



TICP – Episode 52 – How do you create comms with purpose? (Season 6, episode 04)

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Hello and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. The aim of this show is to inform, inspire, and genuinely energise the internal comms profession, all in an effort to improve the way organisations communicate with their people. My guest this week is Maliha Aqeel, a senior experienced international comms practitioner.

Maliha is Director of Global Communications and Digital Channels at Fix Network World, which is a global leader in the automotive aftermarket services sector. The company has 2,000 sites around the world, offering collision, glass and mechanical repair facilities. And Maliha leads multi-channel integrated comms programmes for the organisation. She was previously at the accounting firm EY, where she was Assistant Director for Brand Marketing and Communications.

Now, Maliha and I first met through the International Association of Business Communicators, as we both sit on its International Executive Board, but it was actually Maliha's presentation at this year's IABC World Conference that prompted me to invite her on the show. She shared her advice for how we can create purpose-driven content, not from a theoretical point of view, but clearly from the perspective of someone who does this in her day-to-day role.



So, creating purposeful content is our starting point but, as ever, in this show, we go into so much more. We discuss the key to being successful in a global comms role. We talk about the expectations of Generation Z (or Z, if you prefer) – the next cohort to enter our workforce. We talk about Maliha’s plans to advance our understanding of corporate purpose by undertaking a doctorate no less in how organisations can activate and communicate the tangible impact of purpose on their balance sheet. And, towards the end of our conversation, listen out for easily the most impressively intentional approach to professional development I have ever heard. So, without further ado, I bring you Maliha Aqeel.

So, Maliha, thank you so much for appearing on The Internal Comms Podcast. It's lovely to have you here.

Maliha [05:01]: Thank you, Katie, thank you for having me.

Katie [05:04]: So, at this year’s IABC World Conference you gave an excellent presentation entitled ‘Brand Reimagined: The DNA of Purpose-Driven Content’. And I enjoyed your presentation so much that I just had to have you on the show to talk about it. First of all, that word ‘purpose’, it seems almost ubiquitous these days, we’re just hearing it everywhere. And I always think with a word that gets used a lot there’s more opportunity for us to mean different things, each of us when we’re using it – I think that about ‘authenticity’ is another one – so, let’s start with a definition. What does ‘purpose’ mean to you? And I suppose the second part of that question is, what’s driving your interest in ‘purpose’?

Maliha [05:53]: For me, ‘purpose’ is the reason why a brand exists beyond making money. And I think often I’ve seen purpose being used to talk about the mission and vision, but it’s not actually that. It’s because- the mission and vision are often tied to what the business model is, where the company hopes to be. I think purpose is one of those intangibles. It’s often hard to define for every company unless they know it really well, in terms of, ‘Here’s why we were created in the first place and the impact that we hope to make in society.’ That, I think, to me, is where purpose really comes in because if there isn’t an impact to society then you’re not really a purpose-driven brand.

Katie [06:42]: Yeah, it’s that higher goal, I suppose, your reason for existing beyond making money and keeping shareholders happy. Yeah. And what sort of drove you to talk about this at the World Conference? Are you just seeing this creep into your work more and more as a communicator?

Maliha [07:03]: I think that over the last 10 years I started working on developing a lot of different brands. I worked on the brand task force for the IABC brand as well, including one that I did in my day job at the Institute of Corporate Directors. In the conversations that we were having with stakeholders, it kept coming back to ‘Why does someone want to belong to the ICD or IABC?’ And it sounds like those conversations were not about the value of specific benefits that you get for an association. They were



coming back to what people were looking to feel, to achieve. And it came down to that stakeholder experience. Then that started, kind of, got me thinking (and I'm a very curious person so, when people start talking, I'm automatically going to Google to look things up) I think that at that point is when I started reading a lot about purpose. And different magazines, online journals, there was a seminal work that was published in the *Harvard Business Review* many years ago, which at that point was the first time that someone was struck, started talking about that idea of the purpose of an organisation.

And the more I read about it, the more I saw the connection to the work that we do as communication professionals, which is about finding ways to tell the organisation's story. And, often, that story isn't a press release about an acquisition or about the work the company did. The story is actually about how the company is making an impact to society through the work that it's doing. And I think the more I read about it, and the more I read case studies about companies that have done it well, the more I started to see that there's actually something untapped there in terms of what organisations – majority of them – could focus on, because for the most part purpose has been limited to specific companies that have stuck to their core in terms of why they were created. And that's really, for me, or everything of it starts with this curiosity of, 'Hmm, I wonder what that is?' Or 'I wonder what if?' And then I kind of go down a rabbit hole from there.

Katie [09:20]: Curiosity drives so much of what we do, just sparks interest in new learning. So, I completely understand where you're coming from in that respect.

Maliha [09:28]: With respect to the World Conference presentation, I've been doing a lot of work and thought leadership and content. That's always been my area of expertise. And, so, when I started thinking about the content that gets really successful in terms of helping the business achieve its objectives, and the content that gets the most reach and gets people talking, is the content that is anchored in the organisation's purpose. And there's often a lot of really bad thought leadership out there. There's material disguised as thought leadership. With communication getting more and more involved in the content creation part of it, I thought it was really important for professionals to start to think about how they can elevate their organisation's content journey.

Katie [10:14]: Yeah, absolutely. So, create richer, more meaningful content that aligns to the rationale 'Why your organisation exists'. And it's noisy out there, presumably. So, you know, in all of our worlds for all of our stakeholders. So, quality will out at the end of the day, to get noticed, I guess.

So, you set out the four A's – four component parts, if you like – of purpose-driven content or purpose-driven brands. Can you tell us about your four A's and how they impact our work as comms professionals?



Maliha [10:49]: Sure. So, the four A's are: accountability, authenticity, action, and advocacy. And the way that I see it from a comms professional, you have a role to play in each of those areas.

So, accountability is very much about those metrics. It's about demonstrating impact. There's often examples of brands like Toms, the shoe company, where their customers are ones that really believe in the values of that company. And they target themselves to those consumers as well. So, accountability is very much about understanding the values of your customers, your employees, and then being able to show through hard metrics whether that's corporate citizenship initiatives, maybe a ... if those are part of the values that you espouse. And being able to show that so that not only are you reporting back to your stakeholders about what you're doing, but you're also keeping yourself accountable, to ensure that you actually meet the metrics that you've outlined and are able to deliver on what your stakeholders are expecting. And, I think, for the comms professionals, this is a huge part of that storytelling for them, to be able to communicate what the company is doing, but also contribute to how the company could be leveraging their corporate citizenship in a way maybe they haven't done before, in order to be accountable.

The other is authenticity. So, with authenticity, this is very much about your brand voice. It's about, again, those values and making sure that everything you say and do is aligned to the values that you are known for. And you're not simply taking part in a conversation because it's the popular thing to do. But rather, you're taking part in conversations that align to the values of your brand. And you can see, like here as well, because it is about the brand voice and it is about the conversations that are happening, that is core to the role that communication professionals play for an organisation, whether you're in an internal role or part of the agency.

