

EP07 P2: ALLAN SCOTT

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] **Katie Jensen:**

I'm Katie Jensen, and this is the Path of Public Service from Applaud, celebrating people who have spent their lives working in Ontario's public sector. This is part two of our conversation with Allan Scott, a retired member of the Ontario Public Service who has occupied all roles from frontline worker to director across eight different ministries.

[00:00:21] **Katie Jensen:**

In this episode, we explore what Allan has uncovered while working in enforcement and compliance.

[00:00:27] **Allan Scott:**

But sometimes you'll go and you'll learn that there's really no school. It's just a school on paper, and it's being used to facilitate other things that aren't good.

[00:00:37] **Katie Jensen:**

His advice on becoming a competitive interview candidate -

[00:00:39] **Allan Scott:**

If I'm as director hiring a manager, I'm just not asking who would be a competent manager, because I have a lot of candidates who would be competent managers, I'm asking who would bring the greatest value to my table of managers.

[00:00:55] **Katie Jensen:**

And the calm, measured approach present in all of his work.

[00:00:59] **Allan Scott:**

A public servant never leaps to conclusions. We see a red flag, we do our due diligence, we investigate, we're fair to people, and then we act.

[00:01:09] **Katie Jensen:** We start mid-career. Allen has left the Ministry of Tourism, worked as a Senior Project Manager, and then moved on to the Ministry of Training, where his team suspended non-compliant OSAP applicants and recipients.

[00:01:22] **Allan Scott:** A job came available back on the, what we call the I&E side. Inspections, Investigation and Enforcement. So it's regulatory work, compliance work. And this is where I started in policing. And then I morphed over to all this policy work. And then I saw an opportunity to kind of return more to my roots of the thing I liked best in public service.

[00:01:45] **Allan Scott:** I had management experience now, right? They're advertising a manager. I was a very competitive candidate. I was ultimately offered the job. And I got the lead of a really amazing group of people who were in charge of basically

administering OSAP related compliance work, specifically looking for people who were seeking to obtain student assistance from the government who were not legally entitled to receive it, or they did other bad things in respect of the program that necessitated some action be taken. Whether it be reducing or suspending them from the ability to receive student assistance according to the laws and the policies that were set out. You only have so many inspectors and so much budget. Where do you look? Where do you go?

[00:02:29] **Allan Scott:**

What is the most efficient way possible with the public dollar to try to administer this program in a way that that's fair and reasonable? And that is fascinating work. So I really, really enjoy doing it with the team. And at that time social media was really starting to come online. And it was a bit of a thing where people who ripped off the system would post publicly like on Facebook about, "Look at me, here's what I did!" And in the compliance world, that's what we call low hanging fruit, right? The running joke is, "Exhibit one for the crown is stuff this guy willfully, publicly published.

[00:03:07] **Katie Jensen:**

Did the way that you operate involve doing random audits of all the undergraduates who are coming in and receiving OSAP?

[00:03:14] **Katie Jensen:**

Were people more likely to commit fraud at a certain loan value threshold?

[00:03:18] **Allan Scott:**

You really can't generalize it that way. So there's automated processes that

people who apply for student aid know, because it's all in the fine print in the agreements that you really should read. Uh, and we do something like income matching.

[00:03:30] **Allan Scott:**

There's obviously thresholds, right? You can't be a wealthy person and qualify for many portions of student assistance. So occasionally someone would report their income as x and we'd run a check with the Canada Revenue Agency and we'd see that their income was substantially higher than what they said.

[00:03:47] **Allan Scott:**

And then you'd, you'd investigate and determine what the facts were and you'd, that would include talking to them. And sometimes it would turn out that what was happening was that there'd be like, for example, a dental practice run by their mother or father, and that dental practice would be a corporation and their kids would all be shareholders in the corporation.

[00:04:08] **Allan Scott:**

And on tax returns, the kids were reporting dividend income of \$200,000 a year. As a way to kind of like minimize taxes for the family, they were doing this. And, I'm not a tax lawyer, that may be from CRA's perspective a perfectly valid and legal thing to do I don't know, but for an OSAP purpose you can't file a tax return saying you're in \$200,000 last year and sign a form claiming that you actually only earn \$7,000 a year and get the full range of public service and we'd go and they, they would try to argue.

[00:04:40] **Allan Scott:**

Sometimes it'd be like, "No, no, no, no.

My son didn't really earn that income. They were just doing this because I'm trying to avoid paying taxes to the CRA." And our answer back was, "Go back seven years and file amended tax returns for your kid, resubmit them and we'll reevaluate their application." But of course they weren't willing to do that.

[00:04:59] **Allan Scott:**

So that's just one example of the type of process that would be more automated to catch.

