



The Santa Maria College Podcast

Episode 4: Nicole Lockwood (Ganfield, Class of 1996)

Jake: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Santa Maria College Podcast, where once a month we sit down with members of our community who are creating, innovating, leading, and contributing to making the world a better place from the College's history to social justice, to entrepreneurship, and innovation, we tap into a wide range of topics that affect our girls who are the leaders of tomorrow.

So come along with us for the ride as we pick the brains of those who have been pivotal in Santa Maria's growth and celebrate those who continue to be change makers.

So today I'm joined by Nicole Lockwood. Nicole graduated from Santa Maria in 1996, and since then she has certainly made a name for herself in WA. So, with the background in law and regional economic [00:01:00] development, Nicole currently works with the government and private sector to develop long-term infrastructure plans to secure the future prosperity and liveability of our cities.

She's the founder and director of Lockwood Advisory, which has been in operation for almost a decade. She's the chairperson of Infrastructure WA, Airbridge and the Malka Foundation, which supports young entrepreneurs by teaching and developing entrepreneurial skills and mindset. She's also a board member of NBN Australia, Chief Executive Women, WA Association for Mental Health and the Green Building Council of Australia.

So, Nicole, thank you so much for calling in to chat. You know, when I was doing my research, it was really hard to obviously condense everything you've achieved since graduating, and I think what you're doing for WA and the economy is just pretty phenomenal. So, to start, how are you today?

Nicole: I'm really well and [00:02:00] look, really appreciate the opportunity to be part of this series. So yeah, thank you for your time.

Jake: So just to start, could you maybe talk us a little bit through your journey since leaving Santa? Because, you know, the position you are in, that something that doesn't just happen overnight.

So yeah, just a little bit of a background on your journey to now?

Nicole: Well, I think like everyone, looking back on your career, where you've ended up and where you started, you probably couldn't have planned it if you'd asked at the beginning where I was going to go. I started out with a real passion for the environment, and even at high school, I used to run a little group at school called 'Greensleeves', and we are all about trying to energise kids about environmental issues, and we did a range of things.

We hosted market days and bits and pieces at school events. So that was where my heart was, and I did a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Business with an Environmental Management major at Notre

Dame, sort of to kick me off, with a thought that I would become an environmental lawyer. Very quickly when I [00:03:00] started working as an articled clerk, the practice that I was in had a slight change of plan and their environmental law practice closed down in Perth.

So that plan had to change for me quite quickly. I think what happens with life is, you know, different doors open and the difficult thing when you're at school is you don't really know what's out there. So, you start a career with one set of views, and then you learn about a whole heap of other things when you get into the workforce.

So, I did quite a lot in law over about six or seven years. Tried pretty much all types of law and decided that the system of problem solving, which is what I thought it was, was actually probably about additional problem creation. Often you ended up at the end of a dispute with some additional problems you didn't have at the start, and very rarely the solution to the one you started with.

So, I was quite frustrated, and life then took me on a very different path with my husband. We moved to Karratha for personal reasons with his job, and then opportunities just started to open up from there, which were very different than what I thought I'd be doing when I first left.

Jake: Oh, that's awesome. That's an awesome message, because I think high school, [00:04:00] it's actually quite overwhelming. I feel like there's so many different, you know, pathways you can take. You're getting advice from different people left, right, and centre so, you know, I think just to go with the flow and sort of see where it's things take you.

Nicole: Yeah, I think, we got the opportunity in Year 11 and 12 to go to careers days and different opportunities to meet with universities, and it was difficult to choose. I was lucky that I did have a bit of a clear view and a lot of my friends went on to do parts of a number of degrees and probably it wasn't until their early thirties that they really found the area that they were passionate about.

Whereas I've had a career that hasn't necessarily ended where I thought it would but has taken me in all sorts of directions that has allowed me to keep evolving. So, I've really enjoyed that.

Jake: So, I want to jump straight in and talk about your business, Lockwood Advisory. So, you provide advice to both government and industry in the areas [00:05:00] of urban renewal, infrastructure, freight, and digital enablement.

So just to start so our listeners can understand, could you explain the difference between like the work you do in the public sector versus the private sector?

Nicole: Yeah. Look, it's a good question, and I think it's probably evolved over time in the sense that in my mind, all of the opportunities now sit between both government and the private sector.

