



The Santa Maria College Podcast

Episode 5: Silvia Baylie (Ng, Class of 1998)

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, I would like to introduce you all to a very special guest, SMC Old Girl, Silvia Baylie. So, since graduating from SMC in 1998, Silvia has gone on to lead an incredible life and [00:01:00] career. After school, she headed to Sydney and completed a Bachelor of Aerospace Engineering at the University of New South Wales.

She spent 17 years at Qantas Airways working across seven different roles. She designed several new aircraft interiors like the Airbus A380 and travelled the world working with the likes of Boeing and Airbus. She even looked after Qantas' domestic airports and worked on expanding the Perth airport to support the mining boom, back in 2010.

Towards the end of her time at Qantas, she created their ethical sustainable supply chain, having co-authored their Modern Slavery Statement. After many years of climbing the corporate and consultancy ladder, Silvia decided that it was time to drive change and make a difference in another industry, and so completed her Master of Teaching. [00:02:00]

She is now an Engineering Studies, Science and Mathematics educator and has never been happier. Silvia, thank you so much for taking the time to sit and chat with us. I mean, what an honour. It's so amazing to have you on our podcast.

Silvia: First of all, thank you for the introduction, and thank you for having me. I'm honoured to be included. I'm very excited about what you're doing.

Jake: How are you? How is life in Sydney treating you?

Silvia: I'm loving it. I've been here 22 years now, so you know, Perth is home, but Sydney is also home for me. I have two little ones and a lot of, you know, good friends and so Sydney's been treating us well.

Jake: And do you travel back to Perth often? Do you come to visit or are you mainly Sydney based?

Silvia: No, I do. So, I mean, back in my days when I did have to construct airports and develop airports, I used to come to Perth a lot. Now, I come at least once, maybe even twice a year. My [00:03:00] parents are still there and I have siblings as well and extended family.

So, it's unfortunate that every time we come it's sort of during the holidays, so I haven't been able to actually pop by Santa Maria to say hello.

Jake: Our principal, Jennifer Oaten, would love to have a chat with you, I'm sure.

So, obviously my little by introduction only, you know, scratches the surface of what you've accomplished so far in your career. I can't wait to dive in and chat more about that, but firstly I just wanted to ask, how does it make you feel hearing someone acknowledge your career to date? Like, what emotions are you overcome with?

Silvia: To be honest, I actually feel really grateful. I feel like been an honor to have had so many opportunities, to be part of so many important projects and initiatives. Over the years I've actually worked with a lot of very talented people and inspirational people.

Jake: Well, I think you should be extremely proud of yourself. I think your story will [00:04:00] inspire so many people in our community. Not only students, but I think also parents.

I wanted to talk about your current role as an educator in Engineering Studies, Science and Mathematics.

So you've just completed your Master's and have been teaching for around six months. Is that correct?

Silvia: That's correct, yes.

Jake: How are you finding it all so far?

Silvia: I'm loving it, completely loving it, and I think sometimes my students wonder why I'm, you know, bouncing into the classroom. I think, you know, they can absolutely see the excitement in me.

And when I tell people actually, you know, friends and family about how I'm going, they often make a comment around how happy I am, you know. They can see that. I'm actually really excited about my new role.

Jake: Yeah, I think I can say the same. You know, working in a school, it's such a lovely environment and you can see the teachers are all very passionate about what they [00:05:00] do, and it really rubs off on the girls. You can really feel that sense of community, so it's very nice.

How did you find the transition moving from the corporate world into an educational environment?

Silvia: To be honest, I actually didn't feel the change was that significant. The reason why I say that is I'm very much about incorporating my 20 years of corporate and consultancy experiences into my lessons.

I am very big on helping students make those links between what they're learning now and, you know, everyday application, and that's my passion. I wanna bring the Science and the Maths to life. In Engineering Studies, it's very much around integrating a lot of different subjects, but it's actually then linking to, you know, what could they use it for in every day application?

Jake: What inspired you to make the jump [00:06:00] and switch career paths? Because they're obviously quite different industries.

Silvia: So, the truth is I've always been very fascinated about how our brain works.

I'm very much, you know, about how people work, how we evolve as well. Then, you know, after becoming a mother and having my own children, I looked into how they would learn and how they would develop. So, I finally got the courage to then go, you know, what I actually want to make that difference, not just with my own children, but with other children, you know, our next generation.

Furthermore, towards the end of my career at Qantas, and when I went into consultancy, I did a lot of work around social issues, ethics, and sustainability. So, from my perspective, I really want to make sure I actually play a key role in helping our next generation, bring that to life.

