

## James Shelton: Back to Government

### Introduction

A company owned by the Reserve Bank of Australia hired James Shelton in 2007 to direct their business development. James soon learned about the bank's involvement in foreign bribery. He informed a regulator, which made no difference. James was dismissed when he attempted to press the issue. He enlisted the media in an attempt to prompt an investigation. Four years after James took the job at the bank, and with enormous effort by him and by journalists, Australia made its first ever charges of foreign bribery conspiracy. Key players were convicted and the bank was fined AU\$19.8 million. Further convictions took place in the coming years.

After leaving the bank, James took some time off. For a few years, he struggled to start his career. Then he became a senior manager for international relations at an Australian university. He has since moved on to a position as the relationship manager for a government-based innovation organisation.

### The disclosure

A company (Securrency) owned by the Reserve Bank of Australia hired James in 2007 to direct their business development. Within months of starting, James and another new recruit encountered fraud conspiracy among senior staff and a sister company, Note Printing Australia. They were involved in bribery in various countries, including Malaysia and Nigeria. James sought legal advice to protect himself. Although he urged his colleague to do the same, his colleague decided instead to speak with the managing director about what they had found. James's colleague lost his job. James worked to expose the crimes and provided evidence to a regulator. Five months went by with no action, at which point he asked the regulator for an update. James was soon sacked, with no justifiable reason.

James decided to engage the mainstream media and worked closely with journalists, forcing the regulator to conduct an extensive investigation. In mid-2011, Australia made its first ever foreign bribery conspiracy convictions. Six executives and the bank itself were charged. Penalties of AU\$19.8 million and \$1.8 million were levied against Securrency and Note Printing Australia. In 2012, 2016 and 2018, further convictions followed, including of two bank directors. While some large fines were exacted, the sentencing was light (including two suspended sentences of four and six months). This represents weak accountability for Australia's most extensive foreign bribery deal, which involved Vietnam.

### The new role

Like many of his whistleblowing counterparts, James struggled to find employment when he was sacked after making his disclosure. Given his background in marketing and international relations, he was able to look outside of the banking sector for his next role. As of autumn 2018, he has returned to work for the Australian government, having moved on from a university position as senior manager of international relations. He is now the relationship manager of an innovation agency in Victoria. This is a century-old organisation that aims to drive scientific, technological and economic innovation in the education sector.

From his experience as a whistleblower, James now provides disclosure advice to others that need it. A parliamentary inquiry that took place after his disclosure may result in the establishment of a whistleblower protection authority in Australia. If this happens and the entity is properly resourced and supported, James hopes to collaborate with it in the future.

## Factors that helped

### *Perseverance*

To get a break from the intensity of the whistleblowing experience as well as an unsuccessful job search, James decided to go to Cambodia, a place he had visited in the 1990s. He returned to Australia six months later to contribute to journalists' investigation of his disclosure claims. A large accounting firm hired him around this time for part-time forensic work. He still could not find full-time employment.

In the wake of his disclosure, James suspected his career in the financial industry had come to a close. He expected to be perceived as "someone who's a troublemaker, someone who'll cause issues and problems, and isn't going to be a company man." He questioned the integrity of the entire banking sector in Australia. "This is our central bank, the top end... If these people aren't clean and pure, then who is?" Indeed, James did receive his share of rejections from prospective employers. In spite of this, he continued searching, widening his scope until he secured a relationship management post in a university, something he was quite happy with.

### *Friends and Family*

Throughout his whistleblowing and job hunting, James was assisted by reliable social ties. This circle included family members, friends, counsellors as well as new acquaintances made directly as a result of his disclosure experience. "People that get the full story [are rare]. You get good at just saying bits and pieces of it but not all." He emphasises the benefit of having smart friends who "are quite fascinated by it and give you good feedback... they're good to discuss it with." Intelligent discussion with friends and one academic in particular gave James a much-needed sense of being understood on a deep level while also being able to process his experience. Paired with continuous morale provided by friends and family, this helped him in his applications to secure work.

### *Experience and Education*

While James's disclosure took place within the financial system, his role was around business development rather than, for instance, accounting. In his new job hunt, he began to focus more on skills he had learned and deployed in the past, allowing him to look beyond the sector in which he had blown the whistle. James's education had begun in marketing, and later took a turn towards international relations and diplomacy, areas in which he acquired postgraduate qualifications before his work with Securrency. As such, international relationship management roles such as the one he secured in the university were available to him.

Prior to his disclosure, James had held positions in other government agencies, including, for example, the Department of Defence. His most recent move into a government-owned innovation company made sense, given this precedent. Focusing on his attributes and abilities in this way facilitated James's career redevelopment.

### **Summary: James today**

James blew the whistle on a foreign bribery ring within a national central bank. Because of this, he lost his job. Unthwarted in his pursuit of justice, he joined forces with the media to bring about convictions and fines against those responsible. His experience left him with a mistrust of the Australian financial industry. He found work in his area of expertise in a university and later progressed to an innovation initiative of the government. He continues to promote ethical business and transparency by advising other whistleblowers, and aspires to contribute to a potential whistleblower protection organisation in the future.

### **Read More:**

*Details of the final convictions:*

<https://www.cdpp.gov.au/case-reports/security-and-note-printing-australia-foreign-bribery-prosecutions-finalised>

*James's story as a whistleblower and his interactions with the media:*

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/how-a-meeting-in-a-cafe-with-a-journalist-prompted-australia-s-biggest-foreign-bribery-case-20181127-p50inv.html>