So, all of the challenges we are facing in terms of climate change, digital disruption, you know, resilience, all those sorts of things cannot be solved by any one part of the system. So less and less my roles are about working in discreet parts of the economy, it's now actually about connecting parts of the economy.

So, my career is split really in two parts. One party is through Lockwood Advisory, where I do consulting work and projects for different organisations. The other part is a portfolio of board roles

that sit around those topics and then give me the opportunity to influence outcomes from a [00:06:00] governance perspective.

Jake: I guess my next question would be, can you give some case study examples of some of the work you do? Like, who are you working with, what are some of the projects you're working on or have worked on in the past?

Nicole: So, my major projects, and probably over the last 15 years have been large scale integrated master planning exercises for one of a better word.

So, when I was in Karratha, I ended up becoming the mayor, which wasn't part of the plan. Through that role, it was right in the middle of Pilbara cities. So, lots was happening. The economy was growing, and the community was very deficient in infrastructure. So, part of my role in, in leading the community in that position was to come up with an integrated plan for community infrastructure in particular, but also some of the economic infrastructure.

So that was probably my first foray into how do you, in that case, redevelop and reimagine a community thinking about growth into the future. Then when we moved back to Perth, [00:07:00] I then set up my advisory business and then did a very similar exercise for Bunbury, so looking at the greater Bunbury area.

And that was very much about the economy of the Southwest and how could we help that expand to what it should be given the amount of infrastructure that's down there and allow that to grow over time. Then that led me into a role for the state government, called the Westport Task Force.

So that was the project to look at the future of Fremantle Port and look at moving it to another location to accommodate growth. That one was different again because it was all around freight logistics. So very much about how do we enable growth in our cities by making sure our port and connectivity infrastructure's working well.

So, they're all sort of similar in the way that it's about city shaping, about community building, but about using infrastructure as the lever.

Jake: Sure. And you know, you mentioned having a passion for linking like-minded individuals to connect the dots [00:08:00] between government and industry decision makers.

I mean, how do you achieve this in an ever-changing society?

Nicole: Yeah. It's interesting because the areas that I work in now, I was never trained in. So as a law, as a law student, we didn't learn anything about infrastructure.

Jake: I think this stuff, you can't learn it with a textbook and a PowerPoint. It comes with experience.

Nicole: What I've worked out is it actually doesn't really matter what sector you work in. The issues are the same, and they are that everything is designed and decided by humans. So, what you need to do is you need to work out where everyone's trying to go and often it's in five or six different directions.

Is there a common thread that everyone can connect to? And what are the external factors that are gonna get in the way or enable you getting to that outcome? And I think most people would agree that the biggest frustration in communities is when nothing happens. People might get upset if a decision's made and they don't really like it, but they get more upset if no [00:09:00] decisions made.

So often I find the work I do is about trying to energise and create change and create momentum to get things on track and that can be around planning a piece of infrastructure, it can be around understanding a social use, it can, you know, in the Westport process, we spend a lot of time understanding the value that people connect with recreational fishing and what it would mean for them if we were to put a new port in their favourite fishing spot. So, it's not about the engineering or the design of the infrastructure as much as it is about understanding what matters to people and ultimately the community are the ones that have to give permission for these things to happen.

Jake: That's really interesting. So, you are the chairperson of Infrastructure WA, and their role is to provide advice and assistance to the WA government on infrastructure matters. What does being a chairperson [00:10:00] mean? Excuse my ignorance. but yeah, what does this role entail? I guess that's my question.

Nicole: Well, there's some very simple tasks that every chair will do, and that is to run the meeting. So, you have a board and your role on a monthly or bimonthly basis, depending on the organisation, is to chair the meeting and make sure everybody has the ability to contribute.

And as part of the tasks of a board, you are there to set strategic direction and to look at management and the organization and to approve the budget. So, they're some pretty fundamental tasks that any board will do, and as the chair, ultimately that's your, you know, accountability. But each organization is different.

And what's required of a chair looks quite different depending on the organization. So, in Infrastructure Western Australia's example, we've spent the last three years developing the state's first infrastructure strategy. So, to do that required a lot of behind the scenes work to do research and to understand what, what's the state of all the infrastructure we [00:11:00] have, what are the challenges we're facing?