So we often have really aspirational [00:07:00] goals and we plan and have these strategies, but then when it comes to, you know, applying or implementing and making it real, that's where we often fall down on. And so with my 20 years of experience of being in a real business, I want to actually impart that onto our next generation and actually help them learn how they can actually make aspirational goals into reality.

Jake: That's awesome. And what do you think is your key takeaway and advice for someone wanting to make switch? Because I think sometimes we can feel a little bit pigeonholed, like once we've chosen a career, that's kind of the path we're heading down and you know, having the courage to stand up and make that change can be quite daunting.

So what would your advice be for someone who's maybe going through that sort of thought process?

Silvia: First [00:08:00] of all, don't ever think you're too young or too old to make that change. And the truth is we all have very different thresholds in terms of how we manage or accept change. What I can say about that is, if you think about that transition and it gives you those butterflies in your stomach and you're so excited, follow that.

I remember the day I decided I was going to pursue, you know, a career in education and that I was gonna enrol into the Master's degree, I was so excited. I was beside myself, you know, so don't be afraid and don't think you know that you're too old to make that change or you're too old to go back to studies.

Believe in yourself, and talk to others. You know, talk to other people that've made the change, and even if you don't know anyone that's made that transition, it's just to talk to other people that believe in you and that will support you.

Jake: I'd like to go back in time and talk a little bit about your time working at [00:09:00] Qantas. So Qantas is Australia's largest domestic and international airline. It is one of the strongest brands in

Australia, and also regarded as one of the world's leading long distance airlines and is also the safest. Qantas has even taken out crown as Australia's most attractive employer on more than one occasion.

So I mean, we're talking a 17 year stint across seven different roles at such a large scale company. I mean, I can't even begin to imagine how much you would have taken away from that experience. To start, can you maybe tell us what drew you to Qantas as an employer?

Silvia: Absolutely. I mean, I was always a keen traveler.

I was very lucky that at a very young age I did a lot of travels. I suppose, you know, that industry was very attractive. I suppose maybe this is the nerdy engineer in me, but, I always thought air travel was one of the best inventions of our time. [00:10:00] So, it was only natural that I wanted to, as a budding aerospace engineer, work for an iconic brand.

Jake: I mean, seven different roles across the same business is pretty epic and probably pretty unheard of. How did you manage to work across so many different parts of the organization?

Silvia: So I spent my first nine years in Qantas engineering and I was very lucky to, you know, as part of my projects, I had to work with a lot of different stakeholders, from marketing through to legal, through to airport operations, so across the, the business.

And, what I could see was there were a lot of opportunities where we could improve communication as well as relationships between people. So, I embarked on a Master in Communication Management, wanting to then go to other business units and make some positive [00:11:00] change, you know, improve those communication issues or relationship issues and actually help the business to be more efficient.

So as part of that journey, I made sure I networked with people across the different business units, be really honest around, you know, where I was at, what I was looking for, and when it came to wanting a new role, I would make that really clear as well. So I think it's really important to communicate to other people, let them know what you're about, and ask them to help you on that journey.

Jake: I guess that kind of leads on to my next question. What do you attribute to your success in climbing the corporate ladder? What do you think led to you being able to transition into different areas of the business?

Silvia: Surround yourself with advocates. Similarly to what I was saying around making that transition, you know, what could you do? It's finding those people that will lift you up and support you. So, surround [00:12:00] yourself with advocates and most importantly, be authentic, be genuine, and be kind.

I think we often hear stories from the corporate world or the consultancy world where, you know, the only way to climb the ladder or to achieve what you want is to not be kind, and that's completely not true.

Jake: So you mentioned that you designed a sustainable ethical supply chain framework having co-authored Qantas' Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement. Can you talk to us a little bit about the purpose of this statement and what it actually means?

Silvia: So in a nutshell, the statement or the program is around being transparent to the public around how we do business.

So, in terms of slavery and human trafficking, those issues have been around for a very long time. Sadly, it's only getting worse. So, as part of the program and the statement, [00:13:00] you know, and it's not just Qantas, other businesses, have to do this now as well, is they need to be very clear on how they're doing business in terms of where they're getting their products and services from.

There are countries that have been on this journey for a while. So quite a lot of European organisations have had to be transparent, for quite a long time. Australia in recent years because of a change in legislation, they have to be very transparent.

But ultimately it comes down to, we all need to work together, globally, to try to not just reduce, but eradicate these issues. So you know, that's the key purpose of the program as well as the statement.