The third A, which is action. This is, I think, more tactical in terms of the storytelling, blogs, articles, podcasts, creating campaigns that tell the brand story, making sure the brand story is cohesive across all of the different touch points, that you have a longer customer journey. And, so, this one gets into more the tactics, where the others are a little bit more on the strategic side of things.

And the final is advocacy, which, as it sounds, it's about making advocates of your customers so that they are the ones that are talking about your brand and your brand values to others who share their values with them. And I think if you do the first three well, the advocacy is actually almost an impact of those. You have something that gets delivered. And sometimes you don't even have to actively work on it, because if you've done the other three things well, this just ends up being the result. But when you do have great brand advocates, it does make the job of the comms professional easier. Because then you're able to leverage a lot of what your stakeholders or your advocates are saying about you to help make those connections to the accountability piece, to say, 'You know what, yes, we are reporting on data, but here's what our advocates are also seeing.' And they're almost validating the accountability that you're focused on. To say, 'This brand actually delivers on what they said they would?'



Katie [14:41]: And, also, I guess, internal brand advocacy as well. So, there's a lot of research I think that shows- we had Keith Lewis on the show who's manages social media for Zurich Financial Services saying that the content that's posted from employees is about 10 times more effective than corporately posted content on LinkedIn, for example. So, people love stories from people. I think that's what it's telling us.

Maliha [15:10]: Where I'm currently working, Fix Network World, we launched our employee advocacy programme earlier this year. And we've seen that uptake as well. And we've seen people actually getting interested in the company. And we're starting to see an impact on our employer brand as a result. Because, when I remember when I joined Fixed Network, we didn't have a website. I was researching what, you know, 'Do I want to work here?' and couldn't find anything. And I think, for me, that was part of the challenge: if nothing exists, you can create it. And I was really pleased that within a year of joining the company, I could launch an employee advocacy programme that now actually has contributed to our employer brand. But it's also contributing to the fact our employees are sharing all of the great things that have been happening in the Network. And we're starting to show them that, you know, we're a lot bigger than people think we are. And we're only able to do that by using the power of our employees and their networks.

Katie [16:09]: Just out of interest, do you give your employees toolkits, guidelines, or do you just give them motivation and inspiration to get on with it? Or is it a combination of both?

Maliha [16:20]: It's a combination. So, for us, part of it had to do with getting the right platform. So, we've been investing heavily in marketing technologies and communication technologies, both for reaching our customers, but also helping our employees. So, with the platform, you know, part of that was education. It was very much about 'Why you should be sharing content' and it was about the fact that it could help them build their personal brand. And for some employees, you know, that wasn't a motivation. They don't want to build their personal brand. They're happy not having a presence. But there are people out there in our company who have very customer-facing roles. They're dealing with insurance companies, they're dealing with fleet companies, they're dealing with a lot of different stakeholders that when they go into a meeting, they want to know, 'What does this VP or this director, what do they do? What does the company do?' And they found that that was a real gap for them. And ever since I joined the company, I remember, every conversation I had with the senior executive, there was 'Nobody knows who we are' and 'I don't really know what I'm supposed to say about ourselves.' And when you go on social media, people can't find anything that we're doing, except for one or two brands. And the other thing that from I heard from employees was, 'We don't actually know what's going on inside the organization.'



And we tried emails, we found they were not effective. I think only 45% of people were opening their emails. And we said, 'Okay, if people aren't opening their emails, why is that?' And it's because a large majority of our workforce are actually in the field. They're not at their desk, even though they all have smartphones and they could access email on their mobile, they're just on the road and it's not a priority for them. And, so, we started looking at 'What are the different solutions out there?' Looked at apps, and we were implementing a social media management tool. And part of the tool, they had another product, which was an employee advocacy one. So, when we started talking with them, automatically I started thinking, 'Yeah, I could do employee advocacy, but this might actually help my internal comms problem.' Because, if it's a really easy-to-use app, and if the end people do use apps – I think it's proven worldwide that apps are popular based on the number of downloads – then I thought, 'You know what? I think this is worth experimenting.'

And our CEO is very much an entrepreneur, he encourages experimentation. He always says to me, 'If it doesn't work, that's okay. At least you tried it.' And you move on to the next thing. And, so, when I spoke to him about it, I said, 'You know, it's an incremental spend on top of what we're getting.' But, I said, 'I think it will be worth it because even if we don't have everyone adopting it right away, we still have at least a year to get most people on the platform and figure out, you know, how we're going to use it well.' And he said, 'Go ahead.' And we went with it. And, you know, we saw almost like 70% adoption within the first three months. Which is very rare for employee apps, because often it takes you a year to get anywhere close to that. But, we found that we actually had to educate people about how this app will help them. We showed them that if they were guest workers, they could use it on their desktop, they don't have to have the mobile app, so they had options. And there was a weekly digest that goes out through the app with all the news that they missed.

So, if you have people that don't feel that it is core to their role to know about the content and share it, at least on a weekly basis, they get one wrap-up email which has everything that they missed during the week. That is enough to keep them informed. But on the sales side, people that really want to show their brand on LinkedIn and other channels, all of a sudden they were like, 'Hey, this is great. Like I'm sharing all of this industry news.' It wasn't always just news about us, it was also industry news. So, they could help show that they had an active presence within the industry and knew what was going on. And, so, we started to see that the ones that were the early adopters were definitely the salespeople, because they were the ones that desperately needed something like that. But, as they started sharing, a lot of their team members got involved as well. And it got to the point where everyone was like, 'Hey, I saw like so-and-so shared this piece, I'm going to share something even more.' And it almost became a little bit competitive.

But you know, from our perspective, I didn't want it to be something that I said, you know, 'You have to use it.' We organised training calls, we created a small course as part of our learning management system. And every conversation I had with people, like anytime someone would be like, 'Hey, I need to



send out an email to all employees.' I would be like, 'Well, we don't actually send employ emails anymore. But rather we use our platform, Bamboo, to post the news.' And I said, 'We'll still be able to pull metrics to see who saw it. And if it's super critical we can also do the broadcast through Bamboo so that it does go out to their emails, but the information itself resides in Bamboo for people who are using it most actively.' So, every conversation has been about driving people to use that platform and showing them that that is the only way we communicate with employees, because that's how our employees wanted to be communicated to.

I think people often do forget that all of these platforms or channels are not for us as the communication and marketing professionals, or even the executives at times. These platforms are for our end stakeholders, whether they're customers, employees, whoever they are, and at the end of the day, it's about what they want and how they want to engage with your brand. And if you're willing to engage with them in the way they want to be engaged to, then I think you have the makings of a successful brand.