And this is every form of infrastructure that the state controls from hospitals, to schools, to transport, the lot. Then a lot of my role over the last couple of years in that organisation's been getting out into the community and sharing that message and testing it and getting feedback. So, in a chair role, depending on how the CEO likes to work, you can often have a profile in that space.

So, you might do media, or you might do presentations, or you might be a contact person for the organization, and you're there, I suppose, as a support to the CEO as well. So, for that role, it's been quite busy for the last couple of years as we've developed the state's first strategy. In other roles, when the organisation is in more of a steady state, it may be more of a support to the CEO as well as doing those roles that are required of the board.

Jake: I found it really interesting that only now we're having a state infrastructure strategy. I don't know why I was so surprised to hear that. Why do you think you know it's taken until [00:12:00] now for that to be a thing?

Nicole: It's a very good question. And in other parts of the world, they've been doing this for a long time. It is a worry when you think, hang on a minute, how can we even make a decision about what we're building if we don't know how it fits? So, I was on the Board of Infrastructure Australia, which is the national equivalent for nine years up until a few years ago and that was established, quite some time back, sort of late 2007-2008, to deal with this issue of the fact that we didn't have a strategy nationally.

Then bit by bit each state has come on board and developed their own equivalent and Western Australia is one of the last to form. Now the benefit of being last is that you get to take the best of what everyone else has done and not the same mistake. So, what we've got now is actually quite a sophisticated piece of legislation that has a lot of power to coordinate across government, which is fantastic.

And you know, it's at a time where never before have we needed this so much because there's so much change going on. So yes, you're right, it probably couldn't have come soon [00:13:00] enough. But I think we're well positioned now.

Jake: I guess one common trend in all the things you do, you know, from your business to being on the chair of Infrastructure WA and you know, being a board member at these places, you know, there's one underlying theme in all of it and that's I think sustainability.

What draws you to these organisations which plays such important role in creating a sustainable future for WA?

Nicole: I think as I indicated at the beginning, my passion was in the environment, and I found myself on a path for a good 10 years that I didn't really feel like I was there. I was doing other things that were interesting and teaching me a lot, but I really wasn't getting back to what I wanted to do.

It is interesting the way these opportunities take you on a path that eventually takes you back to what you love. And what I've found, particularly in having children is, you know, my concern for the environment and my passion for finding solutions has only got stronger as I've got older.

I think trying to use the [00:14:00] skills that I have and the opportunities I've been given in a way where I can really help to influence outcomes is something that I feel like, it's a responsibility. I'm in positions where I need to be using my voice to get things to change. So, the thing I'm excited about now, when you have a portfolio career, it takes a while to get pieces that you want and them to fit together, and I've had sort of a couple of cycles of this now in the last nearly 10 years.

I'm at the point now where I love all the things I'm doing and they all compliment and they're coming from totally different directions, but they're actually all centering around a similar theme, which is actually about a change in mindset and skillset, and then a change in the way we work and using the brilliance of human ingenuity to solve these problems, to end up in a position where it isn't about having to give a whole heap of things up because we are wrecking the environment. It's actually about creating new things that we never knew were possible to make our lives even better.

Jake: Mm-hmm. That's really interesting. How do you [00:15:00] divide your time across all these things? Are there things that you have to, you know, turn down or maybe prioritise because you could work on a million things. how do you narrow your focus?

Nicole: Yeah. It varies. So, the good thing about boards is you get visibility at least a year out, sometimes two years out of your meetings.

So, you know, primary responsibility, in a board setting is to be available for the formal meetings. Around that are a range of other obligations that you can then decide how much time you can give to them. So, in my roles, you know, I don't want to take something on unless I can really contribute significantly to it.

So, you've got to be mindful of that when you're deciding how much you do. The reality of the roles is that things ebb and flow. So, some weeks are full on and some weeks are not so bad, but you can never predict when things will go sideways, so you've got to leave yourself capacity for that.

The projects that I do, I don't take on much consulting work because I like to keep that flexibility and know that I can do what I [00:16:00] need. So, I usually only have one main project, maybe a second small one at any one time, and then I can manage all the logistics, but it is very much about I suppose only focusing on the things that you really feel you can add value to.