Jake: I would imagine there are a multitude of issues that you could address at a company like Qantas. Why modern slavery risks? Like, why [00:14:00] that above everything else?

Silvia: So I think there are a lot of reasons from different perspectives. Personally, it comes to the fact that we need to be caring about other people. Look, when I was talking to, you know, stakeholders about the program, and external people about the program, I used to say, well, it's not just because of legislation and that we have to do it, it's the right thing to do.

But actually thinking back now, it's not even about whether it's right or wrong. It's something we just need to do. I mean, we are talking about potentially our friends, family. It's other human beings, you know. It's the right thing to do, and we really need to work together globally to try to eradicate those issues.

Jake: And can you talk about some of the logistics of putting together [00:15:00] such a big piece of work?

Silvia: Yes. I mean, I would love to have said, and people probably had imagined with Qantas, it must be an enormous team. It wasn't an enormous team. Pretty much I could count with one hand. Look, at the time, Qantas, was really recovering, trying to recover commercially and financially from a lot of global issues, from volcano eruptions to bird flu, you know, there were a lot of crises that they had to try to come out from the other end.

So, we had to be very lean and what I did was I leveraged other airlines as well. This comes back to that networking. Like I said, it's an enormous issue and it's not something that we should try to solve by ourselves. I think we definitely need to work with others. So, talking to other airlines as well as a lot of our suppliers or our partners. A lot of them have worked with organisations from Europe.

So, for example, in the [00:16:00] textile industry, they've been on this journey for quite a while. So in terms of where their material and how the material is getting made, to how are the garments manufactured and tapping into those other experts or people that have actually gone through this, that's the best way to, and that's how we did it.

We were very realistic in terms of we need to just start off small and grow it. We can't resolve everything at one time, but one step at a time. So, it was a real wake up call, to be honest. You know, I was always sort of aware of these issues in the background and, you know, people may have heard about, you know, the 7/11 or the Woolworths trolley collectors and being underpaid, but actually having to create a program and create a process for a large organization such as Qantas, it not only educated me in terms of those issues, [00:17:00] but it also made me realise that it's not black and white.

There a lot of issues that yes, there's got to be a grey area. But, you know, at the end of the day, ultimately what I realise is it has to be solved globally. You know, I use a situation like, you know, polio. Polio was eradicated because, the whole world, you know, banded together and worked together to make sure everyone was vaccinated. So we need to do that, you know, for these, it can't just be individual communities.

Jake: So you also worked on Qantas' Supplier Diversity Strategy. What did this involve, and I guess how did it differ from the Modern Slavery Statement?

Silvia: So with supply diversity, it was around how Qantas procured their goods and services. It's about being very conscious around who they work with. So instead of [00:18:00] going back to the big organisations that we've worked with for a very long time, is that at the end of the day, you know, it's an Australian brand. First and foremost we should look at Indigenous owned businesses, for example. It's around working with other small to medium sized businesses.

For example, there are women owned, women led businesses. So it's around, you know what, let's not keep going back to those big organisations, global organisations. Let's look at other businesses. A very big one was around supporting our Indigenous communities.

Jake: What was your approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, at Qantas?

Silvia: I mean, personally and because I led that program, it's around having the courage to make the change. So the truth is I had a lot of conversations with upper management, stakeholders around, let's look at, when we do want a new product or service, or when we are renewing a contract with a [00:19:00] supplier, let's look at alternative suppliers.

And it's around given them I suppose the courage as well to want to explore that. It's human nature in a way, you know, if it's working, let's just keep going with them. You know, we've been happy with that supplier previously, let's just keep going, you know, but it's having that courage as well as the understanding that it doesn't have to be in the too hard basket. It can actually be done.

Jake: There is no doubt that women are underrepresented in engineering, particularly in Australia. We're really quite far behind from the rest of the world. According to Engineers of Australia, only 12% of engineers in the country are made up of women. Why do you believe this is the case?

Silvia: Look, I think women are aware of how underrepresented their gender is in the discipline. I think it comes down to [00:20:00] individual interests. I don't like to general or be gender biased. I do believe there are just some people that are interested in the industry and there's some people that are not.

Some women could also be put off by the fact that it is currently very male-dominated. So once again it goes back to that individual preference. But, you know, at the end of the day, I think it's important to absolutely support the women that have chosen that path, first and foremost and then continue to promote, you know, continue to celebrate, those women that are currently in that industry and actually keep advertising it. Like I said, I have a son and a daughter and I try not to be gender biased from that perspective, but it's around nurturing those interests, but it's also selling the stories as well.