Katie [22:38]: I'm guessing there's probably going to be a few listeners that are at the point of looking across the vast array of employee apps that are on the marketplace at the moment and thinking, 'Where do I start?' You know, 'What's the right one?' Did you have any sort of critical success factors, critical features or benefits that you were looking for that made you go for Bamboo? We don't need to promote that one, particularly. It was the right one for you. But I'm just curious about the process you went through.

Maliha [23:07]: For us, it's all about efficiencies. I don't want my team to have to go to three different places to post content. So, for us, when we found out that this one existed with the management platform we were already getting, and that we would be able to push content out through that platform to Bamboo, to me, that's three steps saved for my team.

Ultimately, for me, all of these technologies that we're investing in, it's all about efficiency. Because if we're spending too much time doing things that are taking away from the value-add tasks that we could be doing, then that's not a good use of time. So, for me, that was one of the critical things is, I knew that eventually I would get one, but it wasn't the primary thought in my mind when we were evaluating social media platforms. But it's just one of those things when you hear about it, and you think, 'Hmm, hey, I can do this with one click.' And I thought 'Yeah.' Like, you know, 'If we can do it with one click, and my team doesn't have to have to go to three different places to update the same content, that's the platform we're going to go with.' And I will say it's true for every platform: we evaluate, we look at efficiency first, cost second. Because you may get a cheaper platform, but if it's not efficient and you're having to spend more time on it, then you kind of have lost the cost-effectiveness of that. So, I think that was key.



The other is always the 'What kind of metrics can we track?' You know, like, often platforms will measure maybe specific things but not give you deep data about the consumer behaviour that's taking place on their platform. And I will say I don't think any platform is perfect when it comes to this kind of data analytics they provide you. I think you always have to have some kind of work-around to analyse it and make it sense for you.

I like the metrics that this platform was providing to us. And it matched the ones that I felt were right for where we are as an organisation, and the journey that we're on, because we're still very early in our digital journey. We're not there at the end, where we're like, 'Hey, we know exactly what data we need to be collecting.' We're very much at the start, where we're like, 'If we can get information about how our employees are using this app, if we know what stories are being read, which ones are being shared, what the reach is, if we can get a lot of this information that will help us make informed decisions about the kind of content that we need to be promoting on this app, but also the kind of content we need to be creating as an organisation, then those metrics for now are good enough for us.'

I think as we go further down this journey that will change, I'm sure, because the more deep data we get, the more we'll want to know, 'Is there something else we can get?' I always think, like, with technology, it's constantly changing. And I think the good thing about any of the technologies that you work with is often the providers are willing to listen to their customers and get feedback on how they can improve. And they always share the product roadmap with you. So, I think when you're evaluating, the huge part of that discussion has to be the product roadmap and looking at the product roadmap to see how many of your future needs will be met and by what time. And if you're willing to wait for that timeline, then I think that becomes part of how you evaluate, because if the timeline is, 'We're only gonna be able to meet this need of yours in five years', and you're at that stage where you're like, 'Well, I really need to meet this need by next year', then you automatically know that's not a platform that you want to use, because their timeline and how much they're investing in their platform does not align with the transformational journey that your organisation is on.

So, I think those are some of the key things that we look at. And, you know, I always work with our procurement team. And I've learned a lot from them in terms of how to evaluate, the questions to ask. I think, like all communication professionals, I thought I knew everything going in. And then I learned that there was a lot I did not know, particularly when it comes to contracts. And doing the first pass at a contract, before they even go to procurement. So, you know, there were things that they taught me about what to look for, what to ask. And, I think well I've certainly learned that anything in an organisation, it has to be a partnership with another department. Because if comms or marketing try to do everything themselves, they inevitably will miss out on things that could have brought value to the organisation, because they don't always have a complete understanding of every single thing that's happening in an organisation. And not that we're expected to know everything that goes on, but I think if you don't have those key partnerships, you miss out and you actually end up showing the executives



that you are not a dot-connector. And you're not thinking about the organisation, but rather you're just thinking about your particular need. So, in my role in particular, I work a lot with our procurement team. I work with IT, I work with HR. I work with our senior executives, too, but without these other three departments, I don't think I would be able to do what I do, because they actually help advocate for me to say, 'Yes, she's done all the evaluations, she's asked the right questions, she has made you a recommendation on the best platform that you could be investing in.' And when all of those things happen, you know, when we get to the end, there isn't any of that, 'No, I'm not going to sign this contract.' It's 'Okay, you've done your due diligence, you've done your checks, and off you go and here's your budget.'

Katie [29:19]: Great advice, there. Thank you. You've already mentioned Toms in terms of a purpose-driven organisation. Are there any other organisations that are particular stand-outs for you, when it comes to those that really do properly define, share and live by their purpose?

Maliha [29:39]: Yeah, this one is an organisation that I've worked for, so I have a lot of knowledge and that's EY. I worked for them for several years and one of the reasons why I wanted to work for them was because of the fact that they are so purpose-driven. I remember I was at the stage in my life where I was looking at 'What's my next opportunity? What's the next challenge that I want?' And I was looking at all of the Big Four consulting firms, and they stood out for me because of their purpose. And what was really coincidental is that my job there was to do thought leadership. And a huge part of how they bring their purpose to life is through thought leadership. So, I got a chance to actually be in the middle of all of that, to be able to see, you know, when you work with different stakeholders inside the organisation about creating content, how do you guide those conversations so that it comes back to the purpose? How do you make sure that the big thought leadership programmes aren't being done because somebody had an idea, but rather it went through this entire vetting process before the work began to say, 'Okay, how does this align to our purpose to build a better working world?' 'How does it core to some of the key principles behind that, which is about if, you know, efficient and trusted capital markets?' 'How does it help the stakeholders?'

And for an accounting firm, you know, they're in such a heavily regulated industry, that if you get it wrong, there is potential of fines of millions of dollars from regulators from any part of the world where you're operating depending on how strict the regulators are. So, the cost of getting it wrong for them is very high which is why when they do their content, purpose is so important, because if it doesn't align to their purpose, they know that's not the right thing to do and they know that it could get them into trouble. And that's not to say that every content is great and, you know, it's always purpose-driven, because sometimes you just need those tactical contents that are at different stages of the client journey. But, I would say, as part of that client journey, when we're at the awareness stage, every single piece of content is purpose-driven. As you go further down that client journey into preference consideration, it starts to become a little bit more tactical, in terms of being super relevant to what that



individual client need is. But, if you think about it, if you started from that perspective of being purpose-driven at the awareness stage, what you're really doing is almost like layering it back as you go down that client journey, but you're still staying true to that purpose. It's just maybe not as visible and evident as it would be when it's about awareness. So, for me, that is one that I look at. And, you know, even though I don't work there anymore, I still go to their website to read their content, because I'm really interested in a lot of the points of view that they share about the world as it could exist from a work perspective, whether it's the future of work, or it's different consumers, and what do those consumer habits and behaviours look like? I'm super fascinated and I think it feeds into that curiosity that I have about the world around me. And I know when I go there, I will find things that make me think. And you know, if you think about it, the only way to build a better working world is to get people thinking and to make them curious about the world around them. So, I think in that respect, they do their job really well.