You know, you do get asked to do a lot of things and probably a third of my portfolio in there, they're smaller roles, but some of those roles I do for free, and you do get asked to do a lot of extra things, and I'm more than happy to do that, but you do have to be a little bit careful about how much you commit to.

Jake: I mean, it's just so cool to see you doing really well between like the sort of corporate leadership roles and the entrepreneurial side of things, and you set such a great example for the girls here at Santa Maria.

So, you're also on the chair of the Malka Foundation, so they support young entrepreneurs teaching them entrepreneurial skills and mindset and financial literacy. You know, it's nice that you are passing those skills onto, you know, the younger [00:17:00] generation and the future.

Nicole: I think Malka, I got drawn to because it's a philanthropic foundation that's about building more entrepreneurs basically. And so in doing that, it goes to the heart of the education system, which is what we are teaching kids right at the beginning through primary school, high school, and certainly into university, that gives them what they need to be able to pursue an idea or their dream and turn it into reality.

The thing I love about that work is that the skills that are being taught as part of these entrepreneurial programs are life skills. It doesn't really matter if you never set up your own business, you'll use them because it's all about problem solving, it's about lateral thinking, it's about negotiation skills.

It's about, you know, resilience, ingenuity, they're things that you need because the workforce is constantly changing. I know with my own girls, I'm constantly challenged with what advice I give them, because it's not clear to me where the best options are. They keep [00:18:00] evolving.

So, I think the, the entrepreneurial education mindset is very much about that ability to flex with change which is so important.

Jake: We've launched a new program at Santa Maria called Women in Business. So, it's like a co-curricular group, which tries to achieve the same sort of thing, like teach them those skills and that mindset and that literacy.

It'd be interesting to see what advice you could give to them. I mean, to start, you know, what I guess has been your most satisfying moment as an entrepreneur?

Nicole: Oh, that's a good question. I think it's always watching other people succeed, so when you are part of something that enables someone else to realise what they're passionate about and you know that you've left a legacy, that's what makes me happy. I think when I look at the work that I've done over many years, not probably in the entrepreneurship space, but in the sort of planning space, when you work really hard on something for a couple of years with a [00:19:00] group of people, and then you move on, and you look back, and that work's been implemented, that's a really fulfilling feeling.

And so, looking back at Karratha, for anyone that's been to Karratha anytime recently, it's totally transformed. The work that we did, you know, ten-fifteen years ago, shaped that. And to know that if you set something up, well, you don't have to be there to control it. You just need to lay the foundations.

I think that's what I get excited about.

Jake: That's awesome. And obviously with your own business comes a lot of responsibility and a lot of stress as well. What's your tips, you know, on managing that side of being an entrepreneur? Because I feel like mental wellbeing is massive today.

So, I'm just wondering how you approach that?

Nicole: Yeah, I think with any business at the end of the day, you've got commitments in terms of financial responsibilities, pressure that you have to manage. So, if you're [00:20:00] going to do something on your own and you're going to be reliant on your own ability to make money, you've got to have either some backup or some plans that allow you to be nimble if things don't go the way you think. So that's why having a portfolio career is good because you can pursue something that you love that might take a little while to get off the ground, but know you've got something coming in that's gonna pay the bills.

So that might be a combination of doing a bit more of a mundane job at some times of the days to then allow you to pursue your passion at other times until it's big enough that you can run it full-time. But with that comes a lot of juggling and some stress and again, it's about how well you manage yourself and your own time as to how successful you are.

So for me, it's always been about sleep, it's been about exercise, eating well, all the boring things are really important and having a network, having people you can talk to, you know, lots of advice, lots of mentors for me are not in a formal sense, it's more [00:21:00] people that I know I can ring and go, you know what, I'm really struggling, what do you think I should do? And communicating lots!

Jake: And I think just not being afraid to like lean on people for help or advice like. I think like you said, it's really important to like use your resources and use the people around you to get to where you need to. Obviously, like, to an extent.

Nicole: Yeah. I think to reminding people that your life is unique and the path that you have ahead of you is unlike anybody else's. So, the biggest risk in any new Endeavor is comparison, is looking around and trying to work out are you better than same than worse than someone next to you? Should you further along behind, that's what makes you come undone.

So, the biggest thing is you've got to back yourself in. If it doesn't work, you know, in the United States where they have a very fertile entrepreneurship culture, investors say they wanna see an entrepreneur that's [00:22:00] failed at least three times before they'll invest in them because they want to see the experience that comes from learning.

