

## S2EP5

### Speaker Key:

EL	Emma Lancaster
NH	Nick Hodges
TW	Ty Wiggins
JM	Joanne Martin

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EL Welcome to the Community Colleges Australia Podcast, our second series on governance and business management. I'm Emma Lancaster. In this episode we speak to Nick Hedges, a human resources expert for small to medium business. We take a look at the issues of recruitment, retention and development of staff in the adult education sector, key HR trends to be mindful of now and for the next three to five years, as well as what it means to adopt a coaching leadership style. Joining me also is Ty Wiggins, principal consultant at Converge Consulting and Joanne Martin, CEO of Central Coast Community College. First up is our HR expert.

NH I'm Nick Hedges and I'm the director of Resolve HR. We're an HR advisory consultancy for small to medium businesses. Anywhere from five to about 150 people in the organisation and I've been in the industry, well, post-study from 1997. So, this is 22 years.

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EL Okay, well let's kick off the episode today. So, first question, what are some of the core human resourcing strategies the community sector should be aware of?

NH Just generally how they attract and retain staff, so particularly if they're in outlying areas, the community colleges even in bigger regional areas, it's often a recurring theme that I'm hearing about, in terms of how do we keep our staff happy? What's going to keep them here in general so that they don't walk across the road to the local TAFE or whatever it may be or a private college even. So, to me, some of the HR strategy is really about employee engagement and how we build the employee engagement and keeping that then at a customer facing level. So, to keep our customers satisfied.

So, if we've got happy employees and we've got them engaged, that'll lead to increased customer satisfaction and then in some cases, depending on the student, could also be parent satisfaction. Also, providing meaningful work and a variety of work, I think, is a really core HT strategy that should be looked at. So, it's not just coming in to do a particular job but... Not the old school multi-skilling-even, but just to provide a variety of work within the role that's being done.

And there's this new emerging trend that's called employee experience. So, on the one hand, we've been talking about employee engagement, but on the other hand it's about what is the experience that the employee or staff member is having at

work. So, that all then leads, obviously, to greater engagement. But it's not just about money, and in this not-for-profit sector it certainly can't be about money.

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So, it has to be what is their experience and what's going to be the best thing for them to get the best experience, which is then going to lead to greater customer satisfaction, etc etc. So, things like how we reward our employees, how flexible is our workplace, the types of networking opportunities that might be interesting to people, the career progression within the larger community colleges. And what sort of support do we provide to our team members? I think that would probably be a large part of it.

EL You were saying in order to have a good workplace, your employees need to be engaged and they need to be happy and a lot of that sounds like it comes from an organisation's culture. So, how do you foster good culture within an organisation?

NH That's a good question. And it's something I'm asked a lot and often my first response is, ask your employees. What do they like? What's interesting to them? What motivates them? What gets them out of bed in the morning? And I've been previously asked by other clients, not even in this sector but generally, oh Nick, how do I motivate my employees? And my first response is, well, ask them. You're not a mind reader and you're not an expert on social behaviour, or maybe you are, but I'm assuming you're not, so ask them.

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But in terms of generally how to increase employee engagement, to me it comes back to there are three main factors, which is having meaningful relationships with your people, having a high level of trust, so that we can empower them. They can take responsibility for their work. And also, having an open and honest communication culture. So, if there are problems, they're brought to you, that they can talk to you.

Vice versa, when things are great they can tell you that things are great and that's really working as well. So, I've heard in the past from other practitioners what's called this three-legged stool concept, that is built on relationships, trust and communication. And I think those are the fundamentals of employee engagement.

EL How can you ensure your organisations HR strategies are up to date and that you're a compliant organisation?

NH Yes, sure. So, really, simplistically, I think we need to just get them checked every couple of years. Legislation changes, new [unclear] changes, regulations change. So, our general best practice would say, at least every two years, at the very most three. But at least every two years. In doing so, naturally, we would say use an external expert and regularly want to be doing every couple of years a proper HR audit of all documentation. Not just policies, but generally is the current infrastructure, what I call infrastructure of documentation, is that all up to date?

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So, undertaking an audit, making sure that's updated again to legislation. Training in all areas of process and policy and procedure is really, really important for staff. It's one thing just having these things in place, it's another thing making sure that they know it. And generally, I'd say, to ensure that you've got access to some expert advisers that are professional in that space. That's the best way of making sure that you're up to date and compliant.

EL And are there any human resourcing strategies or trends that you think the adult education and training sector should be mindful of in the next three to five year period? Like you said yourself, things are always changing.

NH So, I think that's an interesting question, because when you asked me that question, I'm not sure there's any specific difference between the education and training sector to the general broad landscape of businesses in the market. But specifically thinking about, or trying to think about, the education and training space, I think that generally, in the next three to five years I think we're going to see more emergence of what is commonly known as artificial intelligence.

