



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

Podcast Transcript

Conversations on The Runway – Women in Leadership in Defence – Episode 1

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Guest: WOFF-AF Fiona (Fee) Grasby

Michael:

Warrant Officer Air Force is a position not awarded lightly and one which entails the most important and particular of responsibilities, as well as the broad range of leadership skills and experiences. And rest assured the current Warrant Officer Air Force fits that criteria absolutely. Having served in multiple deployments, both domestically and overseas, including as we will here, Afghanistan. Not only that, but today's Warrant Officer of the Air Force is also the first woman to serve in the role indicative I think of how the RAAF is changing, evolving to reflect the values of the society it's so proudly represents.

But as highly and accomplished serving member of the Royal Australian Air Force WOFF-AF is; there is, as we'll hear, a lot more to Fiona Grasby than just a title and what better candidate could there be to join us in our Women in Leadership series here on Conversations on The Runway. Fiona, great to meet you.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

It's wonderful to meet you too, Michael, and I must say to you though, I tend to kind of jazz up the title a little bit. And what I like to say to the workforce is I am the WOFF-AF. And as you could imagine, that brings a lot of giggles in depending on how the demographic of the audience is. And it's good fun. It's absolutely good fun. So it's lovely to meet you too. And thank you so much for the opportunity to have this conversation today.

Michael:

Look, it's your title you can make it, whatever you like. And speaking of titles, I believe you're very rarely referred to as Fiona it's, Fee. Fiona's probably only when you're in trouble and probably by your parents. And I don't imagine that happens very often these days.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

No, absolutely. And it's quite funny because it's navigating around that when people first meet me and I've got that learned behaviour of growing up and being told Fiona usually as you state, when I was in trouble by my parents. So Fee is certainly ... And my father interesting was a Vietnam veteran. So I've grown up in an army family.

Michael:

Don't worry I do want to get to that. So let's not jump ahead. I would like you Fee, Warrant Officer Fee Grasby to explain WOFF-AF. Tell us more what the title entails, please. People who are not familiar with the job, what actually is it?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

It's an absolute privileged position to have in the sense that the Warrant Officer of the Air Force is the senior enlisted leader for Air Force. So working directly with the Chief of Air Force. And my responsibilities are to the total workforce in the sense that as you stated, it's the only position that sits at an E10 level of the defence structure in the promotion or the rank structure.

And I get to represent the women and men across the air force every day. And it's an absolute privilege because to come through the ranks, starting off as a junior listed and an ACWR recruit to come to this level. But effectively my responsibilities are to support command and that's supporting command across all of our air force. Supporting the workforce and that's our total workforce in our total workforce model in the sense of every SERCAT that serves our great force and also the welfare of all.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So those three pillars of the Warrant Officer of Air Force, I apply across our air force strategy in particular and what we know as our lines of effort. And that's how I define what my responsibilities are on a day-to-day basis. The diversity of what I have to do though is incredible, but I'll go back to the point that I worked for the air force, the women and men of the air force, and I serve them. And that's where I certainly believe that being the world's Warrant Officer of the Air Force is an absolute privilege to do what I do every day.

Michael:

You joined the RAAF in 1987. I can't bear to think of how old you were there Fee. If I may call you Fee, but your pedigree in the organisation goes back to your father as he mentioned before, a veteran of the Vietnam conflict, tell us about your father.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

He was an incredible human. He sadly passed away during my first deployment overseas. But as a Vietnam veteran he was certainly an influencer in my life, in the passion of wanting to serve others. And I can distinctly remember the conversation when I was 16 when he ... Because from as long as I remembered, I always wanted to be a policewoman. And he sat me down one night and we were talking about those aspirations. I was one of those kids that every time you saw a police car, I was hanging around and just incredibly curious about how they serve the community and what help they gave to people.

And through conversations with my dad, he certainly influenced the point of getting a military career initially prior to transitioning to police and influenced me into the air force. And by influencing me into the air force, the aspirations were to always become an air force policewoman.