[00:05:04] **Katie Jensen:**

Allan then moved into his first role of director, becoming the Superintendent of Private Career Colleges, and the Director of the Private Career Colleges Branch. A dual role created to address vocational schools that weren't offering students their legal rights and protections.

[00:05:20] **Allan Scott:**

And it was an exciting time of change, because I took what was an administrative and policy branch and turned it into an I&E or enforcement and compliance branch. I got all the staff trained up as provincial offenses officers. I got them designated by the minister as a class to be provincial offenses officers.

[00:05:40] **Allan Scott:**

As superintendent, I was what's called a statutory decision maker. There's basically two kinds of public servants who get to make legal decisions that impact regulated entities or citizens, right? One is a public servant who exercises what's called delegated authority, usually from the minister. And the other is a statutory decision maker who receives his or her authority not

from a minister but directly from a law passed by the legislature. And a superintendent or a registrar, these are usually the public servants whose titles signify that they're independent statutory decision makers. So in that role, we didn't need any sort of new laws or new protections for students, we just needed to start enforcing the old ones. And that's what we did. And we started asking new and interesting questions. We know there's always going to be some base level of complaints, but did we have schools that never had any complaints? Maybe we should go look at one of those. At the very least, maybe we'll learn that they're doing something right.

[00:06:42] **Allan Scott:**

But sometimes you'll go and you'll learn that there's really no school, it's just a school on paper, and it's being used to facilitate other things that aren't good. Things related to immigration or things related to money laundering or things related to whatever, small minority of schools. And then you would then partner up with other enforcement agencies who have mandates in those areas, because of course we don't investigate, you know, that sort of malfeasance, that's often a criminal investigation to be led by the police or a federal government department or something like that, And then we would cooperate with them. And where we found schools that weren't in compliance? What was interesting to me was we would often find that what would happen is a bad actor would enter their space, right?

[00:07:28] **Allan Scott:**

They'd move into their town or city and

they'd start offering a certificate program in something to compete with the established college, and they would start cutting corners and doing things that were a bit dodgy. They would take kickbacks on government grants given to students. They'd turn into maybe something that would look more like a diploma mill than an actual school.

[00:07:52] **Allan Scott:**

Their instructors wouldn't meet the standards that were set out in the legislation, that sort of thing. And then the good player was bleeding business to these schools. So they would then in turn start cutting corners themselves because they have to remain competitive if they want to stay open and continue to have a viable business.

[00:08:12] **Allan Scott:**

And this is the job of a regulator. A regulator doesn't pick winners or losers in an industry. A regulator ensures that there is a fair and level playing field on which healthy competition can take place.

[00:08:25] **Katie Jensen:**

For the benefit of the end user, really.

[00:08:26] **Allan Scott:**

Right, which is the student. So we come in and we take appropriate action to either bring the bad actors into compliance, or assist them in exiting the industry, and that's about as pleasant a way as I can put that. And meanwhile the majority who are good schools and compliant schools and who want to do the right thing are really cheering us on from the sidelines in helping to see the sector cleaned up.

[00:08:50] **Allan Scott:**

And you're quite right, the end person who benefits from all of this is the student who's paying tuition to get trained up in a vocation or with a skill that they need to make an income and provide for themselves and their family. It's a good job because it's one of those rare jobs where you get to, you get a more of an immediate outcome.

Whereas in a lot of government work, the outcome of your work is either never very clearly visible, or it only becomes apparent years or decades down the road.

[00:09:20] **Katie Jensen:** Can you tell me about the secondment that you took? And what is a secondment for folks who've maybe heard about it and have no idea what it actually involves?

[00:09:27] **Allan Scott:** A Secondment allows you to basically be loaned out to another area or another ministry within the larger government to do something different for a while. So In a sense, you have two jobs. You continue to own the rights to what we call your "home" position, the permanent job you hold, while you go out and explore and try something new.

[00:09:52] **Allan Scott:**

And, and this helps everyone, both from the employer and the employee perspective. From the employer's perspective, It allows you to fill a job temporarily instead of permanently, so you can try out someone or multiple people in the role before making a decision, especially if it's a critical job. It gives you exposure and it broadens your network and trains you up in a new area,

and allows you to test the waters in something you're not quite sure you want to do yet.

[00:10:19] **Allan Scott:**

It can also allow you to travel. And these things are encouraged. It is not at all unusual in the public service for the typical tenure in a role to be between two and five years. And in my case, we were looking to make a move out of Toronto. I saw an opportunity became available with Service Ontario. It was a large operational branch that is basically in charge of issuing licenses and cards to Ontarians.

