**SWIM Inspiring Stories**

**Lord Mayor Sally Capp**

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**NATALIE HANNAN**

I'd like to start by acknowledging that I'm hosting the *Inspiring Stories* webinar on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations, custodians and leaders of this incredible land and waters for thousands and thousands of years, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge, and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and I welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here with us today. Thank you for joining us. I want to also acknowledge all of our First Nation colleagues for their important contribution to our academy.

I'm Professor Natalie Hannan, the Associate Dean Diversity and Inclusion for the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, and I resolutely believe that we all have the right to a safe, fair, and equitable workplace, where an individual's race, their gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, background, where disability or mental health issues should not be a barrier to reaching their full potential.

Our faculty is rich in impressive and accomplished women breaking barriers and challenging the status quo, and in 2022, there is still under representation at senior and leadership levels within our faculty, and while we have certainly moved towards enhancing representation, there remains important work to do around gender equality and broader diversity and inclusion. It is my hope that by having conversations that challenge our systems, and inspire leadership from within, and enhance our support of the talented people in our faculty, that we will allow women to reach their full potential, and highlight the various barriers our people face, and in addition to me having the privilege of talking to incredible, inspiring speakers, I'll open the conversation up to you all, ask questions of your own, and at the end, as usual, you'll be able to join breakout groups in breakout rooms, in smaller, more intimate groups to discuss some of the things we've talked about today.

I am thrilled now to be introducing to you our Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sally Capp. Sally is the first woman to be directly elected as Lord Mayor. Sally studied law and commerce at the University of Melbourne, and she came to local politics following a long career as a lawyer, a senior executive, and a businesswoman, having started her own business in venture capital, and subsequently listed on the ASX. She held senior positions at KPMG, ANZ Bank, and Herbert Smith Freehills, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce, and the Property Council, and again, Sally made history by being the first woman Board Member of the Collingwood Football Club. Perhaps even more exhilarating as Sally is a passionate Magpies fan, and since recovering from cancer, Sally's professional life took on a community focus, working as CEO for the Committee for Melbourne, and as Victoria's first female Agent General in London, Sally entered local government in 2018, and was re-elected as the Lord Mayor in 2020. She's involved in various charities and is currently on the board of the Olivia Newton John Cancer Research Institute, and the Mary Jane Lewis Scholarship Foundation.

Sally is also known to many for empowering women to be daring and fearless leaders, so thank you so much for joining me today.

**SALLY CAPP**

Thank you for the very warm welcome from you, Natalie. So thank you for having me, and it's really a pleasure and an honour to be part of your group today.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
Firstly, if it's all right, I was hoping we might find out a little more about you, and if you're happy to tell us a bit more about your journey from your childhood through your days, here at the University of Melbourne, and moving into politics.

**SALLY CAPP**

Yes. Well, thank you. I often describe myself as a millennial before my time. I've had so many career changes, and I really love to challenge myself, and to stretch as much as I can, and I'm captivated by new experiences, new challenges and new opportunities, and that sense of development, learning and knowledge, so that's really driven a lot of those changes. I give you that sort of broad context because I was brought up by very can-do parents. My mother worked as well as my father - very unusual in those days - a long, long time ago, and there was some central themes.

The first one was about working hard, and that sense of attitude and application, "To support aptitude," as my dad used to say, so that was really important. A real appreciation for education, and in our household neither of my parents had gone to university, so this was an important thing for them, and also, from primary, secondary, through to tertiary education, I think that quest for knowledge, and for really empowering yourself through education was central, and then the final thing I'll say is that we are a real family of ‘have a goers’. I'm a serial ‘have a goer’, from being that kid at school that when teacher would say, "Does somebody wanna do this first or have a go?" I would be the one putting my hand up, through to it being a core feature of my career is just that willingness to have a go.

It's led to many humiliations and failures, so I don't want to put a gloss on this, but I've really come to respect failure, and the role that it played in my own development, and I've had so many incredible experiences from literally being a serial ‘have a goer’. So those things really came through very strongly through my family and my early years, and they've really continued as consistent themes through my career.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
Oh, I love that, and probably one of my favourite sayings is, "Just give it a crack," and you'll see if you can do it, and if you can't, then you'll learn, you'll get through it or you'll ask for help, so I love that, so I think we're kindred spirits there. That's fantastic. And how exciting, but perhaps sometimes daunting for you to have been the first woman in so many roles. What does this mean to you? Did you even realise at the time you were blazing such an important trail for so many?

