

Phil Goulin

Class of 1978

Chief Financial Officer, MFAT



Phil's Story

On a recent weekend trip to Hamilton, Phil drove past St John's College. Its size and the renovations happening across campus took him by surprise - quite the contrast to how he remembered his high school.

"My memories of St John's are of a small school. But its size was also one of its strengths. You were encouraged to participate and collaborate. We looked out for each other - it developed pride and created identity."

Staff promoted team spirit both on the sports field and academically. There weren't that many stars; you had to work as a team to achieve. "We beat Hamilton Boys High in rugby and dominated cricket; basketball was just starting to grow."

Phil remembers his high school years as a happy time. He captained the 1st XV and the 1st XI cricket team for two years. "A school's culture comes from its leadership - Brother Pastor John at that time." Leadership roles were identified and supported, collaboration promoted.

Looking back, he labels it an enabling culture, consistent and fair. Corporal punishment was still a thing, but it was applied fairly.

Boys will be boys. Lunchtime was often used sandal slapping - juniors versus seniors. Staff rarely intervened. However, when he broke a boy's arm in the process, the punishment was swift and painful: He had to drive his peer home from school to Te Awamutu - Phil lived in Frankton at the time.

After leaving St John's, Phil completed his Bachelor of Management Studies at Waikato University. He was the first one in his family to do so. In his final year at uni, aged 21, he got offered a position as an opening bowler in an English cricket team. Phil chose to complete university — a difficult decision at the time, but the right one for him.

"There will always be crossroads. Make a decision and stick with it. And don't be too anxious about your decision. You will not make the right one each and every time, and that's OK too."

In 1983 he moved to Wellington and has been living and working there ever since, except for a customary OE. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) and became Deputy Secretary of Corporate Affairs in 2008, the very first non-diplomat to be appointed to this position.

As member of the Ministry's Senior Leadership Team he worked through restructures and led the Ministry's response to the Christchurch Earthquake - he was responsible for coordinating all the offers of and requests for foreign assistance. That was in 2011, and by 2012, he had to push pause and take time off work. A much-needed break to reflect on what is really important in life and make some changes. He's now back at MFAT as the Chief Financial Officer.

Note to younger self: "Success can be defined in different ways."

"Building team culture, creating identity, identifying and supporting leadership are all values and skills that I still apply now in my professional career."