

## Peter Sheehan: A Journey in Psychology

My journey began in the late 1950s as a student of psychology at the University of Sydney, and I soon became captured by the discipline. I was enormously influenced by key academics in my student days and their stimulation was importantly extended by the network of colleagues and professionals I came into contact with overseas.

I took up of the Chair of Psychology at the University of Queensland in 1973 and I stayed at that university for some 25 years, where I developed my professional expertise in diverse areas. I grew strengths in research evaluation which took me to the Chair of the ARGC and the Research Grants Committee of the ARC; at the same time, I was heavily involved as the President of our Society in restructuring the APS and forming the Divisions of Scientific Affairs and Professional Affairs; I took up the Presidency of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia; and my research interest in aggression expanded out to practical concerns about the impact of the cinema, which has been an abiding interest of mine through my life. I found myself taking responsibility for appeal cases to the Commonwealth on censorship decisions for films and videos released in Australia. All of these positions have benefited from the application of my discipline in very different ways.

In many ways, I found myself at the crossroads of change in a complex environment that was evolving on many fronts. The notion of leadership necessarily emphasises the characteristics of a particular person that makes him or her suitable to lead others. In my life there has been an enormous influence of situations that have presented themselves, and I think they have enabled me to be an active part of a great deal of change. To cope I had to perceive change was necessary and adapt to it in some way, using whatever personal and professional skills I could. In taking up the Vice Chancellorship of Australian Catholic University - which was a particularly challenging position for me - I saw the possibility of influencing a university to grow and mature, and I set out intentionally to try to make a difference, with the hope that I could be an agent of enduring change.

In following this path, my professional life illustrates to me the importance of four things: take the opportunities that face you; use, when you can, the skills you think you have; pursue your wider interests in ways that supplement practically your professional concerns; and try to adopt a management style that is firm but collaborative.

Looking back, I think the following principles have been important to me:

One must be confident in oneself and set standards for others to emulate. If personal and moral integrity are not present, I think leadership can't be genuine.

Leaders must actively participate and share in what is happening around them.

Leaders need to constantly reflect and share in the analysis of the reasons we do what we do; in this way I think we create the conditions for finding flexible solutions to the problems that exist.

To take people with you, you need to guide them from the bottom up, and not from the top down. When you hold senior positions, others look for direction, but unless you listen to concerns from the grass roots, in giving direction, you cannot take others with you. I strongly believe that genuine change has to be based on co-participatory involvement.

My last principle and maybe the most important one of all to me is that everyone exists to be respected. I believe mutual tolerance and respect are two of the most important pre-requisites for change to be long-lasting.

Psychology obviously has been a critical part of my life and I am immensely grateful to the discipline for shaping my journey through it. Also, I am profoundly grateful to those who have helped me along the way.

**Peter Sheehan AO**

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