



Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus

Episode 5: Jane Adams, Executive General Manager, Human Resources for Technology Operations at CommBank

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Interviewee: Jane Adams

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Jane Adams, Executive General Manager, Human Resources for Technology Operations, CommBank on the impact of working at two speeds, how ambition drives growth and the importance of giving girls in STEM relatable experiences. Jane also talks about focusing on the compass, not just the clock, the value of career sponsorship and how your skills sit in a box called your mindset.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together.

Shivani [00:00:34] Welcome to Leading Women, the place to ignite your leadership and redefine the business landscape. I'm your host, Shivani Gopal, and in today's episode, we chat with a visionary leader whose zigzag career path inspires outcomes. Jane Adams, Executive General Manager, Human Resources for Technology Operations at CommBank, is a thought leader, career shaper and change agent with a belief that leadership comes in different guises. Jane shares the impact of working at two speeds, how ambition drives growth and the importance of giving girls in STEM relatable experiences that enrich their career opportunities. Her sage advice includes focusing on the compass, not just the clock, the value of career sponsorship and also self-employment, and how your skills sit in a box called your mindset. And I just love how Jane encourages us to bring our rich life skills to work. Jane, welcome to Leading Women. It is so great to have you here.

Jane [00:01:41] Oh, thank you for having me in person and on a sunny day, two things you can't take for granted.

Shivani [00:01:46] Two things that in these days are very rare indeed. Now, Jane, I want to talk about your leadership journey because you're a great example of the fact that leadership and success isn't always a linear path. Sometimes you zig and you zag, what's your path been till now?

Jane [00:02:03] Yes, great expression, zigzag, I started as a consultant, so actually was very far into my career before I actually led a team of people who reported to me. Most of my leadership in my early days came from leading projects, leading outcomes for work, and a lot of influence and negotiation and stakeholder management, which are all good leadership skills. But I didn't actually lead a large team of people well into my career.

Shivani [00:02:34] Isn't that interesting, Jane, because you do now lead very large teams as an executive general manager at CommBank. But of course, you didn't have that experience of leading large groups of people before yet here you are. What advice do you have for women who think, well, in order to get into leadership, I've got to be leading people and teams?

Jane [00:02:54] Yes, I think leadership comes in different guises. I think still to this day I have conversations with women and men, to be honest, around what is the path that they need to take in order to get to senior positions. And a lot of the assumption is that it has to be linear, not zigzag, as you mentioned. And the only

way is to get more budget, more accountability, more people and that's not the way that you collect the unique skills that you can when you lead in different ways. I think there is an absolute advantage to thought leadership as opposed to just people leadership. There's an absolute advantage in learning those influencing skills where you don't have the authority as their leader to tell them what to do. You have to inspire them to do what needs to be done.

Shivani [00:03:49] Oh, goodness, I love that so much and the authority by way of experience and time. And what I love about this so much is, Jane, you really role model this as well. And I felt this in our previous conversations. You don't just bring your whole self to work. You bring all of your skills together to work collectively because you've learnt so much through consulting that makes you the formidable leader that you are today.

Jane [00:04:13] That's very kind, I do think work should be considered collecting skills. I'm often looking at different opportunities that I still have myself and for my team, where it's not about the role and it's not about the title, but it's about what skills will you learn if you go and do that piece of work, or what new experience can you have if you go and support a different area of the business. I think in HR we are incredibly lucky that we support some really interesting teams in CBA, we look after the technology, data and operations teams so we get to get really close to understanding AI and data. We get really close to cyber attack and defence. We learn about operations processing. So it's not just the knowledge you have from an HR perspective, it's who you're supporting and all the things you can learn and collect on the way.

Shivani [00:05:13] We've just had a massive tweeted out moment from Jane Adams, can I say? Work is about collecting skills. Here here, I am so with you. Let's talk about leadership parts, Jane, because one of the incredible things that you do is you are able to take a real step back and say, what path am I on and what path am I forging for others, for you, it's all about creating visionary leadership for yourself and for others, regardless if people are reporting to you or not. Can you tell me more about that?

Jane [00:05:43] Yes, I've always been someone who's been really positive and optimistic and so bring a lot of that energy. And I think if you combine that optimism with a really good strategic view of where we can go and what we can achieve that sort of combines to quite a nice sort of visionary style of leadership. And I find it really rewarding to have people who believe in you and are inspired by you and want to come and work with you and help deliver those outcomes. So it's a bit selfish in a way too, because you get to work with great people if you can inspire them and if you have a pathway.

Shivani [00:06:22] That's so incredible and it's sometimes easy to inspire others into believing others than it is to inspire yourself and believe in yourself. So how do you create a visionary pathway for leadership for you, Jane?