[00:10:46] **Allan Scott:**

Your health card, your driver's license, and a whole bunch of other products. And that job happens to be based in Kingston. And this was what we call an ops job or an operations job. And again, because I was already a director, I was a competitive candidate for this director job, and I was the successful candidate, and we came out to Kingston. And it was very interesting, the breadth and scope of things that I got to work on.

[00:11:11] **Allan Scott:**

It was a job that had an interesting intersection with the private sector. And so we would bring in expertise from the private sector, right, who would be able to talk about things like metrics related to wait times, like lining up for a window to get service, and calls for service on the phone. And it was really, really interesting because when you bring in people from the telecoms who knew a lot about customer service and keeping customers happy, and then they would want to do things that you can't do in the

public sector, it'd be like, "Okay, we obviously messed up here, we're just going to give that person their permit or license for free." Like you can't do that in government because the fees you collect are set by laws and no public servant is the right to change a law. So the law itself would have to say. This person has discretion to give a price break on a driver's license. And that's generally not a thing.

[00:12:01] **Allan Scott:**

So it was really interesting how we would learn from each other. It was a fantastic opportunity, and I got to learn a lot more about how operations work and about the experiences of the frontline people because I brought that with me. So you talk to the team members about what's working and, and what isn't working.

[00:12:18] **Allan Scott:**

I felt that I would value their insights simply because I Remember what it felt like as a frontline person not to have my own insights valued.

[00:12:27] **Katie Jensen:**

I also think that with frontline experience, you have to have a measure of humor. I remember when I got my first car, I think it was maybe 20. I got the license plates and the person working at the service counter gave me an acronym to remember my license plate by and because the first four letters were BHYS. She said, "Okay now remember to behave yourself!" And I never forgot my license plate because of it and I just thought, "Wow She must do that for so many people just to help them remember their license plates." And that

certainly isn't a requirement, but I thought it was so cute and funny that that was just something she did with her day-to-day.

[00:12:59] **Allan Scott:** Yeah, and that's a great story about how public servants, they're generally public servants because they want to help people, right?

[00:13:06] **Allan Scott:** So when they get a chance to do it, in a little way of their own, that ten people above them don't have to approve, I know we like doing that.

[00:13:14] **Katie Jensen:**
Allan reveals how he brought his own frontline experience to his work with Service Ontario.

[00:13:18] **Allan Scott:**
So when I got there, one of our product lines was accessible parking permits, what most people continue to call handicap permits, right, the wheelchair permits.

[00:13:27] **Allan Scott:** I know from policing and prosecuting that there's people using those permits who shouldn't be using them. So I asked the question of my staff. I said, "Well, can we just run a search? Everyone who's over 100, who's applying for a renewal of their APP?" And we came back with a list, I think the oldest one was like 120 year old person was getting an APP.

[00:13:50] **Allan Scott:**
And of course, what was going on was they had long since departed and their family members were continuing to get this premium parking pass that they could use. So there's little things that you can do that you should be checking as a

regulator to try to maintain integrity in your program. Because if someone is using one of those spots who doesn't need it, it means someone who does need it might not be able to use it. And that is not consistent with the policy outcomes you're trying to achieve here. Now, it is possible there's someone who's 100 years old who's still being driven around and needs that permit. You still have to investigate it so you don't leap to conclusions.

[00:14:27] **Allan Scott:**
A public servant never leaps to conclusions. We see a red flag, we do our due diligence, we investigate, we're fair to people, and then we act.

[00:14:36] **Katie Jensen:** I asked Allan to tell us about his final role with the Ontario Public Service.

[00:14:40] **Allan Scott:**
I was seconded to the Service Ontario job, and as it happened, a job became available permanently in Kingston at the director level, which is rare.

[00:14:52] **Allan Scott:**
And it was with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. And I had no background whatsoever in either Municipal Affairs or Housing. But I applied for the position, and again, because I was a current director with two director jobs under my belt, I was a competitive candidate, and I was ultimately successful and offered the position.

[00:15:11] **Allan Scott:**
I joined the ministry and started embarking on a learning curve. And it was a hybrid of policy and operations

and did land use planning. And then the housing file where we had people in Kingston who would deliver housing programs administered from Toronto, our folks would help deliver them across Eastern Ontario. So it was a regional office based in Kingston responsible for delivering MMAH programs to Eastern Ontario municipalities, of which there are 114. Even though it was to be my last job in the public service, it was a very steep learning curve.

[00:15:47] **Katie Jensen:**

With that job, what was the retirement from that like? At what point did you say, "Okay, time for me to go." There's always more work to be done, the work is 10, 20, 30 years away from being done, let's say. How did you know it was time to move on?