Michael:

Just back to your father a little bit more, what was the nature of his experience in Vietnam? Where whereabouts did he serve and in what capacity?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

I would love to be able to tell you, but he was one of those veterans that every time I started to probe in reference to his career, he deflected the conversation. He was one of the wonderful humans that although he suffered immensely with post-traumatic stress you would never have known it because outwardly he was incredibly jovial, always the clown at the party, but inwardly suffering immensely with what his experiences were. And that to me also inspired me to continue to serve as long as what I have in particular, the passion that I have with welfare of our workforce.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So I can't give you any clarity in reference to what his experiences were other than at his funeral it was one of those moments in time where I had just, as I said, redeployed home from to attend his funeral and I did the eulogy. And on the way out from the chapel, I had a man come out from the shadows and hand me a letter. And he said to me, you must be Billy Cool Thorns' youngest daughter. And I replied, yes. And he gave me a letter that dad had penned.

And in this letter, he articulated all the demons that he had been dealing with for such an extended period of time. And it was incredible because I hold that letter very dear because they're all the things that he never spoke about, but to see what he was dealing with inspired me even more to do what I do today. So, incredible human and one that I know would be chuffed and so proud of seeing what we're doing today.

Michael:

Wow. I'm sure he was. Would you describe him when you went into the organisation as a mentor?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Absolutely. He always had an opinion and he affectionately used to always call me the blue orchid. But you at every small stone of my career, whether that be graduating at recruits or graduating at my post initial employment training, he was always there. And usually quietly in the shadows of sense and just yeah, he was always there sharing in that. And he was the one I could talk through life with. And I ran away and joined the air force when I was 17. So comparative to life experience, it was quite shallow in that sense. I thought I knew it all through, trust me. But yeah, he certainly was a mentor throughout my experiences in my career.

Every 17 year old knows everything, don't they? Until they realise that they don't. I certainly did.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

You know what? I will say to you now that the 17 year old recruits that we have joining our air force, wow. They are impressive. And I often say I'd love to go back now and rejoin because you know what, the level of education that they have and their curiosity, and they're not defined by their age. It's just, they're incredible. But I will say to our last recruit course that graduated course nine, we ranged from an 18 year old or 57 year old female on that course. So in your opening statement about our diverse workforce, we're certainly representing that as we get our recruits from the door too, which is fabulous.

Michael:

I do want to talk to you about the evolving nature of leadership and command and who we are commanding and their expectations. But a little bit back to your earlier experiences, Fee. Was it what you expected as that 17? Not even 18. You were 17, were you?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. 17 year old. I was the youngest on course. And I grew up in this little tiny place called Gwendolyn on Lake Macquarie. And one of those idyllic childhoods, although I didn't recognise it at the time where you basically say goodbye to your parents on a Friday afternoon and saw them again on a Sunday. No shoes, I never wore any shoes. Life was just, quite carefree and fabulous. So to go from there into recruit training unit, which was in Adelaide at the time. And the first morning when that culture shock first hits you and you're lining up from your parades and we're making beds and it was a shock and awe phase but I loved it.

I absolutely loved it because it was such a purposeful part of my life and it certainly did shape in the sense that I thrived on that excitement. I thrived on that challenge. And the freedom. Although, as I said, my childhood was quite free. The freedom of feeling like I was in this adult world and learning the craft of being an aircraft woman back then yeah it was a fabulous moment.

Michael:

So this is Lake Macquarie in Tasmania or where?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

No. In New South Wales.

Michael:

New South Wales. South Wales and there are a couple of Lake Macquarie's around. So you didn't find going from a shoeless, dare I say, tomboy. Were a bit of a tomboy as a kid?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah, that's a good way to describe me. It was-

Michael:

Not to put labels on you Fee, but.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

No, no, no.

Michael:

Well, did you find the wonderful free life you were living, the shoeless weekends you didn't find the discipline certainly having to go into the discipline of something like air force training difficult, or did you thrive in that very different atmosphere?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

I absolutely thrived because I had grown up in a disciplined household in the sense of the values and expectations of behaviour and commitment with everything that I started, whether that be my

schooling or sporting. So that had been imprinted from an early age, but yeah, I was one of those crazy recruits that, even the times that we had our free time, I was either running or helping other people polish shoes and make our beds 30 centimetres folded down. So all of those things, I just absolutely loved.

Michael:

What did you want to achieve in the air force? Where did you see yourself heading within the organisation?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

I always knew even as a 17 year old that once I joined and went through my training, it was something that I wanted to be in for an extended period of time. But I still have that drive to be a police woman. So I did think at one stage once I did my initial employment time that I would still join the new South Wales Police because I always wanted to be a police prosecutor. But the time came and here I am, I'm still in.

Michael:

How old were you when you had your first overseas deployment?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Great question. I would have been 20, sorry, oh correction, 31 as in deployment. I'd been overseas previously, but not on a operational deployment in that first sense. So 2003 was my first operational deployment.

