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PETER SHERGOLD AC has been the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet since 2003. A former academic and author, he has served with distinction in a wide range of public administration appointments. Peter is also Chair of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government and a member of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Board.

Q: *What is your ideal Australia?*

A: A country in which people share hope and enthusiasm for the future.

Q: *How would describe Australia at present?*

A: A country insufficiently aware of its wonderful attributes, considerable strengths and extraordinary potential.

Q: *Which Australian do you most admire?*

A: I admire young people who, in many different ways, seek to work in the public interest.

Q: *What do you consider your greatest achievement?*

A: Being recognised in the Australia Day Honours “for service to the community as a significant leader ... in the public sector” – and, with far less competence, being a dad.

Q: *What is your greatest regret or life learning to date?*

A: Learning that the ‘work-life balance’ is too simple: work, paid and unpaid, provides many of the rewards of life.

Q: *Where do you find your inspiration?*

A: Cross-country skiing on a fine day in the Snowy Mountains: a blue sky, sparkling snow, snow gums and exercise are hard to beat.

Q: *Who are your heroes?*

A: The people who, through voluntary endeavour, make a community.

Q: *How would you describe yourself?*

A: A thinker trapped in a doer’s body.

Q: *If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?*

A: Stop it being so secretly enjoyable to behave like a grumpy old man.

Q: *What is your worst fear?*

A: Boredom.

Q: *What qualities do you most admire in people?*

A: Enthusiasm, commitment, good will, humour.

Q: *Who are your favourite writers?*

A: Historians and biographers.

Q: *When are you happiest?*

A: Doing things I’ve never done before.

Q: *What did you want to be when you grew up?*

A: An archaeologist.

Q: *What one thing would you tell your children about how to live/be in the world?*

A: Try to make a difference.

Q: *What is your life motto?*

A: You wouldn’t be dead for quids.