Katie [33:20]: Links in the show notes, guys, so that you can explore all this content yourself.

So, I believe you are hoping to embark on a doctorate in corporate purpose. Specifically, how purpose can create tangible value on the balance sheet? This sounds absolutely fascinating, ever-so-slightly daunting to me at the same time. I'd love to know more about this. What kind of research do you hope to be undertaking and what is it, at the end of the day, that you hope to discover?

Maliha [33:54]: And I think with this one, I almost see like, if it comes together, being that part of this journey I've been on about my curiosity about purpose. And the more I read about it, the more I realised that, you know, you can talk about purpose, but it feels a bit too theoretical at times. And when you're dealing with shareholders – my background is financial communications, so, I dealt a lot with shareholders, I dealt a lot with different types of investors – for them, it is about 'What is the earnings per share? What does your net loss and you know, what is EBITA?' All of those things. Those are the kinds of metrics that they look at to evaluate companies. And that's been the case for a really long time. I would say almost hundreds of years, ever since we've had shareholders. But it's only in the last I think, almost like three to five years where even shareholders have started to look at companies to say, 'Well, that's all well and good, but what does your five-year journey look like? What does your 10-year journey look like?'

And part of it was something that I worked on when I was at the ICD, which was an initiative called Long-term Capitalism. It was something that was started by a lot of the big institutional investors there that are investing in global assets. And part of that was to show that capitalism can be sustainable. It's not only about making money, but it's also about making contributions to society, because companies recognise that they have a role to play. And the institutional investors started to look at their portfolios and started to realise that while their portfolios were doing well financially, their reputation was taking a hit. And the reputation of companies, when those get impacted, it does have an impact on the portfolio value. Because if the stock prices start going down, if the sales are down, all of that has a financial



impact on the company. And, so, a lot of these institutional investors started looking at reputation. And reputation risk, almost, like, 10 years ago, was one of those buzzwords where everyone was talking about 'reputation risk' and the 'value of reputation risk'. And what I started to realise when I did my research (because part of the doctoral programme is you have to prepare your statement of intent for research, and you have to do quite a lot of research ahead of time to show them why you want to invest four years of your life if you're looking at one topic) and so part of the research that I did, I realised that the central problem was companies talk about their purpose, but no one is actually able to put a value on it, to say that, 'If we did purpose, here is the actual dollar value that you can assign to it.'

If you think about reputation, in financial statements there's always something called 'goodwill'. There is a dollar value for goodwill, and essentially, goodwill came out of the reputation risk discussions. So, for me, that kind of got me thinking about 'can we have dollar value for purpose? If we do have a dollar value for purpose, can we communicate that to the investor community, to different stakeholders, to show you know, what like, "Here is the tangible impact that purpose is having on our actual business"?' And there's so many different components to that, and I'm sure I will learn there's other components that I don't even know about. But definitely things like the supply chain, making sure that you're sourcing from sustainable sources, that your supply chain in different countries is actually being respectful of local laws, but also human rights concerns. So, all of those things, when you start to think about your supply chain, your supply chain as a company, is the thing that gets measured. And if you can start to embed your purpose in those things and then be able to measure it, you will start to see that impact on the balance sheet.

And one of the feedback that I got on my proposal was to really think about the communication aspect of it more because in companies like EY, with something called 'Project EPIC', has been doing a lot of work on the accounting side of things to create measures for long-term value, which can be shown in the financial statements. And, so, the recommendation from the university was 'Take some of the work that's already been done on the metric side, but now start to think about how you layer on communication as part of that.' Because they said, 'You're not an accountant, so you won't be able to do that work.' And I said 'No, I wasn't expecting to create accounting standards for purpose'. But, I said, 'I know that there is work that's been done as part of Project Epic to create these tangible metrics.' But, I said 'The challenge is nobody actually knows what those are. And they don't actually know how they connect back to the broader business.' And she says, 'Well, that's actually a communication problem.' You know, silly me as a communication professional, I didn't think it was a communication problem, because to me, I was like, 'That's a business problem. That's a management problem.' But in speaking to the programme advisors, they were like, 'No, this is a communication problem.' Because if companies actually have all of this information, but it's fragmented, there's no one bringing it all together. They said, 'Wouldn't it make sense for them to actually have a framework that allows them to communicate it?' And, so, for me, a part of that research is about understanding all of the different metrics that exist across an organisation, the KPIs that are not always communication KPIs, but they're everything to do



with operations, with financials and to start to bring them all together under one strategic communication framework so that I am able to show that companies that are purpose-driven and activate their purpose across all areas of the organisation, I'm able to create a framework that allows them to communicate the impact of that purpose to their employees, to their investors, to their customers and other stakeholders. And then, by doing that, it will have an impact on their share price if they're a public company, because it creates confidence in the company, it creates confidence that they will be around for a long time because they are not chasing the trends but, rather, they have a long-term view on their business and they're putting in place all of these measures and frameworks that allow them to continue to evolve as a company.

And, so, part of that sustainable capitalism that I talked about earlier was about the fact that capitalism evolves over time. And that's why it's been successful for so long. But you need people to actually push capitalism to evolve. And, so, that entire sustainable capitalism conversation from, think it was like 10, 12 years ago now, there was an initiative that came out which was a framework for long-term capitalism. And a lot of this, I find, is almost, like, purpose has now become at the bookend of that, where there's a lot of work that's been done on the tangibles of financial statements on supply chains, on operations, on creating KPIs that actually make sense. But now it's about those intangibles like purpose, to say, 'What is that KPI?' Like, 'Could we create KPIs that are tied to the purpose? And that every or every department has to have a KPI, then, that measures them on how they're aligning themselves to the purpose and delivering on that purpose.' And, so, for me, part of the work that I want to do is create all of those frameworks that can be embedded into different departments and build on the work that's already been done, but add the layer of communication, so that you're able to activate that purpose, but also communicate its impact to the broader community.

Katie [42:14]: It's absolutely fascinating stuff. My mind is racing. I mean, part of me is just thinking, 'My goodness me, this is the Holy Grail.' I mean, this is what we've been looking for all this time: a number that proves this is what it's worth, this is the value of it. Because intuitively, instinctively, we know the value of being purpose-driven, of standing on the right side of, you know, moral, ethical behaviour. And we also know our consumers and our employees care about these things so much more. And I guess they're looking for that transparency.

Maliha [42:52]: Yeah. And I think part of that conversation is about the change in generation that is happening across, not just within organisations, but generally in society. If you look at each subsequent generation, you know, when with millennials definitely there's differences, whether you're an older millennial or a newer millennial. But ultimately, I think there is things that are common across all of them in terms of the way they want to hold companies to account.