Jane [00:06:36] Yes, it's a really good question. I spent my earlier years thinking that you had to just deliver outcomes all the time. I used to have a philosophy where I had to do something good every week, something great every month, something fantastic every quarter, and be really driven by the immediate short-term pieces of work. And then it occurred to me that you can get really busy doing those more urgent pieces or the more, you know, short-term pieces, and that you can still do that. But you also really need to think about what's the impact you can have more broadly over a three-year horizon. You know, what can you do that no one else can do or that you can inspire to bring people around that will leave an actual difference longer-term. So I think the two speeds of work is really important, and I think that leadership pathway shows that you can actually get things done but also leave an impact.

Shivani [00:07:42] I feel like when you said that you invoked in me a vision of that good old time matrix, urgent, not urgent, important, not important. What am I delegating? What am I not? And you're so right, Jane, we do have so many urgent priorities, which means we can't look long-term. And sometimes the pace of business does that to us because we've got so many short-term targets that we need to achieve. I love what you've said about having, you know, two speed, a short-term focus and a long-term focus. How do you manage that when you've got competing priorities in the workforce that are driving you to think just here and now?

Jane [00:08:16] Yes, I think you have to force the time into your diary, into your week to focus on the longer-term. And someone once told me a great expression, make sure you focus on the compass, not just the clock. So know the direction you're hitting and know what you have to achieve over a longer-term horizon because then you will prioritise the clock pieces, the urgent pieces, but they have to be serving and getting you closer to that long-term piece of work. So I think that's the balance, forcing the time into your diary and making sure that you are giving your teams freedom to take time out, to spin things on the more strategic or the longer-term pieces of work as well.

Shivani [00:09:03] So true because as you say, Jane, and I'm paraphrasing something that you said to me the last time we spoke because not everything fits neatly into something that you can do in just three or 12 months. Sometimes you do need to indeed have a longer-term vision, which you, of course, do so well, because you walk the walk and talk the talk. And I want to talk about that when it comes to girls in STEM, because you've been doing a lot of work around looking to the future and doing the work that needs to be done around getting more girls into STEM. Share more about that, please.

Jane [00:09:35] Oh, I'd love to and recently, actually, we just ran our sixth Girls in Tech event at Commonwealth Bank. So let me tell you a little bit more about that. In Year 9 and 10, a lot of young women are pulling out of STEM subjects. They are choosing not to stay in those subjects. And a lot of the time it's because they don't really understand what those subjects will do for them in terms of a career and a job. And they can't imagine what those jobs might look like. And so we started a program where we invite Year 10 and 9 girls and their teachers, importantly to come and have a day at Commonwealth Bank. We bring some inspirational speakers who might be from the bank but also outside of the bank. They talk about their careers. They talk about what they do. We had a panel of four of our most amazing graduates last week talking to the students, and they're not that far different in age. You know, these are early graduates, 20 to 23, really relating to what it's like to be in work. And this is the day where they get to find out what careers in data might look like. What does it mean to actually build a data model? What does it mean to write code to solve a problem that we have at work or to build the latest app that you're using for banking? And what is it like even to be a bit of a detective and really understand what a job in cybersecurity might look like? And I don't think we do enough to explain what the future can look like for them. So they're making choices without that understanding. And so for us, it's a small thing we can do to keep girls in STEM and then hopefully they'll come back when they're studying at university and be one of our interns on a casual basis. And then hopefully they'll even become graduates and work with us permanently. But whether they work in CBA or somewhere else, at least they're in STEM. And there's definitely a need for us to have far more girls and women studying STEM and being part of our technologically-enabled future.

Shivani [00:11:48] I love that so much because what you see, you can become and you're showing girls a genuine future in STEM, but you're also offering these internships because what you experience becomes your reality. And that is so powerful and you don't just have, you know, cyber crime, you've also got, you know, people in financial crime and all sorts of areas of CommBank that actually come through to show a day in the life of for these girls, too.

Jane [00:12:13] That's absolutely right, I mean, financial crime is quite a new career, too. So we can't rely on parents understanding and being able to tell their children of what these jobs are. Some of them have only emerged in the last sort of decade or two. And so we have an onus and an obligation to really explain what a day in the life of these jobs look like.

Shivani [00:12:36] And speaking of parents, Jane, and visionary leadership, you've got a great knack for stepping back and saying, of all of these skills that you've got, you can bring this to the forefront in the work that you do. Tell me the aha moments that you've discovered with mums and the skills that they can bring to the workforce.