**SALLY CAPP**  
No, of course, and we often say that as women, don't we? Where we tend to be, to think that we are more opportunistic than strategic about these things, but often, they come together. I'm very strategic about creating options, and constantly reviewing what those options are for me, professionally, but I'm also very open to what might come my way, and being able to be adaptive, and flexible, and move quickly when opportunities present. So, I think it is a balance of both of those things. The first time I was a first, if you like, was actually the Board of the Collingwood Football Club, and I'm just a feral Collingwood supporter, so at that point, I wasn't focused on the first bit, I was really motivated about getting involved, but it does come to one of my career rules, which is about telling people what you want in life, and because most people do want to help you, but if they don't know what you want, then it's difficult to have worthwhile support because people will just push you in the directions they think are best for you, not what is really what you want to achieve. I've clumsily described that, but just to cut a long story short, I've always been a passionate Collingwood supporter.

I got into my career and had been running my own business, listed on the ASX, as you said, and thought, "Now's the time for me to start thinking about how I can get back involved in the club," and it was actually a male colleague who knew my professional background well, who said, actually with disdain, "What would you do at a football club?" And so it motivated me to say, "Well, I could do lots of things, but I do think I could be on the Board given my business background, and I feel I've got a lot to contribute in terms of growing the commercial side of the business, and that's where I'd like to be." It wasn't until there was that trigger of somebody saying, "What would you do there?" And a man who just couldn't believe that a woman could operate in that environment, really triggered me to crystallise what that role might be, and from there, a number of things happened, and as is often the way, when you put it out into the universe, the opportunity appears, but it is important to, I think, really to be able to verbalise what your aspirations and ambitions are, to be open to others supporting you in that, but you've really got to own it, firstly, and it's been an important hallmark, as well, of how I've operated, is to really own my own sense of success, and own my own aspirations, and be excited about them.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

Sometimes that's it, isn't it? I think it's when somebody questions or puts any type of thought out there that there's a doubt that you could do something, it cements, this ‘actually I can do this’, and I'll tell you how I'm gonna do it, so sometimes, maybe that wasn't the intent of the comment, but sometimes that's the outcome, which I think is fantastic.

So I first heard you speak, actually years ago now, and you were telling this story to a room of women leaders about Vida Goldstein, another incredible trailblazing woman, who in the late 1800s and early 1900s, actively supported women's rights and emancipation in a variety of fora, and this story really resonated with me at the time, and while it didn't lead to her own election, it certainly forged a path for many who came after. I really think there is so much power in sharing our stories, the good and the bad. How important do you think it is that we share these inspiring stories, and sometimes focus on the effort to drive change, rather, not necessarily the outcome?

**SALLY CAPP**  
Exactly. We are so on the same page here, Natalie, because particularly in this role, for me, the sharing of stories has become absolutely key, and I've made a conscious decision to use more quotes by women, to share the stories of women, because when I came in as Lord Mayor, one of the first things I did was stood in front of the big marble boards in Town Hall, that have the names of the Lord Mayors chiseled in with gold leaf, and realising that of 104, there had actually been two previous female Lord Mayors, when Councillors rotated through the role. I had never heard their stories.

I did not understand the influence that they'd had on our city, which is substantial, Winsome McCaughey and Lecki Ord, and it really triggered in me that sense of the saying, "You can't be what you can't see," that we need to tell these stories. We're not represented in the statues around town, we don't hear our stories on the news or in documentaries, not very often. I know that's starting to change now, but we all have a role to play in sharing those stories and telling our own stories. It's one of the reasons why I like to really make a commitment to forums like yours today is so that we can share stories and inspire each other. So for me, it's absolutely key, and like the Vida story, for me is really important because it was a big part of the decision I made to even run for Lord Mayor, because, as I said, I have a respect for failure, but please do not doubt. I am highly competitive and I like to win, and so when I was faced with running the first time, in 2018, it's not anything I'd done before, and I really was daunted by the whole process, and the public nature of effectively applying for a job, and the fact that I really didn't know how to go about it, and I was initially very worried about let's say the biggest public humiliation I was probably ever going to experience if I lost, and what I realised, in reflecting back on stories like Vida, is it was being involved in the election, it was being a voice in the debates, it was the opportunity to talk about issues that were important to women, from Vida's perspective, and that was the win. That was a big part of what changes trajectories, is just being involved in the process, putting your hand up in the first place, and going through the process, and that, for me, became the crystallising fact because I realized that just in doing that, I was creating change.