But when you look at Generation Z, they are the ones that are not just holding companies to account but actually becoming activists about doing so. I guess, like, all of my nieces are Generation Z. And one



of them, she's 12 years' old and when I have conversations with her, it's all about, 'Well, why can't companies focus on climate change? Like, how hard is it for them to do that?' And I know instinctually I'm like, 'Yes, climate change is important. But I will admit, it's not something I think about on a day-to-day basis.' I like to think I do my part. But for someone like her and her friends and her classmates, this is almost become one of those things where they're like, 'It's not rocket science, you should be able to figure it out. I mean, you have all this money, you're adults, you're in positions of power.' And for them, that's like, 'If you're not going to do it, we will'. And as I think about how the generations are coming up, the newer generations coming up, and the way that their worldview has been informed, I think if companies don't catch up, they're going to find that they don't, they're not relevant to the conversations because you're going to have new business models emerging that meet the needs of this new generation. And those will be business models that they create, to suit the life and the planet that they believe is their right to have.

Katie [44:52]: What it basically means at the end of the day is that you might have a perfectly acceptable product or service, but if everything that goes around it is not, in some way, benefiting society, that ain't going to be enough because you need to do more than that. Fascinating stuff.

Now, you have a global role as the Director of Global Communications and Digital Channels. But, I also know you've worked internationally for many years. I was just keen to ask a little bit about this in terms of any advice you'd give someone who's maybe about to embark on a global role for the first time and is struggling with just the diversity and the different demands and needs and expectations of an international audience? Any hints and tips?

Maliha [45:42]: I think my first one is to listen. I think the biggest mistake that people can make is to go in with ideas without actually understanding the cultural context of the different countries where your company operates. And, so, part of when I joined Fix Network, but also what I've done in the other roles I've helped during my career is always ask questions and try to understand and listen. And I think that is such an essential skill for any communicator to have. And I think even if you're not in a global role, it's an essential skill to have, because our job is to help stakeholders deliver on their business objectives. And if we're not listening to them and listening to what those business objectives are, we can't actually do our job well.

And, so, for me, as part of my onboarding, I had a lot of calls with a lot of our stakeholders in different countries. And I prepared five questions that I would ask all of them and was the same five questions every time. You know, I wanted to know things like, 'What are some of the challenges that they face in their region?' You know, 'What's the kind of support that they're looking for?' 'What does their market share look like?' Because if they are in an emerging country, their market share is really small. And, so, is that a priority for them, to help them gain more market share? If you're in a more mature country, you're probably market share is not super essential. But maybe engagement and lack of engagement is a



problem to solve. So, for me, I kind of went into it, like, every single interview with the exact same five questions. And it definitely helped me because when I'd ask a question, I would just listen. And I took lots of notes. I still have all of my notes and, to me, that was so important in helping me do my job well, because as I started to build my plan for how I would help the company, I could say, 'Oh, you know what, so-and-so in Australia said to me that this is not going to work for them. So, I can't necessarily mandate that they do this.' Or someone in Germany said to me that, you know, in their market, 'People have a very different motivation for why they would want to join a franchise network.' And, so, if I tell them a message about all of these other things that are not relevant to them, they're gonna miss out.

But I think the biggest lesson that I learned was: I don't have to always be the one to solve the problem. I have to help my regional teams solve it. And often, I think when you are in a global role, you forget the fact that there are regional teams out there whose job is to know the market, to be your eyes and ears in the market, and to help bring your messages to life in a way that is relevant and appropriate for the markets in which they operate. Even if you don't have a communication team or a marketing team in that region, you have someone in that region who knows it well and knows it in a way that you never can if you've never actually worked there or live there.

And, so, part of that listening then kind of translates into socialising and socialising ideas before you launch them, making sure that you have taken into consideration all of the things that could go wrong, but all of the ways in which these campaigns or programmes need to be adapted by the regions and the time that they would need in order to adapt them. Some of it is the key messages, they might need to adapt it to the market. Some of it is actually things like translation. You know, I can't send anything to Germany to say, 'I need you to communicate this tomorrow.' They have to take my English communication, they have to understand it, they have to translate it into German, and they have to make sure that it's appropriate in German for the audience that they're targeting. And, so, I have to be respectful of their timelines. I have to make sure that I have understood what else they're working on. And, so, the earlier you can start working on those things, and the more you can socialise the ideas, you'll find that you actually become more effective in a global role if you forget the fact that your job is not to say 'I'm going to be in the centre and I'm going to push a button, then everything goes down and everyone's going to do what I tell them.' That's not a global role. It wasn't a global role at EY, it's not the global role where I work right now. The role is to listen, is to socialise and is to take that feedback. And every single time improve upon your process so that people see that you're not tone deaf, you're not always just doing the same thing every time, but you've learned from what you did the last time so that you don't ask the same questions again, but rather you ask the next series of questions to actually elevate the process even further, and you make it better every single time. So, I think for me that would be the advice that I would give to people in global roles is that, take a step back, and listen to the talent around you. And give them a chance to tell you all the things that you don't know and probably will never be able to know completely because you're not actually living and working in those markets.



Katie [51:02]: That is such great advice. And I want to come back to something that you said right at the beginning, because I think it's so important. That process that you went through where you decided, 'What are my five core questions?' And I think – and we notice this when we do our Acid Test audits – asking the same question in almost exactly the same way is fascinating, because immediately you start to see where there's alignment, where there's misalignment, where there's gaps. It's just- that alone is a fascinating exercise. So no, thank you for that. Brilliant advice, there.

Now, you've worked across comms disciplines, I know. And I'm just interested in how much crossover you see between, say, media, customer, employee, investor relations? I mean, there are some people saying 'We're all just going to be called communicators at the end of the day.' Is that your view? Or do you think there are some unique characteristics of the internal audience that we should always be bearing in mind?

Maliha [52:06]: There are characteristics and I think it's more goes back to their motivations. I definitely do see crossover. To me, I've always approached my career as audience-first. If I know who my audience is, all the core principles about, you know, the right message, the right place at the right time, they all come together. The message- I think the single core message doesn't change. It's the way you communicate that message that becomes relevant to that audience.

But I think you always have to be mindful of the motivations. For employees, they have chosen your company as a place for them to work. And, nowadays, I think on average people stay with their company three to four years, maybe five at the most. But if you think about the fact that even if they leave after five years, if they had a really great experience, they're going to be your advocates for life, right? And they're going to want to keep coming back. And maybe someday, they might want to come back to work for your company, again, because they realise that they did all the other stuff they wanted to do and now they want to come back here to do things that maybe are different from what they did before. And, so, with employees, I find that while your single core message doesn't change – it's there because that is your key message – the way you communicate it has to be tied to the motivations, but you always have to remember that your employees have choices. And I think especially now, they have even more choices of where they want to work, more importantly, how they want to work. And if you don't recognise that they are in the driver's seat of making the decisions about their careers, they have a lot more choices in terms of the kinds of companies that can better align to their values, maybe better align to the kind of lifestyle they want to live while also being able to earn an income, I think if you don't recognise that, then you are being tone deaf to what you need to do to be a great employer brand.