Okay. Okay. Tell us about that. What was it like, do you remember crossing that threshold from serving domestically to the notion that I may be putting myself and my friends, I maybe entering into a situation of great personal danger? Does every serving member who deploys into an active zone go through something like that? Surely they must.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

You're conscious of it. But with my experiences, I trusted my training. And each deployment is very different because the threat levels, depending on where you're deployed to obviously has an impact on your emotional and the social aspects of how your experiences transpired. But I was pretty excited for the first deployment because I went into a policing role there. Started working as part of the counter-intelligence team.

Michael:

Where was this? What was your first one?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

This was in the middle east area of operations. So it's really great opportunity. And as a serving member, we spend so much time training and we invest so much energy into our specialist fields. So to be able to then transfer that into a deployed environment it's a challenge, but it's incredibly professionally rewarding as well. So I always looked at deployments as an opportunity and that was evident in some of my career choices where I had made decisions not to go through promotion courses because I hadn't deployed at various ranks. And I wanted to make sure in my own professional development, it had nothing to do with anybody else that I could have those leadership

qualities and then transpire that into a deployed environment and still be successful with the team around me. It was really important to me.

Michael:

That's interesting. So, do I understand that you sort of held yourself back perhaps because you didn't feel that you had sufficient experience to advance in one particular direction within the organisation?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Absolutely. So I'm one of those unique ones that I'm not defined by what I do, and I'm not defined by my rank. So to me, it was about what I could provide the organisation or what the organisation needed from me. So I made the decision when I was a flight Sergeant. And at the time I was the course director at the security empire school, working with the police training there. And I made the decision at that point, not to do my promotion courses because I knew I'd be quite competitive for promotion to Warrant Officer at that stage, however, I'd never deployed as a Flight Sergeant. I had deployed as a Sergeant. That was my first deployment and previously I was overseas to that, but never had deployed as a flight Sergeant. So to me prior to moving into a warrant officer rank, I wanted to demonstrate to myself that I could deploy as a flight Sergeant. And then in my own mind would prepare me to then be a Warrant Officer.

Michael:

One of our previous cases on conversations on the runway told me that it was only when she deployed actively to, and in a situation that was not, or potentially not particularly safe, that there was this light bulb moment where, oh, that's what all that training was for. It all makes sense now. Did you have that?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Absolutely. So my deployment to Afghanistan was that aha moment for me. But at the same time, it was also that combination of years and the sense of the dedication to training and understanding the continuum that we're always in to prepare us and you know, what being in the defence force is hard. And it's hard for a number of different reasons, but my gosh, the rewards when you get to serve whether that be domestically, because as you know, our defence force are deployed often than not domestically to support our communities, which is an amazing job that they do, but to actually do for real, in some cases what we trained for, for such a long period of time, it's an aha moment.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

It's a moment in time as well, where it does it all make sense. And it's really, really difficult to articulate the feeling of that to someone who hasn't served because it's an intrinsic drive that keeps us doing what we do. And you know, what some of our defence force members, the majority of them, since most members they're so incredibly selfless. So it's that.

Michael:

One of my favourite photographs that I've discovered in some of the research I've been working on with the organisation for the 100 year anniversary is of a C-130 Hercules. Speaking of the nature of domestic deployment, a photo of a Herc in a steep climb with the ramp open dispersing bales of hay, great big chunks of hay being tipped out the back to obviously a flood or bush fire relief. And that to me really sums up. And there's something so Australian about that image and you can see the ... I've

forgotten the title of that very important role of the air man who is chained to the back of the aircraft and pushes all this stuff out. But just good old bales of hay being rolled out to the cows below sort of such essential work, but sort of simple and elemental don't you think?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Oh absolutely. That would have been one of our load masters.

Michael:

Load master. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. So incredible work and it's so rewarding. It may be just, putting out bales of hay to some people, but I can tell you through talking with our workforce they get invigorated by able to support the communities and and it's sometimes just those simple things and yeah, it's a really ripe opportunity that we can support when we do.