I think the more women in engineering do talk about, then we can definitely support the next generation of females. You know, more could be more [00:21:00] interested.

Jake: Were there times where you felt that the lack of women present in your field impacted you?

Silvia: Not particularly, and to be honest, because of my seven different roles, I've moved around a lot of different business units.

I actually have been in business units where there have been a lot of females, mainly females and I've actually felt isolated and alone, compared to my time in engineering surrounded by males. So that once again it goes back to our personal experience I'm sure there are lots of other stories from other females in those male dominated business units.

Jake: And have you yourself experienced any gender bias in the workplace? And if so, how did you sort of overcome that?

Silvia: Absolutely. So, I always remember the first time that I got offered my role in [00:22:00] engineering and the manager actually made quite an inappropriate comment. So look, at that time absolutely I could have reported him. I could have absolutely spoken to human resources about it, but for me it was actually proving him wrong.

That that gave me, you know, the best satisfaction to be honest. Like I said, everyone will handle it differently. But personally, I actually just wanted to prove him wrong and I did.

Jake: And why do you feel that it is so important to see more women in STEM type roles?

Silvia: It is a fact from research that males and females operate differently. I've also led teams, I've been in teams myself, and I definitely have seen the value that we, we all get from having people from different backgrounds, right? It's not just gender, but different skills, different experiences, different capabilities.[00:23:00]

Therefore it is important to have that balance. Like you said earlier on, there are still very few females in engineering disciplines and for us to work effectively for any organisation, um, to work effectively is to have that right balance.

Jake: I mean, you're clearly an incredible role model for the Santa Maria College community. You are someone that we would define as a social innovator considering all of the work you've done throughout your career.

For all of our teachers, heads of learning, students and even parents who are continually, you know, looking for ways to innovate, we'd like to ask, I guess, how do you drive innovation?

Silvia: I continuously challenge the status quo. Just because something isn't broken, doesn't mean it can't be improved. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about everything we [00:24:00] are doing, it needs improvement. What I mean by that is, we are often limited in terms of resources.

There could be better ways of doing something, you know, we can possibly be more efficient, especially with technology, with a lot of new research. So don't be afraid to actually find things that you could actually make it better, you know? To me, that's innovation.

Jake: So I guess that sort of leads me into my next question. What is your philosophy on innovation?

Silvia: That innovation is meaningless without purpose. Going back to the fact that we do have limited resources. So it's not about just doing something for the sake of doing something. And I'm a true believer that there needs to be a purpose.

Jake: I know this one's a bit of a tough one, but how do you sort of approach shifting a culture of "yes, but" to "yes, and"?[00:25:00]

Silvia: So I'm an optimist, but a realist at the same time. I'm very practical. It will take work, for sure, but I truly believe it's possible. This is why I became an educator. We need to plant those seeds now.

We need to nurture and foster them and continue to spread the good news and to do that, right? It's not to say we can't try and evolve the current generations, but for me, it's around influencing and supporting the younger even younger generation so that in future, they all become the "yes, and".

I personally won't be able to change the world and no one can on their own, but if we all just planted one seed or more than that, a few seeds, it will grow. You know, one day that massive impact will happen.

Jake: And how do you spot [00:26:00] opportunities for innovation in, you know, the busyness of your everyday life?

Silvia: First and foremost is having that passion for change. I mentioned earlier around how we have different thresholds around accepting managing change. But I think it's the desire that, you know, we can always do things in a different way, more efficiently, more effective, and challenging that status quo is, it's really important.

Once again, it's not to say, you know, we are doing everything wrong, it's just saying that, we've learned so much through research and through technology now, we can continuously, make those changes for the better.

Jake: And what are some ways you've measured your social impact throughout your career?

Silvia: Feedback, whether it's direct or indirect. Look, I've had direct feedback from small Indigenous businesses, to [00:27:00] say wow, you know, for us to then, to want to engage them like a large

organization, um, it's helped them grow, you know, and it's not just economically from their small business perspective, but the impact to their families because of the ability for them to work with a large organisation.

So in terms of indirectly, look, I'm, like I said, I'm an optimist. I truly believe that what I've done to date, will one day grow to have bigger impacts. So, like I said, it's like that small drop of water and, and the ripple effect.

Jake: So I'd like to go back in time and talk a little bit about your high school experience at SMC.

You know, there is no doubt that high school is critical in our formative years. It goes beyond just developing a basic education level. Social skills are taught, and more importantly, [00:28:00] most people start to realize who or what they are, their likes and dislikes and their personality traits. So in saying this, how would you describe yourself in high school is the Silvia we're speaking to now, similar to the Silvia from the 90s?