And I think it's the same for different stakeholders, particularly for public companies. If you don't understand why your investors have chosen to invest in you versus all the other millions of companies out there that they could have chosen to invest in, if you don't understand that, and if you don't meet their needs, and if you're not communicating the things that are important to them, you will lose those



investment dollars. And, so, I think for me, that is what it comes down to is understanding the motivations of the different audience.

And I think there is a difference between audiences that have a vested interest in your organisation versus ones that don't. I don't think media has a vested interest in your individual organisation. Their vested interest is in the story itself and being able to be accountable to the readership, to make sure that they have done their job to tell as accurate a story as they can with what they know. I think, though employees, investors, your end customers, particularly for B2C companies, all of those stakeholders have a vested interest in your company, they have a vested interest that maybe is a little bit self-centered in terms of what their motivations are, and how your company can align to the values that you hold. But, at the end of the day, they have that vested interest, they have chosen either to give you their time, their money, all of their effort, they have chosen to give you something. And, so, I think as a company, you have to think about 'What are you giving back to them that is important to what they're looking for?' And I think that's where often communication professionals can sometimes get things wrong, where they fail to recognise the stakeholders' motivations and what inspires them, what will be relevant for them. They focus on the message they want to tell or the story they want to tell. And they just focus on that. And I always feel that it's a disservice to your stakeholders who are giving you so much to not think about what they want.

So, one of the things that I often tell my team is, you know, 'If you were the one searching on Google, or something, like, what would make *you* want to click on our website versus somebody else's, right?' And I always tell them, like, 'We are stakeholders, as well.' Like, we forget, as communication professionals that when a communication goes out, we as the employee also get it. And sometimes because we've worked on it we kind of ignore it. But if I did not work on it, then I am part of the communication team and I receive it, I have to ask myself, 'How do I feel about this as an employee?' Forget about the fact that I may have worked on it, but if I was to just have received it, 'Do I feel good about it? Do I feel like I have more questions than I have answers? Do I feel like this is a company that's invested in me the way that I'm investing in them?' And you know that I'm always baffled by the fact that we forget that we're also employees. We are so focused on doing our job that we just forget that and it's the same as customers. We forget that we are also customers of our own business. We may be not the complete business. And certainly, I wouldn't be, you know, a customer of the accounting function. But maybe I'm a customer of one of their customers or something like that, right? So, I think if you start to ask yourself, 'If I'm going to put on my consumer hat, and I'm going to be the one consuming those messages, and I'm going to be the one that clicks on something, what will motivate *me* to do it?' And if it motivates me, I'm sure it motivates another 10 people, and then another 10 after that, and I think you keep building it from there. But if you remember that you are also an end stakeholder it makes your job easier, because you know exactly what messages will work. And you know exactly what will not work. And then you just do it really well.



Katie [58:18]: Yes. Really, really good advice. Thank you.

Now, we met through sitting on the International Executive Board of the International Association of Business Communicators. Gosh that's a long sentence isn't it? The IABC. I'm always interested in asking people what draws them to membership associations because I think that for somebody who might be weighing up the pros and cons, thinking of their busy days and their busy life, thinking 'Is this something I should be doing as well?' Why did you get involved? What was your sort of personal motivation for getting involved?

Maliha [58:57]: So, I got involved with IABC when I moved to Canada from Dubai. And when I moved to Canada, I did not know anyone. I have some family here but I did not know any professionals. And I remember when I was in Dubai, there was someone that was an IABC member in Australia. And he was an instructor that was doing a crisis comms workshop for us. And he'd given examples of some of his work to IABC and what he'd learned and there wasn't an IABC chapter in Dubai at that time, so I kind of just parked it and when I moved to Canada, I was like, 'Okay, how am I going to meet other professionals?' Like 'How am I going to get a job? I don't even know how people do communications here!' Like, 'I know nothing.' And, so, I went online and I was like, 'I wonder if there is an IABC chapter in Toronto?' And, coincidentally, at that point it was the largest chapter in the world. And, so, I ended up joining pretty much right away cos I recognised that the only way that I would be able to build my community of other professionals was to be part of an association and to actually show up and take part.

Because one of the things that I think I recognised after attending one event was everyone knew everyone. I didn't really know anybody and I'm not the best when it comes to networking. I am the first to admit that I really am bad at it and probably need to learn more. And, so, I didn't really know how to have a conversation. But a lot of the people, they were actually very welcoming. As soon as they found out that I was newly moved to Canada and stuff, like everyone started being super welcoming to me. And I think looking at part of those conversations, I realised that a lot of people volunteer for the association and it's all volunteer-driven. That was something I don't think I knew when I joined, particularly I think at the local chapter level that's more true than maybe at the headquarter level.

And, so, I said, 'Okay.' I went to the website for the Toronto chapter, I looked at volunteering, I filled out the form. Someone contacted me pretty much right away and I met with that person. And I started volunteering as part of the professional development portfolio. And, for me, volunteering, like, I wasn't working because I just moved here and I thought, 'You know what? Like, this would be a good chance for me to actually get to know the industry here, to get to meet other people, to actually understand how things are done in Canada.' Because if I didn't do that, I would just be sitting at home applying for jobs without having any context. And, so, that was really, for me, the start of my IBAC journey.



And I found that the more I gave, the more I got back. That by volunteering, people got to know me. When I got my first job in Canada, the board member that I was volunteering for actually gave me a work reference. And that was so important because all of my references were from Dubai. And if you've ever moved to a new country, you find out really quick that all of your old references from another part of the world are not as important as the ones are from that country. And, so, by volunteering for a couple of years, you know, that helped me build that credibility as well. She knew that I could do the job. She knew that I was responsive. She knew that when she wanted something, I delivered. And, so, when I said, 'Would you be willing to give a work reference?' she said, 'Yeah, I would be happy to do it.' And I always thank her for that, because I think as a new immigrant it's so hard to enter the workforce when you have a lot of these barriers that are outside of your control. But I think you can address them by taking steps that are specific to you and relevant to what you want to achieve. And the more I found, like, the more I volunteered the more I got to know people, the more I got interested in it, and I started to see how I could contribute to the organisation, and how I can help.

And so eventually I ended up serving on the Toronto chapter board. I was President as well. And after that is when I joined the International Executive Board. But, by the time I joined the board, I think I'd been a volunteer for 10 years. And I've been volunteering at the international level, at the regional level. And it allowed me to really understand the organisation in a way that I think I would have never done if I had just been a member and had just received information. And I would be, like, 'Yeah, like, I'll engage when I have the time.' But I found, like, sometimes I didn't even have to spend a lot of time on volunteering, like sometimes it was as much as, 'Yes, I will judge an award.' And that takes, you know, maybe it's like 10 hours out of my day or maybe out of the month because you don't spend all of it at one time. But if all I could give was 10 hours, that was still 10 hours where I got something back because if you've ever judged awards, you know that you learn so much by reading other people's work. Like, it's literally case study after case study after case study of all the things that maybe you never get a chance to do yourself.