Michael:

Malaysia, Indonesia, PNG and East Timor the some of the places you've been deployed before, even start talking about the middle east Fee. Deployment often means being thrust into some of the worst situations of human conflict on the planet. It must be surely there's no training for that. There's no preparation really that you can make to expose someone who's had a kind of a decent loving upbringing in relative safety. You can't train for that. Can you?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

No, you can't Michael. But what you can do is understand what your roles and responsibilities are in those environments. And some of those deployments were incredibly short as well. And then some of them were an extended period of time and multiple occasions. So you just have to really have a clear understanding of what your roles and responsibilities are and take from that when you deploy to these locations and take the experiences in as well. So sometimes talking with some of our veterans and we hear the statement that they've changed through their deployment experiences. You do, you absolutely do. And that change can take a complete myriad of different ways depending on what your experiences are.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So humility is one of those things when you put into those environments and you see the communities that perceptionally to some may have nothing. But to them, they have everything. So the Solomon Islands was incredibly humbling for me because to the outside world, some of those villagers and the kids may have nothing, but my gosh, they were so full of smiles and energy, and you gave them football and they thought it was just the greatest thing ever. And just to spend time with them. So it's a humbling experience. And you just take the richness from each of those times that you deploy, and then you choose as a human, what you do with those experiences, in the sense of when you come home.

Michael:

In 2012 Fee, you were deployed to Afghanistan as second in charge of the force protection and security section at the multinational base at Tarin Kowt. Do you remember your first impressions of that country?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Absolutely. First of all, I got stuck on the back of the aircraft. So the interesting thing was when we were departing from the location prior to going into Afghanistan we had a full aircraft. So my deployment team had to be fully kitted up with our webbing and weapons and ammunition and helmets, and all that fun stuff. And I got stuck. So, so it was-

Michael:

You got stuck? How do you mean stuck?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. Well, trying to get to my seat at the front of the aircraft and here I was wedged between the equipment like a turtle stuck on my back. So I thought this is going to go really well.

Michael:

Oh, did somebody get a picture? Did somebody get a picture?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Oh I hope not. And then the flight into the Afghanistan air space. And then, you know, you get informed when you're coming into that airspace. So you basically being prepared from that point. And then when we landed in Tarin Kowt, the best way to describe it is when the ramp went down in the back of the aircraft and we can first see the landscape I thought I'd landed on the moon. And then so when we came off the back of the aircraft, as I say, we were in our full deployment kit. It was hot, it was noisy. It was a sensory overload in all aspects of who you are as a human.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So it was like, I described that shock and awe phase as well. So having to process that really quickly and because the interesting thing is the team that you're replacing. They're so excited to see you. They are just falling over themselves with joy, because as soon as the person that I was replacing saw me, they think, okay, getting home is getting closer now. So they're always so excited. So you're trying to process sensory overload and just kind of take a breath in some cases.

Michael:

Tell us about your role at Tarin Kowt? What did it entail? Force protection, security section. What does that mean to an uneducated such as myself?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. So the second in charge of force protection security effectively think about in terms of the police force on the base. You know managing the security plus a number of the policing issues that came up as well.

Michael:

And as we know, from the nature of that conflict, that itself was a potentially extremely dangerous position to be in.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yes. Potentially on many occasions with what was happening in that location. But once again, the team around us were fabulous working with the coalition. Working with not only defence people, but contractors there as well, learning so much in reference to some of the tasks that I did involved international security forces and policing elements. So learning so much about how they do business. One of the roles that I distinctly recall that I had participated in the female engagement team training. So as being the only female at the team, my responsibility then came as managing all the women and children on the base whether they be transiting through and this is the local population and also agencies as they're coming through as well.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So effectively, no woman or child came onto the base without having been screened through the small team that I had. So that was a moment in time once again experiencing the support that we provided for the local women and children.

Michael:

Well, just the words, the women of Afghanistan conjures up to me, at least an outsider, a very dismal picture of what I perceive to be a very harshly done by even one of the most downtrodden groups of humanity in the world, but you've then met them. That's probably not how you saw them Fee.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

No. It was challenging at times because overtly or the projection that we made depending on who was around at the time was they were incredibly reserved, but I will share with you once we were behind either the searching screens or once we were in the safety, when it was just the women and the children, my gosh, we giggled and we laughed, and they complained about their husbands and their sons. And I remember one occasion we actually made the statement universally, we are the same. So we did have a little girl at one stage though, who was actually, I say a little girl, because most of them don't have a record of their birth dates.

Michael:

Really.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So there's no such thing of being able to identify how old someone is. And this particular young girl was joining the police force. And we're going through the process of screening her and she'd never ridden a bike before. So in the safety of our screening area, we brought in a bike and she had the opportunity to ... We put on the bike and, and just once again, those moments where you see a smile and laugh and just have fun, absolutely fun.