Jane [00:12:53] Yes, great question, about three years ago we were discussing the fact that we had far more cyber attack and defence jobs than we had people that we could hire. There weren't enough people in market and we were talking about reskilling and actually what do we need to have as kind of core skills for people to come in and for us to teach them the more technical attack and defence skills and the list of things are obviously things like growth mindset, learning, agility, curiosity. But other than that, it was really great social connections, ability to look through social media with detective-like skills, ability to solve problems, ability to

multitask and when you read that list out, you think of parents and mums and the fact that they are connected both to their own friend network and have great connections and great detective skills. But they also learn from their children, who are often very cutting edge in terms of technology understanding and new apps, new information. So blend that together and returning to work, mums are a great source and a great opportunity for cyber.

Shivani [00:14:07] That is so refreshing and what I love about that so much is your shattering biases because we know that role descriptions so often are written so traditionally, and they're done traditionally because men used to apply and work in those roles and so effectively writing them for men. By rewriting them for skills, you have written them for mothers, an incredible piece of work that you've done. What hope does that give you for the future?

Jane [00:14:31] Well, I do hope that we will not have a gender lens on any role. I mean, we probably still carry that bias. Many of us probably still carry that bias across a number of roles. You mentioned about the writing job descriptions that sound male, we actually did a piece of work in our data area to gender neutralise all of the job descriptions because some of the words are not overtly masculine. But you know, the language and the fact that they are very detailed elements that women might look at and go, I don't have all 30 of those skills. And when we completed that exercise, the number of applicants from females just went up enormously because they weren't put off by reading that very masculine and detailed job description versus a summary of the attributes and skills that you need with some experience required.

Shivani [00:15:30] And I love that you're doing that because you're achieving some real results as opposed to the current numbers that we're seeing where 20% of the graduates are women in STEM?

Jane [00:15:40] Yes, that's right, I mean, we need to increase that number and that's a community and an Australian challenge where we've managed to get to with some of the initiatives we're doing around Girls in Tech, re-writing job description, encouraging females to come into the workforce and be part of it. We've managed to get to about between 28% and 33% female representation in our tech roles. It varies a little bit based on the nature of the job, higher in some areas, a little bit lower in others. But it's really pleasing that across the board we can hit that sort of 33%. But I'm not giving up until we're at least 50.

Shivani [00:16:18] Oh, absolutely, 50 and then beyond, why not, right?

Jane [00:16:22] Total domination.

Shivani [00:16:24] Total domination and speaking of domination, there is a way for us to get there, and that is by supporting and sponsoring each other along that way because, Jane, in order to activate your leadership, you've often been plucked out and sponsored into roles that you weren't quite ready for.

Jane [00:16:42] Oh, absolutely and I make the distinction very clearly here between having a mentor and having a sponsor because I've had a couple of mentors in my life and they've been interesting. There have been lovely discussions, lovely people, cups of coffee, reinforcing so I've enjoyed them. But a sponsor is someone, who spots your capability and pushes you or pulls you into your next opportunity. And I've had four very specific moments in my career where I didn't think I was ready to move or I didn't think I had the skills to move. But they pulled me into it and I felt uncomfortable and I had self-doubt. And for the first six months, I wasn't sure exactly how I was going to pull it off. But every time I've grown from it and every time I've broadened my skillset from it. So those sponsors have been absolutely essential to get me where I am today.

Shivani [00:17:37] How would I find a sponsor in the workforce?

Jane [00:17:41] I think it's a natural connection and energy you find with someone, someone who you can see, you can learn from, someone that you admire in terms of their own career and what they've achieved and just spend time with them. You don't have to ask them to be your sponsor. You don't have to ask them to do anything formally because if you work really well for them and they enjoy working with you and you share your ambition and what you want to do and where you want to go, they will make it happen.

Shivani [00:18:14] And I love that you've talked about sharing your ambition because ambition is a powerful word, not a dirty word that we've often been shamed into thinking. Why do you think it's so important that girls and women talk about ambition more often?

Jane [00:18:28] I think naturally girls are less confident in talking about what they want, whether that be a salary increase, whether that be the next role and so it doesn't have to be a dirty word, as you say. Ambition is about growth. Ambition is about where you can have an impact and where you can support the business with their outcomes as well as growing yourself. So the framing of your ambition is important because it's not selfish. It's actually about collectively doing good for the organisation, the community, the company.

Shivani [00:19:06] Just another tweetable moment there from Jane Adams, ambition is about growth. I absolutely love that and it is so true. Now, speaking about your ambition coming to the forefront, often when you are put into roles that you're not quite ready for, we often feel like, goodness, this is the moment when we can sink or swim. But there are moments of grey. How did you strive and survive in those moments of grey and how do others do the same?