I became very focused on that part of it, and it was very motivating for me. So the Vida story is very close to my heart, and I like to share it because not many people know about that story, and it's been very central to motivating me, particularly in this latest role.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
I look at your leadership style, and I do think it's more of ‘let's get in the arena’, rather than sit and criticise on the sideline, so I think that's fantastic and very inspirational.

On that note, Melbourne has had a challenging two years, and I guess I'm hoping to just try and get a bit more information on how you navigated your important leadership role in Melbourne through these turbulent times?

**SALLY CAPP**  
Look, it's a great question, and it's an ever-evolving aspect, is leadership, because we're always learning, and adding those experiences and learnings into who we are and how we lead. It's been just the most epic four years, for me, so far, because I really came in, as I said, as Lord Mayor. I'd never been in local government before, I'd never held a publicly elected office before, and so I was already in that huge stage of drinking from the fire hose, and throwing myself in the deep end, and learning that way, with lots of great support, but it was also a very controversial time.

There was an intensity and an urgency to what was happening when I was first elected, and then suddenly, all of us were thrown into a situation of incredible uncertainty. No rule book, as the saying goes. A global crisis that had devastating health impacts as well, as we learned over time, of course, economic, mental health, physical, social, all the other impacts that we'll be dealing with for years to come, and it was quite the challenge, and a lot of reflections on the way through, and here are some really quick thoughts. When faced with situations like that, the first thing I like to do is go back to two things; what do I know? That's important just to remind ourselves, and give us some confidence, but it gives you a start on that positive momentum, because you can start with the things you do know, and that you can manage, and then it makes it easier to deal with the more uncertain elements, and the things that are new and challenging. So that's important.

Then the other aspect that I started with, and we did here at Town Hall is what is essential? What is critical? What is it that we needed to do that no other level of government was doing, or no other organisation? And really focusing on those essential elements because one, they're critical, but two, again, it gives you a sense of action, delivery, implementation, that positive momentum that then really starts to give you some insight into how you might take the next steps, and let's face it, as most of most of us know in this forum, the hardest thing is starting.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
It's the blank page. As soon as you start and you create that momentum, you've got a better ability to manage issues as they come along. So those were two core things. The other thing that I find important is to be able to say, "I don't know all of the answers," to say, "Let's make some decisions, let's experiment, let's explore, but we might have to make other decisions relatively quickly if those things don't work." It's being open to feedback and other people's ideas, and I think that sense of vulnerability, and the way that it plays out in those situations, but not just at a crisis, we actually face many of those situations, maybe in smaller ways, day-to-day, and I think it's a great hallmark, if I can use a generic approach for a moment, of a lot of women's leadership is to be completely comfortable with vulnerability, and to be inclusive, and embrace other inputs, and I think it's powerful, and when you're in a time that we've had in the last couple of years, or almost three years now, really being the type of leader that can be adaptive, that can include people, can take feedback, and respond in an agile way. That's exactly what you have to do because you don't know with certainty what other path you should take.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
Yeah. I couldn't agree more, and I think it's about that, just again, it comes back to a bit of your mantra, just got to get in and see, and we didn't have any idea what to do in this time, and, I think, partly, the great leaders did shine through, and were able to keep things going.

What do you think you're most proud of over the past two years?

**SALLY CAPP**Oh, golly gosh. Well, you may have already figured this out, but I'm a real optimist, not just a glass half full, I'm a glass all the way full kind of person, and I can take you into many of the most devastating impacts over the last three years, but there have been so many silver linings as well, and I'll touch on just a few. Have I got time for a few?