Particularly around recruitment selection, so having the AI selection tools. And what's interesting is, over the last couple of months I've been reading quite a few articles by HR experts saying these are really valuable tools, but at the same time don't forget the human element of making decisions. And don't forget that we are humans and we need to relate to humans. So, the robots, in a sense, can help us make decisions, but it shouldn't be the only decision-maker.

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What are the other emerging strategies and trends, I'd say we should be mindful of diversity, general diversity in the workplace, ensuring that... And I'm not just talking about men and women, I'm talking about general diversity, whether it be age, physical disabilities, mental disabilities, all of those sorts of things. I think we're going to see more emergence. We've seen over the last 12 months this emergence of the hashtag metoo stuff and sexual harassment.

So, I think what we're going to find is not necessarily that that builds but the awareness that's gained from a lot of that, which I think is a great thing that it's being brought to the surface. So, things like bullying and harassment, domestic violence, those sorts of factors and we've just seen recently a legislative change that came through from the Australian government around a domestic violence leave policy within awards [?].

So, I think those sorts of trends are going to be more prevalent and I think we need to be more mindful of that. I think just generally from a soft HR perspective I think we should be more mindful of the way that we onboard and offboard our employees. Having more structured programs, even for smaller organisations of half a dozen people, having a proper onboarding program of 60 to 90 days where somebody feels embedded in the organisation.

And likewise when people are leaving, that we're thinking about letting them leave with a good feeling and a positive feeling.

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EL So, how important is the recruitment and retention of staff in the adult education sector?

NH Well, it's everything, really Emma. It really is everything. Your people are your business and it sounds so obvious to say it, but people are your service, people are your business. So, you need the right people on board who can deliver. And it's not just about skills and capabilities, can they do the job? But it's also about the right fit and the right culture. And do they suit your particular workplace. So, what goes along with that when we talk about recruitment and retention, is also then how we evaluate and appraise staff to ensure that they're aligned to your business.

So, it's having the right people on board, which is everything and so important, but then also how do we make sure that they stay engaged but also evaluate them and appraise them.

EL So, what can organisations do then to attract and retain those skilled and qualified teachers? Do you have any specific tips for regional campuses and metro campuses as well?

NH Yes, I think there's a couple of things. I think, obviously, always look at the course offering, again this is not an HR thing, but I'd say that as a business person, are we offering the right courses. Is what we offered five years ago still relevant today? There's changing technologies and evolution in everything, so are we still relevant? Again, I mentioned it before but looking at the regional needs and the specific demographic needs of the area, whether it be in the city or regional centres. And are we aligned?

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So, is it aligned with what the needs are? What industries in that particular area exist and has that changed? So, again, have we got the right course offering? And then from an employee/staff perspective, other than financial, what else can we offer? So, I know one of the colleges has a problem in terms of attracting their teachers where they offer significantly less money than TAFE, so they can't compete on price. So, the way they try to compete is that they've offered already course content that doesn't have to be written by the teacher. Flexible arrangements of work, they have smaller teaching classes, they offer teaching development and those sorts of benefits.

So, I think it's really about looking at your particular centre and what would be the best that's going to suit your demographic.

EL And I think that's a good thing to know, really, when it comes to qualified staff, that it's not just all about finances, there are other ways that you can make your staff happy and attract and retain them.

NH For sure. And then if you look at it broader, in thinking about this question that you've just asked me, we can also build broader relationships with other key organisations in the area, the Leagues clubs, the RSL clubs and those sorts of things. And can that have a benefit for the people that work for us or for the courses that we're offering?

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So, when we think about those sorts of things, industry partnerships are all very important, so can we bring in key industry speakers into a course? Which might be attractive for people to undertake the course or that are even teaching the course.

EL And so, what then do you think are some simple and really practical things an organisation can do today if they were starting today, they heard this podcast today and they want to ensure they're investing in and developing their staff? What are some key practical tips that you could offer?

NH So, if they were starting today, I think that's a tough question. Can I flip the question to say, let's say that they have started and they're very early on, fledgling. So, what I'd be encouraging all leaders of the colleges to be doing is to be talking to their staff, whether that's formally or informally. Start building relationships with your staff, ensure that you've got strategies in place that can decrease that isolation. Have you got values for your organisation? Do you recruit on your values?

So, those things are all, whilst they sound simple, they need to be in place. And it's not just a nice to have, they really are a need to have, because when I think about community colleges it's about giving back, it's about the altruism. It's certainly not for profit. So, it's not about making money and be corporate, it's about what can we offer. So, have we got the right people that have that right mindset and what are our values that align to that?

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So, I'd be asking your staff to get their thoughts in terms of what is important to them and also what's important for delivery. And often a good way of doing that is through an employee engagement survey, they're often useful ways of getting information. People like to give information because often they're anonymous as well. So, it's one of the ways that we found that working with clients really tends to work very well.