Michael:

Tell me about a very special Christmas you spent in Afghanistan.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

One of our roles as the security section was to conduct the bio enrolling of all the casualties as they came through the base. So we got to work incredibly close with the emergency team, the coalition emergency team at the hospital to the point that you have to be such a synergize team when you're

like any emergency centre. And I really have so much respect for people that work in those locations. But this particular Christmas, it was winter there, and there was snow on all of the mountains. And if you think about Afghanistan, you wouldn't think in some cases of beauty, but the landscape and the smiles were always beautiful with the people. But we went to midnight mass with the team from the ER and mass was held in a rickety shed that had no resemblance to a chapel or a church.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

But it was so moving because leading up to midnight we joined together in song. There were people with instruments, such rudimentary instruments, but it was incredible. And once midnight hit we all hugged and thanked each other. And it was those moments where you kind of forgot what was happening around you and just embrace the humanity of what brought people together and our purpose. So to share that with people who on a daily basis where we're so focused on saving lives and helping others yeah, you never forget that feeling of what that meant.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

And the funny thing was, once the service was finished one of the wonderful women that I'm so incredibly close to still who went to the mass with me, we went back to what we affectionately called our chalet, where we were living, which is effectively a shipping container, and it was past midnight. So I may have got a Christmas bell and ran through the hallways and pretending I was Santa. Yeah. And it was quite funny because the only person that actually woke up and stuck their head out was the Commanding Officer. And it was just like that Merry Christmas, sir. And it was like Merry Christmas Fee. And we went back and yeah, so amazing.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

And it is once again, one of those examples where when we come together you make the most out of everything. And when you're away from loved ones during Christmas and the challenge that is for them more so than what it is for us. And I will state that because it's through conversations, I certainly appreciate it can be harder for families than what it can be for us. To share that midnight mass and that incredible experience Michael.

Michael:

You told me in the preliminary conversation we had prior to this conversation Fee that in Afghanistan, as long as you kept your eyes above the horizon, it could be a beautiful country, but gazing below the horizon, it was a very different picture you said.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. It goes back to that landscape. The mountains around us were so incredibly picturesque, we arrived there in 50 degree heat and then left in minus 10. So to see that landscape change. But yeah as you lowered your gaze and saw around some of the people and what their living conditions were and what the suffering is particularly as we saw them coming through the Role Two hospital is ... I sat in on the team, did sat and held a hand of an Afghan who had been injured in a motor vehicle accident. And he passed when we sat with him and no one else was around him except effectively the medical team. And we stayed with him until he passed.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah it was an incredible moving situation when you absorbed yourself into that kind of atmospheric. However the purpose, that I attached myself to was if I could make a difference

somewhere if I could bring a smile to someone's face, if I could bring some goodness. So that's where I really cherish those opportunities with doing my role as the female engagement senior NCO or senior non-commission officer with what we do with the women and children. The wonderful people back in Australia who would send care packages and a lot of those care packages as well we shared them with the local communities. So on one particular occasion, one of the little girls that I'd worked with for an extended period of time, she'd never seen a baby doll before.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Yeah. So it was amazing. And so we got her, a baby doll sent over and her story was, I had worked with her extensively because she was part of the team who well her brother was in her mother would come in as well to help with the cam air flights that left the base a couple of times a week. And we'd gone from her first screening point where I first had to search her. And she was incredibly timid, so shy, quite scared overtly because here I was, this is white female with weapons and searching her. And it was quite clinical in the sense of making sure that she was safe, and we were safe. So at the time of the deployment, when it came to an end, she was laughing, she was smiling. She'd bring in pictures for me. We got her coloured pencils, as I said, a baby doll. One of the wonderful care packages that were sent over had a knitted blanket for her.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So it was an incredible thing, but what we had to be cautious of, as well as we never wanted to put any of the females or the children in any danger. So that's why all of this engagement happened behind the screens. So we didn't want to cause them any further angst by and letting the community know that they were close to us. I must say to you though, Michael I built fabulous relationships with the Afghan security forces that worked on the base. I got many marriage proposals.

Michael:

I'm sure.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

I think I got offered to be sold as for a couple of goats once. So I've got many rings.

Michael:

And I'm sure there are top quality goats too.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Undoubtedly.

