

## **ROBERT BUCKLAND – INTERVIEW WRITE-UP**

Robert Buckland, the Welsh Conservative Party politician and barrister was the MP for South Swindon from 2010 to 2024. His political roles include Solicitor General for England and Wales from 2014 to 2019, Secretary of State for Justice (Prisons) and Lord Chancellor, July 2019, until cabinet reshuffle in September 2021 and Secretary of State for Wales, 2022. Robert is the second Lord Chancellor from Llanelli, after Lord Elwyn Jones. He was born in Llanelli, attended Hatfield College, Durham and graduated in Law in 1990.

Robert attended the Inns of Court School of Law, where he was a prize winner for Advocacy and was Called to the Bar at Inner Temple in October 1991. He returned to practise in Wales and was appointed as a Recorder of the Crown Court, sitting on the Midland Circuit.

### **LEADERS ADMIRIED**

Winston Churchill was the leader first referenced as being admired, his leadership attributes noted as being a hard worker and for getting things done as well as for being an effective orator. His public speaking ability and inspirational oration being fine-tuned by intensive study of the speeches of notable orators as well as by intense preparation and by making multiple adjustments. Churchill was also commended for taking business seriously and being effective in leading by example – attributes noted despite his unorthodox leadership style, reputedly frequently spending all morning in his dressing gown, surrounded by papers and secretaries with a glass of whisky to hand!

Two American presidents were also referenced, Abraham Lincoln (1861–65) and Franklin D Roosevelt (1933-45). Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> president was described as a brilliant president and a good example of servant leadership. His approach acclaimed as being the epitome of calm, being quiet and unassuming and for not being intimidating. Interestingly, Lincoln is also referenced as '*being able to show any perissologist (someone who uses a superfluity of words) how things should be done*'. (Dent, 2020) Alternative words mentioned in Susie Dent's book include '*bluviator*' (someone who loves the sound of their own voice, and a blower of hot air, and '*circumbendibus*' (words or actions that go round and round without ever getting to the point. Political communication styles preferably to be avoided!

Franklin D Roosevelt (often referred to as FDR), was noted as always smiling and having a leadership style that was optimistic, a positive projection of confidence, and a '*can do*' approach. A forceful character and personality, albeit possibly with subconscious projection, also conveyed an effective sense of connection with others. Admiration was also expressed for several professional colleagues, in particular senior barristers who were involved in decision making at work and who were especially commended for valuing others' views and inspiring a sense of teamwork.

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### **'SERVANT LEADERSHIP'**

'Servant leadership' was noted by Robert as an esteemed leadership style, its attributes suggested as leading by example and personally demonstrating behaviour that aims to encourage others' morale by working together with people in a positive atmosphere rather than just in a theoretical hierarchy. The aim of servant leadership philosophy is to work in a decentralised structure and interact with others in a way that promotes wellbeing by inspiring authority rather than demonstrating power. Self-assurance, calmness and confidence were also noted as admired leadership attributes, and emphasis noted that those who underestimate the power of emotional connection do so at their peril.

### **PRISONS & COURTS**

*'EQ – a core skill for effective political engagement'*

A comprehensive awareness and understanding of emotional intelligence and the concept of EQ has been a long-term part of Robert's modus operandi. Consciousness of the part that EQ plays in being successful and striving to constantly use an EQ approach was accentuated, with particular significance noted that applied EQ is a necessary core skill for effective political engagement.

The serious responsibilities involved in the work settings of prisons and courts was also noted, and for being the environments where EQ needed to be in constant use. The need to understand and empathize at an emotional level being important extending through to the work of prison officers, understanding shared human experiences and issues being part of day-to-day involvement.

### **PARLIAMENT IS A TEAM PURSUIT**

*'I didn't have the monopoly on wisdom'*

Unless interdependence is understood, you won't get anywhere in politics. Ministerial experience prompted quick learning that there is no monopoly on wisdom and that parliament is a team pursuit that requires ongoing EQ engagement with colleagues. Being honest, encouraging feedback and being a good listener were all emphasized, along with recognition that while listening is important, it's also hard and needs time and energy. Interdependence also doesn't count unless attentive and effective listening is included in the way you engage with others.

Making effective connection with others to influence change needs energy and requires a proactive approach that doesn't just leave things to the wheels of government. Needing to understand which battles to fight and the importance of persuading others and working with them to effect change, along with being honest – warts and all was recommended!

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### **INTERDEPENDENCE AND ASSOCIATIONS**

The relationship when dealing with volunteers in an MP's Associations was noted as potentially being problematic when there are highly polarizing issues such as Brexit. The raw emotions involved can be stressful to deal with. As an MP, it's important to take a 'softer touch', accept any limitations involved and take a quiet approach by finding things out privately and listening to concerns. The previously noted and endorsed '*Servant leadership*' approach was advocated as being applicable. Emphasis was also made on having mutual respect for roles and responsibilities, including the Association allowing the MP to get on with his or her job and trusting their MP's judgement as a representative to choose how to vote in parliament. Making sure that the right people are involved coming through, with the right attitude and approach was also emphasized.

### **BE GENUINELY CONSTRUCTIVE**

Despite the adversarial culture between different political parties that at times pervades discourse between individuals and more often projects the public image of parliamentary proceedings, there are numerous opportunities for cross party working. Instead of the 'cut and thrust' approach, reaching out and accepting challenges with open debates about issues based on negotiation and principled compromise with a test of evidence on fair grounds is proposed as normal practice. What's most important was recognized as having a reputation such as that held by the late former Minister, James Brokenshire whose obituary referenced his quiet ability, loyalty and pragmatism that was highly respected regardless of political affiliation.

### **ADVICE TO YOUNGER SELF**

*'The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right time but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.'*

DOROTHY NEVILL

Our 'end note' discussion and the advice to younger self question prompted the following:

- Be more patient – self check that you're doing this.
- It's often better to leave things unsaid.
- The skill of decision making is understanding when its needed as much as the decision itself - letting things take their course can sometimes resolve things.