[00:16:00] **Allan Scott:**

So most public servants can retire in what we call "factor 90." That means your age, plus your years of service, equal 90. And I was hitting my number and I just decided that I'm still in my mid to late 50s, I have time to kind of like start a new chapter. And if there's one thing I've learned about the diversity of public service is there's many ways to serve your community. You can help out a municipality. You can volunteer to sit on committees. You can join boards of directors and you can just take a job on the sideline to try something you thought you might enjoy.

[00:16:36] **Allan Scott:**

I just knew that it was time to go and it's time to give someone else a chance to do that job now. And, and knowing,

knowing when to leave is part of what being a good public servant means.

[00:16:50] **Katie Jensen:**

And since retiring, Allan has found a new way to serve, through supply teaching.

[00:16:54] **Allan Scott:** I have a friend in the community who happens to be a high school principal with the local board, and he said, "Oh, you're retiring, you should teach! We need adults who can pass a police check and have a university degree, who are interested in being emergency supply teachers." And it's interesting, because you never know, you could get a text at 6am from a principal saying, come on in and teach. I've honestly ended up enjoying doing the elementary grades way more.

[00:17:23] **Allan Scott:**

It's just fascinating. First of all, you're busier, so the time goes quicker. I love, you know, you get to sit in a chair and read them a book about whales and that kind of thing. So it's just a lot of fun. You just go in and follow the lesson plan left for you by the real teacher, make a report at the end of the day, and go home. And they put a couple of bucks in your pocket.

[00:17:44] **Katie Jensen:**

Has anyone ever called you "kindergarten cop?"

[00:17:44] **Allan Scott:**

I've gotten that a few times, if they find out that I was a police officer at some point. And I'm also six foot two, right? So I'm big. So I, I, I kind of get it and people do often, in fact, mistake me for Arnold Schwarzenegger, it's a very common error. I deal with it my whole life.

[00:18:02] **Katie Jensen:**

So if you were going back to you in the 1990s, what would you say to younger Allan to kind of prepare you or help guard you against some of the tendencies or mistakes you might make? Basically, what advice would you give your younger self entering your career?

[00:18:15] **Allan Scott:**

I probably would have said get a certification or a vocation. Get the broadest array of education you can possibly get. And if you can pick up a ticket, like a designation, of something in your back pocket, you know, you're an engineer, you're a lawyer, or you're an accountant, something like that, you don't need to work in any of those fields. throughout your public service career, but that would be your value add proposition as to why you should be hired over some other highly qualified person competing against you for a job. Because remember, if I'm as a director hiring a manager, I'm just not asking who would be a competent manager because I have a lot of candidates who would be competent managers. I'm asking who would bring the greatest value to my table of managers.

[00:19:03] **Katie Jensen:**

Can you plug your LinkedIn? Because it's so great. You should tell people to follow you on LinkedIn because you're so active on it.

[00:19:08] **Allan Scott:**

A LinkedIn profile is a great thing to have. And if you're within the public service, you have your own internal systems where you're essentially

creating a LinkedIn profile for your system.

[00:19:17] **Allan Scott:**

So you might as well cut-and-paste it over. And the reason is, if you express an interest in a new job or you apply for something, truth be told, one of the first things the hiring manager or director or ADM does is they'll check you out on LinkedIn, and they're just looking to see where you've been, where you've worked, are there any shared experiences, and of course the key question, is there anyone that I know who also knows this person that can tell me about them before I finalize an interview list? So it is in your benefit to curate a LinkedIn profile that will help facilitate your career.

[00:19:50] **Katie Jensen:**

And if you're just starting out in the workforce, or you're looking to switch fields, here's what Allan has to say.

[00:19:56] **Allan Scott:**

Public service is an honorable and viable career that too many qualified people don't consider.

[00:20:03] **Allan Scott:**

I have enormously successful private sector friends, but it's feast or famine. They'll work and then the company will get sold, or they'll be downsized, or their department will be closed. So they had huge chunks of their careers where they were unemployed and had to go through the stress of finding a new job and so forth.

[00:20:19] **Allan Scott:**

And with public service there can be uncertainty too, but it's usually of a

different sort. And you have the opportunity to, if you hate doing something, to start doing a new thing without quitting. And I feel like that's a key value. But be forewarned, because if you're good and we see you're good, our goal will be to keep you for 2 years. Because if we can keep you for 2 years, we got a real shot at 5. And if we can keep you for 5 years, we can get you for 10. And if we get you for 10, we've got you for 30. So that's our plan, but hopefully it dovetails with your plan as well.

[00:20:56] **Katie Jensen:**

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[00:21:06] **Katie Jensen:**

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