleagues in the same way as you do when you're in an organisation.

Jocelyn Furlan 28:13

Absolutely, and I think it's the real challenge of non executive directorships is that you dip in and out of relationships. When you're in the executive world, you're working with people every day, five days a week you see them or virtually see them. You know, how they think. When you're on a board, you might only see those people have a dozen times a year. And so the impression that you make and the contribution that you make, and your relationship with them is condensed into these little pockets. And that's where it's even more important, I think, to be self aware, because you can't just fall in and be yourself. Someone who doesn't know you, like a colleague would know you. And everything you say has is the impact that you have. It's not that you have a greater impact. It's that you have an impact in absence of a continuum of the religions. And so for me the executive coaching around the board directorships, when I moved from being executive to non executive was equally important, because every impression is a first impression when it's only six times a year.

Helga Svendsen 29:13

Yeah, absolutely.

Jocelyn Furlan 29:15

You have to just be really aware of the impact of your words and your behaviour. And, you know, I'd never really had an appreciation of how hard it can be for chairs of boards, if they've got really strong personalities in the room, rolling those personalities knowing that you're only going to see these people six times a year, but you need to get really good decisions out of them.

Helga Svendsen 29:35

Yes. Oh, so much wisdom in there yet. Again, we've gone over time, Jocelyn, but I just also at the same time want to continue that conversation. I am cheekily just going to throw in there, which is a little bit cheeky of me, but it's my podcast. So I can do that. But to say that the bond accelerator programme that I run, which is a group programme for women was exactly For this reason, because when we're board directors together, it's not The same relationship has colleagues and sometimes you just need that safe space to talk to others about the challenges you're facing or your emotional intelligence or dealing with people, whatever it may be. And it's exactly why I created that programme so that women can come together and share some of those things. So could not agree more than that the importance of some of those things. Jocelyn amazing. So I'm wondering, from the conversation that we've had today both about the superannuation, it is such a long title, isn't it? superannuation complaints, tribunal Advisory Council? There you go. I've got it, and about coaching and reflection. What are the main points you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Jocelyn Furlan 30:42

I think one of the main points is that every interaction you have with people is important. It's really important to not be an overt marketer, you will have an impact on people in the end. Use all the skills you can to put your best foot forward because you never know where it's gonna lead and had an extraordinarily wonderful outcome. tribunal and then for myself after, after I left the tribunal. And I think the importance of self awareness of being prepared to learn, being willing to learn and being willing to move into learning from being uncomfortable, and trialling new things and not being scared to try different things and see what happens. If what you do before hasn't worked. Some of your best behaviours are always going to be learned and you have to practice them for your whole life.

Helga Svendsen 31:25

Thank you once again for being on the take on board podcast, just so many pearls of wisdom in there that I know people will get a lot from. I know they did from the last one as well. So thank you for updating us on this situation at Strathcona with COVID-19. And thank you for sharing more of your story with us today on the podcast.

Jocelyn Furlan 31:42

It's a pleasure. Thank you for inviting me