The first one was focus on people. Really, the first big decision we made is that we wanted to keep all our team employed. We felt that was important, so that we could deliver those essential services, so that we could provide some confidence and certainty at a time of so much uncertainty, but to do that, we also needed to be flexible because some of the roles we just couldn't deliver, our libraries closed, for example, and gyms, so what could we do with those staff? So, it was the commitment to people, and then that sense of culture about being all in, and people being flexible. It was an incredible sight to behold. To see the way that the entire team responded to just rolling their sleeves up, and doing whatever was necessary, but that only came because we really showed our commitment in people, and it’s really provided a fantastic undercurrent to our ongoing culture, here at Town Hall.

The second thing I wanted to note was that we've really morphed more into being a City of Yes. We've identified so many of the barriers that we'd put up for ourselves, in terms of how we went around delivering services, programs, and projects, and that time of COVID, when we had to act quickly in so many ways, meant that we are now constantly reassessing and challenging to improve the way that we operate, and it's resulted in some fantastic outcomes. We're accelerating out many of our permit processes, but we delivered programs like Outdoor Dining in what would've otherwise taken us 18 months, in eight weeks. It just shows you what's possible, and it's been very empowering for everybody as well, I think, to have that authority, and that's been brilliant. So look, there are a couple of internal things, but externally, there are so many to mention. The inspiration of individual acts was really what motivated me every single day when I was feeling like I was going into the depths of the crisis and happy to speak more about those, but what was a constant thread through the entire crisis was an expectation from our stakeholders that we remained committed to progressing the big issues that we'd faced pre-COVID, anyway.

So despite the crisis, making sure we remained focused on our efforts around affordable housing, on climate change, and responding to climate change, and the fact that our community really, not only gave us the permission to keep doing those things but expected it of us actually filled us with pride and a sense of purpose. We had, of course, to respond to the crisis, but we could keep working on these big issues, and we've made enormous leaps and bounds on, for example, projects to help rough sleepers in our city, that really have been the direct results of those extraordinary circumstances of the crisis. I reflect with a lot of hope for the future, based on how we responded as a community during that crisis and those ongoing expectations. It's been fantastic.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

I think it's really important that, as you say, that the other things kept progressing because, as we know, the pandemic was going, but these other things weren't going away. I think it's a testament to your leadership, and, as you say, the community, to expect that we actually continue, and make sure we progress these things, because eventually, we will come out of this and we need that hope for the other things, and there's these big issues, such as climate change, that's absolutely not going away, so I think it's fantastic.

I think I know the answer to my next question, but because you're such an optimist, as you say, but I'm sure that in many of these senior executive and leadership roles that you've faced many hurdles, just in general, but particularly as a woman, how do you deal with this? Does this derail you or does this inspire and motivate you?

**SALLY CAPP**  
Mm, well, you've probably already guessed. I really use them as very motivating moments, but it's not to say that I don't also have moments of being frustrated, disheartened, downright frustrated, and disappointed, and they can be very emotional times, and frankly, you've got to go through all of those emotions, and be able to come out the other side. Luckily for me, as an optimist, I'm able to move through those quickly, and when I started work, they were very different circumstances. I remember being in a meeting as a young lawyer, and having a few things to say in the meeting, and afterwards, the partner in charge took me aside and basically said, "I don't give an F what you think. You were only there to look good, and I don't value your opinions in any way, and neither did the clients," so shut up, basically, that was a lovely introduction in the first couple of weeks to my legal career.

We've moved on since then, but there are many barriers that remain that we can see and that are obvious, and I think the harder ones are even things like unconscious bias, they're just so difficult to deal with. For me, one of the biggest things when I'm feeling really frustrated or dismayed about a situation is to know that just fronting up, just continuing and being, and persevering, and knocking on that door, or raising that issue, or highlighting the injustice, just by continuing to do that, there is value in that, both for me personally because it's a great outlet, but to not let those things go necessarily. Sometimes you have to go, "Let it go for a little while and come back to it," to get an effective outcome, but nonetheless really persevering, and that sense that there's power in just turning up and continuing to do that has been very helpful to me in facing some of those barriers, but I do think that there's still so much work. I see it as Lord Mayor, diversity and inclusion, gender, of course and women are the biggest group facing discrimination in terms of a number, and I know, as a watershed, if we can move through more of those issues, it'll have positive ripple effects across other groups, but, of course, race, and faith, and education, and sexuality, abilities, you mentioned earlier, there are just so many groups that feel discriminated, that can feel also fearful, who don't feel heard, and we've got a lot of work to do to really release the potential of all of these people that are currently being quashed and frustrated in some way because of the structures that exist.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

Yeah and absolutely. Yeah, I agree, absolutely, and I think the more we can, as you say, just keep fronting up, and just turning up and making sure we're advocating, particularly when others don't have a voice as well.