EL That was Nick Hedges, the director of Resolve HR. Next up is Ty Wiggins. If you've been listening to the series episode by episode, you'll be familiar with his voice. Ty is the principal of Converge Consulting and an expert in leadership development. He's going to talk us through what it means to adopt a coaching leadership style, as well as how to drive and improve employee engagement.

TW I think employee engagement across all sectors is a growing challenge, it's a constant challenge. The things that we see that drive engagement are clear communication about what is expected. We have a view that employees only really want two things, which is tell me exactly what you want me to be doing and then tell me how I'm going. So, there's clear direction on what's expected, content and context. Are we doing it fast, are we doing it best, are we doing it big, is really important.

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And then give me constant feedback on how I'm going and those two things, when they're in place from a leadership point of view, tend to result in high engagement scores. The other thing that we look at is, when we go through a planning process

or a decision process, another phrase that we have is, people need to weigh in in order to buy in. So, if you don't let people contribute to the discussion early, it's harder for them to buy in if they disagree.

People can disagree with what you want them to do and still give it 100%, provided they feel like they've been heard in terms of any concerns or hesitations they have. And that you've communicated back why you can or can't implement those things, so good communication, clarity about what's expected and regular feedback on how they're going, we think, drives engagement.

EL So then, let's talk a little bit about coaching and leadership styles, how do you choose your leadership style as a CEO of a community college? Is it something that is just innate or is it something that you work on? How does that work?

TW I think many leaders don't consciously choose their leadership style. I think they revert to experiences they've had throughout their career and things that they liked and things that they didn't like. Not dissimilar to how we decide to parent. I liked this but I didn't like that, I'm going to do this. And they end up with this aspect of leadership as how they would like to be led. Which works, and sometimes doesn't work. So, leading people the way you'd like to be led is not always the best leadership style for them.

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There's a big movement around less command and control, more collaboration. Flatter structures, getting people involved, everyone having a voice. So, leaders really need to understand what their philosophy is going to be on how much of a voice the employees have, what to do when there are tough conversations to be had? How do I manage performance? And how do I invest in and develop the staff that I've got?

EL So, what are the benefits then if you're looking at adopting a leadership style that is a coaching leadership style?

TW Key benefits are people enjoy being coached far more than they enjoy being told what to do. So, an example from a coaching point of view is a coaching style leader is one that lets the employee or the staff member develop the ideas with the leader, as opposed to just giving the answer. So, if I can give you an example, it's well known that from a leadership point of view we want employees to come to us when they have a problem already with some solutions. That's leadership 101.

The coaching extension would look a little like this, employee comes forward, says I've got a problem, leader says great, what do you think the solution is? The employee says, I think it's this. That's where a lot of the conversations stop. But to have a coaching conversation on top of that would look a bit like this, that's great, what else have you considered and what have you discarded and why? So, what we're doing now is we're getting into the thought process around why the employee thinks that's the right answer.

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We'd go through that process, exhausting those, and then the leader would make a call. Either say, great, what you've suggested is actually right. Or they'd say no, that's not actually what we need to do and here's the bit that you didn't understand

or the context that you didn't have. If it is right, the follow-on statement would look like, Bob, that's great. That's exactly the right decision and that's what I would do in the same circumstance. If you have a similar circumstance in future and you follow that thought process, I'm confident for you to do it on your own.

That type of conversation is one that employees will go home and talk about, because what they really want to understand is not what to do but how I worked out what to do. And that would be an example of that extension of the coaching conversation.

EL That sounds really empowering for the employee, as well. And it sounds like it does require time though, you need to have time to have those conversations. Would you encourage CEOs to be making the time to have those conversations?

TW Definitely. It's one or two more minutes every time you have a conversation that says you hours and hours down the track, because it's empowering for the employee, absolutely, but it also is empowering for the leader because the leader starts to understand the employee's thought process. So, if we can follow ABC and get to D, then if I know the employees are doing the same thing, we're likely to get a very similar outcome.

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So, this is a concept we call show your working, which is taken from doing a mathematic exam where you show your working, you still get points if you get the answer wrong. Leaders don't show their working enough, and the employees actually want to know, how did you work that out so that I can do that in your absence. So, by understanding how the employee is thinking about the process, it will make it easier for you to coach and develop them, safeguard them against making mistakes and eventually empower them to make those decisions on their own.

EL Ty, I'm keen to hear your thoughts on recruitment and retention in the community college sector.

TW Numerous challenges within the college sector, in terms of regional locations, restricted recruitment pool etc. However, all organisations are bound by the same level of employee performance. If we get the right people on the bus, as the analogy goes, we'll get the right results. So, the encouragement for CEOs, we'd still do, recruit slowly, fire quickly. Pay attention to and manage carefully the probation period, because everyone is on their best behaviour through the recruitment period and the probation period is there to let some of those behaviours develop a little bit further so you can see what's really going on.