Silvia: Hopefully I've got better hair, but look, I think yes, absolutely in a way. I was different in the sense that I spoke my mind. I was extremely independent. That was because I had a slightly unusual upbringing where I wasn't raised by my immediate family, you know, from a young age. I had relatives that helped do that and I was a boarder as well.

Um, so I had to learn at a very young age to survive. And I learned that if I wanted something to happen, I would have to do it myself. I really think that helped me in adulthood. You know, it's not about sitting around waiting for someone [00:29:00] else to make it happen. It's about you making it happen. So set those goals, and then go for it.

Jake: So you mentioned that you grew up, um, in a traditional Chinese household. How did this impact your approach to learning and living as a teenager?

Silvia: I must admit, there were challenging years. Like I said earlier on, I wasn't raised by my immediate family from a very young age.

I grew up to be, you know, very independent, had my own mind and at that stage, as a teenager, as an adolescent, you know, so much is happening, you know, with our minds, emotionally, physically, and mixed with cultural differences, you know, between the east and the west, there were definitely challenging years.

My parents at times couldn't understand where I was coming from and I couldn't understand where they were coming from. I suppose from my perspective, I took the good bits from the east and the good bits from the west and [00:30:00] effectively set my own goals, and just went for it.

I was so independent that I actually moved to Sydney when I was 18 years old. At the time I thought, yes, I'm an adult. You know, I'm so mature and so old and to be honest, looking back now, you know, 18 years old, it wasn't old at all.

Jake: So was there a particular teacher or subject or co-curricular program which you think may have sparked your passion for wanting to make a difference in the lives of others?

Silvia: I always remember, I had several teachers that I could absolutely see their passion, you know, not just the passion for the subjects they were teaching, but the passion for their students. That's what I hope I'm doing now and that I will continue to do for my students. And to me, I absolutely think education or educators, you know, it's a vocation.

Unfortunately, in my days we didn't have [00:31:00] STEM programs or, you know, other really great co-curricular programs that SMC is doing. But like I said, it goes back to I had a lot of teachers that were, I could see their passion.

Jake: That's awesome. And what do you think are the three most valuable skills you gained from your SMC education, which you still carry with you now?

Silvia: Public speaking. Absolutely public speaking, organizational skills, and team building. So, they were not just valuable at school. Very relevant in the outside world. There are other skills, but those were definitely the key ones for me.

Jake: And I have to ask, if you could go back in time, would you have changed the way you did anything?

Silvia: Absolutely not. I'm very much the type of person that I do [00:32:00] reflect on my past, and I think it's really important to do that, but I'm very much about looking forward. So reflect on the past and look to the future, you know, how you could do things differently, and better.

It is not to say forget about it, but it's to reflect and I had a lot of fond memories at the College.

Jake: What does the future look like for you?

Silvia: I would like to create those ripples in the education industry. Obviously, I would love to see my students now evolve. But at the same time, I actually came into education because I have a passion to support my, my colleagues, you know, the other educators. I truly believe educators are undervalued in this country and I really want to be able to change that. So absolutely I want to see my students, you know, thrive and, and develop.

Um, but at the same time, I'm hoping to. To [00:33:00] support my, my colleagues.

Jake: And just adding to that, do you have any long-term goals or career objectives?

Silvia: Well, my family will probably kill me, but I mean, I've just finished my Master's degree, but I've been thinking about a PhD and the reason for that is, look, I think it's such a blessing to be able to learn new things, at any age.

Um, but more importantly, I'm really interested in doing further research. I'm an advocate of inclusive education, diverse and inclusive education. So research more into how we can continue to support those diverse learning needs. I'm also very interested actually in. You know, mental health and the whole system around grades and university entrance requirements.

Look, if it was up to me, I would completely get rid of those exams. I don't actually think scores are important. I actually [00:34:00] believe in what that person has learned and how they've become a better person because of what they've been exposed to. So I've got a long list of research topics, but yes, they're some of my objectives and look, if I could remove greed from the world, I would add that to the list too.

Jake: So that brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you so much for coming onto our podcast. It's been an absolute pleasure chatting with you. I think your approach to life is, you know, truly inspiring and I think our listeners will have gained such valuable insights.

Also, thank you to our listeners for tuning in. We really appreciate your support. If you head to our website at www.santamaria.wa.edu.au, you'll be able to find more information about Silvia and her work, as [00:35:00] well as the transcript to this episode. Also, remember to subscribe to our podcast and let us know what you think.