So, for me, that's really been one of the reasons why I've continued to stay involved is the more I've given, the more I've gotten back. And I say that, I still have so much more to give and I think there's a lot of potential, so, you know, any association, it really does run on the back office members. And I think the more engaged members are in the affairs of the organisation, and giving feedback even if you can't volunteer but you can give feedback to the association on how they can become more relevant to you as a member, I think you've done your job in helping the association become all the things that it can be for future members as well and for future professionals. And I think being passive doesn't help them, because if you're passive, it makes it feel like everything is okay. But I think as we saw with that capitalism example, if capitalism can evolve so can associations, because the world is evolving all the time. And you can't stand still. So, whatever business model you have, you have to evolve and the only way you can do that is if your stakeholders are invested in you and giving feedback and volunteering if that is the model you go for.



Katie [1:05:34]: It's really interesting. Coming back to something that you said right at the beginning of that answer, you were talking about, you know, you're not necessarily the one that's, kind of, first out of the gate, very confidently networking or literally 'working the room' as they say. And I was reading – and it wouldn't be The Internal Comms Podcast if there wasn't a book recommendation at some point – at the moment I'm reading *Build your Dream Network* by J Kelly Hoey. And I think by joining a professional association you are really accelerating the prospects that your networking is going to actually achieve results. You're already in the right company of like-minded people. It just makes sense.

Maliha [1:06:15]: Exactly. And, you know, you will find that not everyone is great at networking. So, you find the people at the corner of the room and you start networking with them without realising it because you're really commiserating with each other. But, before the end of the night, you realise you're actually networking.

Katie [1:06:32]: It comes in many guises. That's the thing.

Now, I can absolutely tell from your contribution to our board meetings that we have every month as Treasurer and Board Secretary, and you've already demonstrated that on this show, that you have a really solid understanding of the mechanics of business, and particularly in the financials. I'm fascinated by how you gained this understanding. Was it a lot of listening? And were there very specific things that you went out and did? Training, books you read? Any help? Because I think communicators, it's not their natural *milieu*, if we want to say that, in the financials. How did you gain that knowledge and understanding?

Maliha [1:07:17]: When I was in high school I studied business as my focus. And I was really, really good at accounting. Like, I was so good at it that my teacher was like, 'You should become an accountant.' And I was like, 'Yeah, that's not really my thing.' And my dad's an investment banker. So, when my dad knew I was good at accounting, he started giving me all of these stock lists to review and I had to create a portfolio and actually track it for him, and show him how my portfolio was performing. So, I think I have a bit of a unique experience where I kind of, like, I think I've always naturally gravitated towards numbers, even though, surprisingly, I'm really bad at math. I cannot do basic math without a calculator. But, everything else, I think all that analytical thinking I am really good at that.

So, I think, for me, I kind of started from that where I did study it. And I had an interest in it because my dad was in the industry and so I've been surrounded by financials most of my life. But I always knew that I didn't want to work as an investment banker because I didn't find it creative enough for me. I have always seen my personality as being 50% strategic, 50% creative. And, so, communication's a perfect career for me because you're able to tap both of those skills equally. But, I think, like anything, you also have to then learn and you have to take the time to learn. So, for me, I do spend, like, a lot of time



reading up on different articles. Like, the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal* are two of my favourite newspapers. And if I don't understand something that I'm reading, I will Google it. Investopedia is my favourite website for anything to do with investment, because they explain it in a way that's designed for layman's and so if I don't understand the thing, I'm like, 'Hmm, Investopedia.com!' and search for it. So, I think, like, you know, some things for sure do come naturally to me. I think it's the way I am. I am analytical in the way I think. I'm strategic in the way I think. But those things are natural and- but I think if those don't come naturally you and it's important for you to learn those as part of your role, I think you have to invest the time to learn it. For some people that could mean doing a course like, you know, 'Finance for non-financial managers' or something like that. You know, there's courses out there that are designed for people that don't work in finance. But, I think, you have to put in the time to learn.

And I, even though I didn't want to be an investment banker, I ended up doing financial communications. And when you do financial communications you do learn a lot by working. And most of my clients were institutional investors and they did acquisitions. So, I had to learn their world really quickly. And the only way to learn their world is to ask questions. If I didn't understand something, I just had to be willing to ask them. Like I always felt like if I went into the room knowing everything, I would lose that opportunity to ask questions. So, when we were working on perhaps a new project and I was not super familiar with what they were doing, I would just tell my client and I would just be honest, and say, 'Look, I know how to do the communication side of this well. I know what messages we could do to reach your investor community. But can you explain to me how an IPO works? Can you explain to me all of the different regulatory factors that we need to be accountable for?' Because, you know, it's not my job to necessarily know how to run an IPO, but I do need to understand the basics of it so that I can communicate it well, and I can't understand the basics if I'm not willing to ask the question.

So, if I go into every conversation pretending I know everything, I will likely not do my job well. So, I think you do have to take the time to learn and I am constantly learning. I like to learn generally, like that's who I am. Part of that is curiosity. Part of that is just I'm a lifelong learner. And, so, I like learning new things. And, so, one of the things that I've done for several years is I create a budget for myself personally every year where I say that, 'I'm gonna invest X number of dollars in learning about these topics this year.' And I've reached the point where I don't do as much on the communication side, because I feel very confident that I know things that I need to do from a communication perspective. But I started to do a lot more courses on business. So, for the last, almost like two, three years now, every year I do a course through the Harvard Business School on different business topics. I did strategy execution this year. A couple of years ago, I've done disruptive strategies. So, I'm already thinking about what my next one will be. Because I'm finding that by doing these other courses that are not central to my role, I'm able to learn how my stakeholders work and how they think. So, I know how to have conversations with executives in the language that they speak because I'm able to do these courses and I'm able to read these articles, and then invest in my own learning to be able to have more strategic



conversations, but more importantly, show them that I understand the business of the business. Because if I don't understand the business of our business, how- what am I communicating? I can't communicate it because I don't understand how operations links to IT or all of those things, because I didn't take the chance to learn it. So, I think, for me, it is partly some of it just comes naturally to me, but the other I have had to work at it. I think if I didn't work at it, I probably wouldn't be able to do what I do on the board. And part of being on the board is to also constantly learn, you know? I've had to constantly learn about different association models, what works in different parts of the world versus what doesn't work and try to ask myself, 'Could this apply to IABC?' Sometimes it can, sometimes it can't, but if you don't know what to ask for, how will I even start the conversation? So, I think that's kind of been my secret to success is just continuously learning and reading and trying to make sense of things when they don't make sense to me.