Jake: And the resilience.

Nicole: Exactly. If everything's always gone well for you, you're never gonna know how to deal with things when it gets difficult.

So being willing to run at something and give it your all and then if it doesn't end where you think, that's okay, because that piece of information or that experience will be of benefit to you later down the line.

Jake: It's all character building.

Nicole: It is.

Jake: Well, that's good advice. So, I wanted to go back in time and talk a little bit, I know you touched on it previously, but just talk a little bit more in depth about your high school experience at Santa Maria.

How would you describe yourself in high school? Do you think you are similar, or do you think you've done a lot of growing?

Nicole: Um, I was right in the middle of the spectrum. I was relatively smart, but not super smart. So, I had to work quite hard, but I always got pretty good grades.

I wasn't [00:23:00] a nerd in the sense of a bookworm that sat on her own, but I wasn't in the popular group. I was sort of one of those people that just kind of blended between various groups. I had a circle, but the circle kept growing, which was nice. I loved my time at Santa. It was a really wonderful environment.

I loved the teachers I had. I loved everything about school, which was fantastic. I think though for people who have or know me now, I don't think I look like I did at school in terms of my personality. I think I actually look quite the same. I haven't changed a lot since I was younger, except for a few extra lines.

I always liked public speaking. I was quite happy to lead. Those sort of characteristics were there. But I think I've learned so much about myself now and I put myself in places that I never thought I would be comfortable to when I was younger. And I'm doing really awesome, exciting things with people that

are amazing and I sort of look back, and I don't have [00:24:00] any of the fears or the worries that I had when I was in school, which is, you know, that's just a wonderful thing that comes with.

Jake: And life experience.

Nicole: I've had a lot of things happen that have made me realize what's important. So, I'm really clear on what matters to me now.

Jake: Do you think there were any, like, I just always find it really fascinating to ask, do you think there's any like subjects or co-curriculars or teachers that really had an impact on you?

Quite often, alumni have something that's really stuck with them. So, I was just curious if there's anything that really is still quite clear in your memory or, you know, has really resonated with you?

Nicole: Look, the humanities were always my favourite subjects. I was good at maths and science, but I liked the humanities.

And so, my teachers in those subjects, I always really enjoyed. You know, spending time with them and you know, their passions because they were similar to mine. I think I'd say it's broader than that. It's more probably around the pastoral care side of things. [00:25:00] So it's less about a subject or a teacher, more about the environment that was created.

There were a lot of people that made that special for me and a lot of teachers. I think our year group, there was a really great bond between our year group and the teachers. You felt like they were really proud of you and that you could do anything and that the world was your oyster.

And that probably is the biggest thing that I've taken is that pretty much, if you can imagine it or see it, you can do it.

Jake: No, that's awesome. And I guess my final question is what advice would you give to students to ensure they get the most out of their experience?

Nicole: Well, my philosophy with most things is if you get asked to do something, or you see something, and it excites you, and you feel drawn to it, and my gut is my radar, and everything is say yes and work it out later.

You can always pull out of something, but once you've passed something up, it's more difficult to go [00:26:00] back. So, the things that I have taken on that I didn't understand, I couldn't see where they were going, I wasn't really sure, but I knew that there was something about them that I really liked the look of, have positioned me for the most amazing opportunities that I never thought possible.

So really not allowing your mind and your perception of what's possible to get in the way of the unknown, which is what comes from these, you know, open doors that you need to walk through.

Jake: That's really good advice. So that brings us to the end of this episode. So yeah, I'd just like to thank you for taking the time to chat. It's been an absolute pleasure. You know, I think you've done

and for WA and what you continue to do is really quite inspiring, and I feel like our parents and students may be listening, will have taken a lot away from this. So, yeah. Thank you very much.

Nicole: It's my pleasure. Thank you.

Jake: So also, to our listeners, thank you for tuning in and listening. We [00:27:00] appreciate your continued support. If you head to our website at www.santamaria.wa.edu.au/podcast you'll be able to find more on Lockwood Advisory, Nicole's LinkedIn profile, as well as the full video interview and transcript to this episode.

If you have any stories that you think are words telling, please reach out to crd@santamaria.wa.edu.au. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast and let us know what you think!