I think is very important we keep doing that. There's a lot of passionate and hardworking Melburnians here, listening today and they obviously support our wonderful city. Is there some good ways that they can assist with the recovery efforts, as we navigate through this pandemic, and contribute to Melbourne's future?

**SALLY CAPP**  
Yes, there are many ways. Thank you, and the power of the individual acting in the best interests of community, we saw highlighted so much during COVID and I sat in so many international forums, and national forums with mayors, and it really was a feature, even when we felt really frustrated, at times, of being the city with the most days in lockdown, there were so many communities around the world that said, "Wow, your community are willing to do that for the good of all." They saw it as something incredibly positive.

Well, the first thing is to really value the city. We are a capital city. It is a unique environment, but it's dependent on people coming into the city. We've had a very visitor, event, culture, sports-led recovery this year, recognising that when people come in for a visitor experience, we had the best chance of moving COVID caution to COVID confidence.

Our visitor numbers on weekends and to major events, are consistently above pre-COVID levels, so that's been brilliant. The central business district has recovered well, for Melbourne there's still a huge amount of work to do, and we recognise that there's a new rhythm to working. It's been normalised, flexible working arrangements, and for us, it's really trying to crystallise as quickly as possible the purpose for which people will come together in teams, or with clients, or with stakeholders, how they want to work in environments, at scale, in cities like Melbourne, how they're going to leverage the dynamism of city capital, city environments.

These are the sorts of questions that major cities around the world are coping with, but we're really needing and seeking the feedback, and the drive of the individuals coming in to move us to what that resolution, and what that final rhythm will look like, and so we're still in that stage of transformation and transition, which is a lot of uncertainty still for our small businesses, and of course it's the virtuous or the vicious cycle, whichever way you want to look at it.

Those businesses need people to be able to stay open, particularly the small businesses, but people come to the city because they enjoy the uniqueness of so many of those small businesses, and the experiences they create. So we're just trying to hold it all together at the moment as we move towards this new rhythm, and I would really encourage people to settle into and identify what that rhythm means for them, and they're very individual discussions with employers, based on your needs, your team's needs, your organization's needs, your clients' needs, et cetera. These are the big questions of our time, but we're really hoping, as Team Melbourne, we can move to towards that as quickly as possible, so I think really appreciating the city, and moving into that new rhythm, they would be very helpful things, and look, beyond that, we already do so many things with the University of Melbourne.

But for all of you, as members of our community, being engaged in homelessness issues, and solutions around affordable and social housing, being engaged in the urgency of responding to climate change and all of the programs underway, whether it means you want a worm farm at home, or whether you're going to be advising us on our big, renewable energy battery project, there are so many ways to engage with us, and at local government, most closely connected to people. it's the most vital of relationships.

**NATALIE HANNAN**

One last question, and it could be really quick, you wake tomorrow and you're boss of Australia, you've woken, you're the new prime minister. You could change one thing for Australia to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and reconciliation. What would that be? –

**SALLY CAPP**  
The first thing I would do is set targets. You can call them quotas, I'm fine with that too, is to set targets, to measure those targets, and to performance manage against those targets. We talk about equity and equality, and we have lots of great conversations about those things, but unless we set the targets, what gets measured gets managed. We are not getting the leaps and bounds that we're expecting. We're getting incremental change and it's not on. If we really value this and we think it's important, like any other strategy that we have in a work environment, you need to set the targets, you need to measure them, and you need to manage the performance and achievement of those. That would be something I would do immediately, and I think it would completely change the approach and culture we have.

**NATALIE HANNAN**  
I think so too. Thank you so much, Lord Mayor Sally Capp, for your time today. Its been fantastic to be able to discuss with you the power of storytelling, and driving change, and gender equity, and how we might now go forward, and champion some more of this, so thank you so much for that.

**SALLY CAPP**  
Thank you so much. It's been great. Thank you.