Katie [1:13:47]: I love the intentionality of sitting down and saying, 'I am investing in a very physical sense in my development.' And 'What areas am I going to focus on?' I think that's really great advice.

So, in the little time that we have left, if you do have the time, I'd love to ask you these quickfire questions if I may? What would most surprise people about Maliha Aqeel?

Maliha [1:14:15]: That I'm a hardcore romantic.

Katie [1:14:18]: Oh, there you go. That came out of the blue, Maliha.

Maliha [1:14:24]: I believe in soulmates and happy endings. I make no apologies for it, but it surprises people who have only ever seen me be analytical when they're like, 'What?'

Katie [1:14:36]: It's rare that I'm lost for words, but you caught me on the hop. That's the last thing I expected you to say.

Maliha [1:14:42]: Yeah, like I just love everything to do with romance. I read romance novels. I write romance novels. I write them, too. It's always been my end goal to be a published author. And I have so many ideas and stuff and I've actually started writing again and publishing online, just getting my stories out there. And part of that was that intentionality again of saying, 'Okay, writing is important to me. And I spend my entire life doing corporate, but I need to also exercise this other muscle that I have, which is about writing fiction.'

Katie [1:15:20]: Are you brave enough to include a link in our show notes?



Maliha [1:15:23]: I mean, I can include my Tumblr blog, cos that's, I write fan-fiction these days, so I can include a link to my Tumblr blog, and you guys are welcome to read my fan-fiction. And it's always romance, but I love it. And yeah.

Katie [1:15:39]: What do you wish you had known when you first started out in your career?

Maliha [1:15:47]: I think I wish I'd known how to prioritise well. I, early on in my career, someone actually did give me that advice and I ignored it. They told me to not take on too much just because- just to show people that I'm saying 'yes'. They said, 'You know, you need to pace yourself.' And I ignored that advice because I thought that, you know, they were just saying it for, to maybe keep me down. And I realised many years later what they were really saying was that you have to find balance in your life. And you have to prioritise things, and you have to be able to say 'no' when you know that you cannot do something well. And I really wish that I had listened to the advice when it was first given to me. But I wish I'd known how important that was from a communication perspective. Because we are pulled in so many directions where everyone's work is their priority that we don't always know how to prioritise, and we end up working really long hours to make everybody happy. And I realised you never make everybody happy. So, you have to figure out what's the priority for the business? You need to have people that are your sponsors that say, 'Yes, you need to focus on this and nothing else.' And that becomes your filter for saying 'no'.

Katie [1:17:06]: Yeah, it's an art saying 'no', isn't it? And it's when we really need to learn. And I often think about the difference between being busy and being effective. And I think although, you know, the wise people say, 'Well, business is a choice.' It never feels like that in the middle of a long to-do list. And you think 'How many days, how many hours I've got left in this day? I've just not enough. Without a cloning machine I don't know how I'm going to solve this problem.' But coming back to what really matters and priorities, and what's going to create I guess the most value for you, for your organisation, is so critical, I guess in all that.

So, what book – it doesn't have to be a book, it could be a website, it could be a report – should all comms professionals read?

Maliha [1:17:55]: That's kind of a tough one, because it depends on where you are in your career. But I think it is important for a comms professional to read up on all the industry articles and publications, you know, like the IABC has The Catalyst, which has really great articles for people all over the world, with very different perspectives. And, so, I think that's something. I know I get the newsletter, and I'll click on the articles that interest me, and you know, so I think you have to read up on your craft first. And depending on the industry you're in, I'm sure there are different publications. Like, I mentioned, for me, Investopedia is really important because in financial comms, I need that information, right? But I think definitely industry ones. I think if you're trying to figure things out, I found Simon Sinek's *Start With Why*



really helpful, because I read it at a point in my life where I was trying to figure out what my next 10, 15 years looked like. And when I read that book, I started applying it to myself, less so to my organisation. And I found it really helpful to help me understand better 'What makes me happy?' 'What's my "why"?' Right? And I think it really helped me clarify what my values are so that I can make more, better decisions for me.

Katie [1:19:20]: It's interesting, I felt the same way *Start With Why* and then recently I've read Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* which I should have read 30 years ago, I realise, but he's- one of his basic lessons, which is sort of 'start with the end in mind'. Such good advice. And he tells it in a quite a sad way, you know you imagine your own funeral and what you want people to be saying and I don't think it needs to be that dark. But, coming back to why, what's the purpose? What's your personal goal or mission? I think it's so helpful.

Maliha [1:19:56]: You know something interesting, when I was 18, I created a 15-year path for my life? I had milestones and I hit every single milestone. And I reached the end of the 15 years, I was like, 'What's next?' I had no idea.

Katie [1:20:12]: I can't imagine doing that at that age. That's just very impressive. I have to say, I'm wondering if this next question is even relevant. Because is there anything you've not tried? But imagine tomorrow, you knew for certain you wouldn't fail? What would you do?

Maliha [1:20:33]: If I knew for certain I wouldn't fail? I don't know, actually. I remember when you sent that question. I've been thinking about it. But, to me, failure is just a way to learn. So, if I wouldn't fail, I don't know if I would want to do it. Because then you're too perfect. So, I don't know, like, I like doing things that I know I could fail at because it allows me to learn more about myself. But, yeah, I just don't know. I know it's a bit of a cop-out. But I just don't know.

Katie [1:21:07]: It's not. It's a clever twist on the question. If failure is impossible, then all of a sudden it becomes a bit boring and dull.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, I like, I like that take on the question. So, finally, we give you a billboard for millions to see. What are you going to put on that billboard?

Maliha [1:21:34]: I'm going to put 'She lived her life well.'

Katie [1:21:40]: Nice. Thank you very much, Maliha. This has been an absolute pleasure. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Maliha [1:21:46]: Thank you so much, Katie.



Katie [1:21:49]: And, so, that's a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast.

Now, listeners have been telling me that they would really value the transcript for our shows. So, I am delighted to say that these are now available, head over to our website abcomm.co.uk/podcast, where you can either read them online, or you can download them as a PDF.

If you are enjoying the show, I would be really grateful if you could show your appreciation by leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts. This isn't vanity metrics on my part, I promise. It's the way the algorithms work. The more ratings we have, the more discoverable the show becomes for other IC pros out there.

So, stay tuned, or maybe even subscribe, because I would hate for you to miss my interview with Sally Susman, Executive Vice President and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Pfizer. Sally is going to tell us what it was like being part of Pfizer's vaccine development task force and crafting the company's message at such an historic time for the company and, well, let's be frank, humanity in general. Listen out for that one.

All that remains is to say a special thank you for all of those who reach out to me on LinkedIn, on Twitter, occasionally even in person when we're lucky enough to meet that way. Your feedback is invaluable. It means the world to me, and I do try to respond to every comment. So, until we meet again, lovely listeners, stay safe and well, and, remember, it's what's inside that counts.