Jane [00:19:34] There will definitely be the grey moments in anyone's career, in anyone's life, I think. And you're allowed to sit in those grey moments for a while and reflect on them and think about how you got here and think about why you're there and how to not necessarily be there for as long next time. Or think about, you know, how to get yourself out of those grey moments, I think. It's important that not everything is sunshine and roses like the bad moments, the tough moments, the ambiguous moments actually give you great learning if you take the time to reflect and learn from those moments.

Shivani [00:20:16] Because you, of course, have grown from your moments of discomfort.

Jane [00:20:22] Yes, I think, you know, people don't like change because it's uncomfortable. Well, not all people, but a lot of people talk about not liking change because it's uncomfortable. But comfort is same. Comfort means you're cruising. Comfort means that, you know, you can enjoy it and people do like the comfort, but you're not usually learning, if you're that comfortable. You really need to be put in positions of newness, of challenge and therefore discomfort to grow and learn.

Shivani [00:20:53] Jane, there's this saying that often goes around and that is do something outside of your comfort zone every single day, what's your version of that?

Jane [00:21:02] Oh, that's a great saying, every day might feel a bit tough, if you had to do it every day. My version of that is probably just say yes. Take every opportunity. If you get given an opportunity, just say yes and you'll learn from it and it might be uncomfortable, but you'll grow from the experience.

Shivani [00:21:23] So Jane, you've achieved some incredible things in your career and a lot of that you have learnt along the way. How do you build a relationship with lifelong learning to be your best self?

Jane [00:21:34] Yes, lifelong learning is a great saying, actually, and I'm a strong advocate for learning, and I think you can learn in many different ways. Often people assume learning means sitting in a classroom or going back to university, and that is definitely one way. Education is important but I think you learn most from exposure to other people's ideas and thinking and experience, experience on the job. I am someone who listens to a lot of podcasts, which is not quite ironic but very important to me is listen to podcasts. Listen to what's going on. Read a lot. Talk to a lot of people and try and integrate the threads that I'm hearing and apply them to different contexts. You don't have to read business books to think about business. You can read history books. You can read autobiographies. You can read thought leadership and different areas and integrate that into what is that going to mean for people, for business, for society and just explore through your thinking.

Shivani [00:22:45] And of course, we have incredible women and men listening to this podcast all wanting to activate their leadership career and if we were to think, you know, how can I do some of the magical stuff that Jane has done to emulate my career in yours, what advice might you have for them?

Jane [00:23:01] Well, I have a very basic level of advice, which is at some stage in your life, be self-employed. And the reason I say that is because you will never learn a greater level of delivery, resilience, engagement in a company because there's a safety net when you're in a company, whereas when you're self-employed, you're as good as your last job and you don't do a good job, you won't get referred, and if you don't work, you won't get paid. So there is something just so educational in my mind from having a moment in your life where you choose to be self-employed.

Shivani [00:23:41] As a self-employed person myself, I can absolutely agree. You really do live and die by your results. And why do you think that lack of safety net just drives you forward in a totally different way?

Jane [00:23:53] I think you're probably slightly out of your comfort zone every day, as you say yes to lots of different opportunities when you're self-employed. And it's not a great word to use, but there's something a little bit safe and entitled about having the security blanket of a company. And I love working for a company, so don't get me wrong, I think it's great to have opportunities where you can, but when you are with a company, you appreciate it more if you know how hard it can be to be self-employed.

Shivani [00:24:27] I got this notion that sometimes we can accidentally take our employed roles for granted that we're always going to get paid next fortnight and next month, and life doesn't work that way. We know through COVID it hasn't worked that way. So I guess if we can have that self-employed mindset even whilst we are employed, if self-employed isn't right for us or it doesn't quite work out, we're always going to be thriving, moving out of our comfort zone and doing just what you have done, Jane, with your career. Now, Jane, at Leading Women, we are committed to activating women's leadership. So I want to know what tool has ignited your leadership that you can share with us for the Leadership Toolbox?

Jane [00:25:05] I think it's mindset, actually you've just triggered me to think this but again, another quote from someone that wasn't for me but I've carried with me for years is that your skills sit in a box called your mindset, and if you don't open your mindset, you'll never be able to apply your skills.

Shivani [00:25:24] If you don't open your mindset, you'll never be able to apply your skills that is so incredibly powerful. Jane Adams, thank you so much for joining us at Leading Women.

Jane [00:25:36] You're welcome. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Julienne [00:25:38] Thanks for listening to Leading Women, where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfocus.com.au and subscribe to Leading Women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at [#leadingwomenaus](https://twitter.com/leadingwomenaus)