And to remember that as leaders, you will always get the lowest level of performance that you accept. What you walk past is what you'll get. So, when leaders are looking to make changes from a performance point of view, they often have to change the way they're responding to poor performance before anyone else will change.

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Unfortunately, a lot of times when I do this kind of coaching, it comes back to the leader in the first instance. So, think about what you're accepting, because that lowest level is the base level you'll get from everybody.

EL That was Ty Wiggins, the principal of Converge Consulting. And finally, here is Joanne Martin. She's the CEO of the Central Coast Community College and she truly values the benefits of employment flexibility as a part-time CEO. Joanne heads a successful regional campus in New South Wales. Joanne, how do you drive and improve employee engagement in your organisation?

JM I have a team of part-time working mums, including myself, as well as some other employees, a couple of males. But we're predominantly part-time, so employee engagement, for me does need to revolve around flexibility, but it also needs to revolve around absolutely leveraging each individual's strengths and matching what their strengths are and what they enjoy doing and just sharing the responsibilities, focusing on what particular people's interests and strengths are.

And I think having done that, we know have a really strong team who are cross-skilled and really engaged. They understand their role, they understand the business. They work together to achieve the results that we need to achieve. Everyone chips in. Because we are all part-time, some things can take longer to get done than others, and I think it's just being able to accept that and being able to communicate with the board that things do take a little bit longer but we are really good at prioritising and we get things done. It can just take a little bit longer, because of the situation we're in.

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But being able to provide flexibility, we do work in a sector that doesn't necessarily pay higher wages. But being able to provide flexibility and support and also giving people the opportunity to learn every day in their own roles by giving people cross-skilling opportunities or backup for other team members, opportunities, is also providing a really good engagement process for all of the team members.

EL So, you're a part-time CEO, can you perhaps explain that a little more to me? Do you ever encounter some weird attitudes that come along with that or are people... They embrace that?

JM Most people embrace it and think, oh God, how lucky are you? And I absolutely agree with them. I've got the perfect job. I do have a bit of an HR background, in previous roles I have run HR business units. And I think it was really important for me to do a job that fitted in with my life.

EL So, do you have any specific recruitment and retention challenges as an organisation operating outside of a metropolitan location?

JM I don't know. Having not worked in any metropolitan areas in this industry I'm not 100% sure. And where I work there are a lot of people who commute anyway, on the Central Coast they lose a lot of people locally to Sydney, so the market in Sydney is just there and they obviously pay higher salaries. But that comes at a cost.

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So, I think the labour pool that I have available to me, and we do branch up towards the Hunter Valley, which is that little bit more removed, I think the labour pool is limited for want of a better word, because there are other opportunities available to people. But you might not have the exact skills, but I think getting good people and recruiting good people and being able to use their strengths and then in-filling that with maybe some external support if that's possible, is always possible. So, getting good people and keeping them has been really important for us.

We're a small organisation, we have a small team. I've been in my role for almost three years and throughout that time we've built a team, we've gone through the forming, storming, norming, performance phases. When you're building a team, the team forms. There's always conflict and that's your storming and getting to know each other and finding your place in the team. Norming is where everything's starting to settle down and people are starting to hit their stride. And then performing is when you're working as a collective better than the sum of the individuals.

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So, it's taken us a couple of years to get to that point and I think we're in the performing stage now, but it is definitely a result of teamwork, cross-skilling, keeping communication open. Having expectations of each other and holding each other to those expectations. It's about being really grateful for the opportunities that you have. There's always things to complain about at work, but we're really mindful of appreciating the great things about our working environment.

We mightn't be earning the biggest salaries in the world, but we work on a beautiful campus, we work with fantastic people, we're doing fantastic things for the community and with our students. So, we're constantly reminding each other and ourselves about how fortunate we are in being able to do what we get to do every day. So, I think there's some things that can be really helpful for leaders in our organisations, just to hone in on capability.

Giving people accountability, focusing on teamwork and high-performing teams and making sure people just are grateful every day for what they're getting to do.

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That was Joanne Martin, the CEO of the Central Coast Community College. You've been listening to the Community Colleges Australia Podcast season two. This podcast is produced for Community College Australia by Heaps Good media. Engineered by Miles Martignoni and presented by me, Emma Lancaster. This series has been produced with funding from the New South Wales Department of Industry. Next time, on our final episode for the series, we tackle the issue of funding. We'll look at a CEO's approach to funding, how to maximise your colleges chances of funding and how to lay the long game.

That's next time on the CCA podcast series. You can find the full list of episodes at [CCA.edu.au](http://CCA.edu.au). thanks for listening.