Michael:

The best goats money can buy Fee.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

I also got many rings given to me. And my method in my mind madness was a case of either it's about building relationships. We were there for the same purpose and I was really confident that if I was to respond or when I had to respond to incidents on the base, those relationships go a long way in order to have a positive outcome for everybody.

Michael:

We spoke a little bit earlier about some of those new young, fresh faces coming through leadership in 2021 probably looks a bit different to what it did in 1987. The expectations of young people today are that they will be listened to, that their opinions be taken seriously, independence, some call it entitlement, call it what you will. Is this not completely at odds with the traditional notions of leadership?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Absolutely not in my books, Michael. So I love what I call the functional disruptor. And I encourage that within our force because the ones who are curious, the ones who do ask the questions and also I'll share with you, the air force is very much of the modelling around leadership that it's leadership at every level. So, so rank provides you the opportunity for accountability and responsibility. But the leadership in those leadership qualities are not defined by rank. So that's why I'm really encouraging of the wonderful people that we have coming through air force. And it's actually supported by our air force strategy as well, that what that leader at every level. We have, and I'll share with you, we've recently started what we've identified or titled a leader enrichment programme.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

And we're deliberately targeting our most junior enlisted and our junior officers, because the reality is that they are the champions of change. So you can talk very strategic at the levels that we currently see that, however, the ones who are at the tactical levels as we roll out the changes to the air force culture and the evolution of the re vectoring of that, it stays junior enlisted in those junior officers who are the ones who are going to make this actually happen. So I love the functional disruptors. I encourage them to ask why. There's obviously in the defence force and it goes with what our defence values are, is respect. And there's a way to navigate around that. But yeah, I certainly encourage that, which is different to when I first joined. Because when I first joined, you weren't necessarily encouraged to have a voice either.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

So rank was very much identified as an authority. But I'll also share with you though, and this is the world according to Fee. So this is not in any doctrine any way. So the workforce actually espouses leadership on you. And what I mean by that is as I said, incredibly privileged to be there, Warrant Officer of the Air Force at the moment, but the leadership and how I'm actually viewed as a leader is not decided by me. And it's certainly not defined by the rank of Warrant Officer at the Air Force. My leadership abilities and my leadership qualities will be decided by the force that I'm empowered to serve. And that goes across all rank levels. And leadership to me is about that connection and the emotional connection with the workforce. Because if you don't connect, you can't then empower. You can't then build the trust in the workforce and the world, according to Fee, once again, that's the difference between a leader and a manager.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

A manager can come in and make things happen. But if they're not building the trust within the workforce, if they can't connect, if you, if you can't untap their motivation they will see you as a manager. They won't espouse leadership on you. So I tend to think of things a little bit different in that space. And that's why as I said very much focused on providing opportunities for our most junior enlisted leaders to be developed into the future plus so they can take my job in the future.

Michael:

You're our first WOFF AF female WOFF AF. Can we perhaps, do you think one day perhaps soon expect the first female CAF, Chief Air Force?

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Why not?

Michael:

Why not.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Why not. As an organisation and these are not just words, we truly value that diversity and once again, and it goes back to probably your statement in reference to, yeah, I was a tomboy when I was growing up. I often asked the workforce, because I think it's really important, particularly at our recruit units, what your superpower is. Because understanding what your superpower is, then enables you to identify superpowers in others. And I'm very open when I explain what my superpowers are and my superpowers are, I don't see rank, I don't see sex, I don't see gender. I just see humans. And the question in reference to, can there be a Chief of Air Force that is female in the future? Absolutely. Absolutely. The organisation though, has to be set up in order to make sure that we recognise that person early in their career and that they provided the opportunities to develop for success into those positions. And that's the key.

Michael:

Fiona Grasby. I feel I have been functionally disrupted over this conversation, and I'm far the better for it as everyone listening. Warrant Officer air force, thank you so much Fiona Grasby for your time. It's been great talking to you and getting an insight into what you do and where you will go, who knows, but it'll be a long way from here and we'll be watching it very closely. Thanks so much for your time today.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Thanks so much, Michael, and that's mutual as well. Thanks for the commitment that you're making to our service and in particular with doing the podcast, because you're giving people a voice who may not have necessarily had it in the past, which is very much grateful for us. So thanks so much, Michael, certainly look forward to meeting you in the future if that opportunity comes up.

Michael:

I hope so. Thanks Fee.

Fiona (Fee) Grasby:

Thank you.