



## TICP – Episode 60 – How to have better conversations

(Season 7, episode 05)

### [Katie 00:03]:

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Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. Every fortnight I sit down with the leading lights from the world of communication, business and academia to tease out a smart-thinking, fresh ideas and new fix for improving workplace communication. One of the unexpected consequences of hosting this show is that I am now regularly pitched potential guests by PR firms. Now 90% of the time, these guests are wholly inappropriate for the show. But when I heard about the work of Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres, I was immediately intrigued. They are the co-authors of *Conversations Worth Having, Using Appreciative Inquiry to Fuel Productive and Meaningful Engagement*. Now, if you're anything like me, work can sometimes feel like, you know, one long conversation, we're either in conversation with ourselves or colleagues, stakeholders or our audiences. So, if there is a way to make these conversations more productive, perhaps even more enjoyable, uplifting, I am all in. I was also intrigued to discover whether Appreciative Inquiry can stop us from having those circular conversations that go nowhere, where we go round and round a problem and fail to actually address it head-on.

Now, Jackie and Cheri have been researching, writing, consulting, speaking on Appreciative Inquiry since 1996. Cheri is the CEO of the consulting firm, [Collaborative by Design](#), and Jackie is a professor at the [Lawrence Technological University](#) in Michigan. Jackie is also an advisor at the [David L Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry](#) – David Cooperrider being the original co-creator of Appreciative Inquiry. Now, in this conversation, Cheri and Jackie share advice on how to frame and flip a problem,



how to ask a generative question that reveals fresh information and insight, and how our conversations actually affect the executive functions of our brains, our ability to reason, be imaginative and solve problems. And, finally, listen out for a story about a therapist and the one foot by one foot square he has behind his desk. I absolutely love that story. Anyway, without further ado, here are Jackie and Cheri.

So, Cheri and Jackie, thank you so much for appearing on The Internal Comms Podcast. I'm super excited about this conversation.

**[Cheri 05:08]:**

Yeah. So are we, Katie. Thank you so much for inviting us.

**[Katie 05:12]:**

To set the scene for listeners, I thought it might be useful to discuss what led you to the study of conversation? Can you share a little bit about your background, your experience?

**[Cheri 05:25]:**

So, in 2000, and I don't know, early 2000s, Jackie and I met and we discovered we had something in common. Both of us wanted to bring Appreciative Inquiry, which was an organisational change approach that we had been using, we wanted to bring it to the general public, because both of us felt like this paradigm of talking about what you want, and engaging people in conversations that move you towards the future you desire, would be really valuable. And, so, in 2005, we co-authored a book called *Dynamic Relationships*. And 10 years later, we thought, let's do a second edition on this. And we realised that our thinking about how to talk about Appreciative Inquiry as a way of being and every-day engagement had completely shifted, transformed. We couldn't kind of revise that book, we had to rewrite a different one. And, over time, *Conversations Worth Having* actually emerged. We didn't go in realising it, that it was all about our conversations. But trying to make the practice so simple, that we really did realise it's all about our conversations.

**[Jackie 06:51]:**

You know, Cheri struck on 100% on that story, and I would just say it became crystal clear for me once we moved from the first edition to the second edition. It was all about our conversations, and we just started realising, 'oh, my goodness, how much we are in conversations!' If you think about how much of your awake hours you're having a conversation in your mind, or with someone else. And the best way to have these conversations is with what we've learned was an Appreciative Inquiry that appreciates tone and positive direction. And that's how we drew, we were literally drawn, invited into this. And it just dawned on us that it is all about our conversations.

**[Katie 07:38]:**

It's so interesting for me, because it seems that, in some ways, you know, having the right kind of conversations could be a mechanism for potentially changing workplaces, even, dare I say, the world around us. And one might argue that could well be a good endeavour at the moment. But that's hiding in plain sight. I think you use the phrase almost like 'it's the water we're swimming in'. But it seems so basic to talk about conversations. I've just been interested in your reflection on why conversations that actually so important.

**[Jackie 08:12]:**

I'll throw something out there that I thought about on my drive into work this morning. I said, 'Imagine what the world might be like if our world leaders who are coming together had conversations worth having and cocreating and coexisting in a peaceful world?' And that was my thinking this morning, before coming on to this conversation with you and Cheri.

**[Katie 08:38]:**

That's a wonderful thought, if only that could happen. Let's start with the nature of our conversations. So again, until I'd read the book, I always thought of my conversations in a rather sort of basic, rudimentary way as either being, well, 'That was a good conversation.' 'That was a bad conversation.' 'That was uplifting.' 'That was absolutely the opposite.' There is a four-box model in your book, very early on in your book, I think it's chapter two, that actually sets out the types of conversation that we're probably having day to day, and I thought that might be a useful place to start, almost kind of decoding, getting people to understand 'What conversation am I in right now?' Can you just explain what that four-box model looks like?

**[Cheri 09:20]:**

Sure. There are two dimensions to our conversation. So, if you think of a vertical line, at the top of that vertical line we put the word 'appreciative'. And by appreciative we mean adding value or valuing what is, so conversations that tend towards the appreciative are conversations that add value, value people, value situations. At the other end of that is 'depreciating' conversations, which devalue people in situations. And, then, if you imagine a horizontal line going across, on one side are 'statements' and on the other 'questions,' so we're always somewhere in those four quadrants. And that horizontal line actually creates a marker that the conversations below that line are depreciated. They're either statement-based and appreciative or they're inquiry-based and appreciative. And the conversations above are either statement-based or inquiry-based. And if you think of the kinds of conversations you have, that you would say are below the line, conversations where you feel devalued, or your words and language are devaluing others, those are clearly not conversations worth having. And anything you want to talk about below the line, unless you're just bent on criticising and venting, which we all are sometimes guilty. But if you're not bent on doing that, it doesn't matter what the situation is, even dealing with tough situations, crises, or needing to give critical feedback, you can do so from above the line. And, so, that's what the book is all about, how do you stay above the line in your conversations so

that you can engage with people in ways that actually have everyone in the conversation moving towards what you want, and feeling included and valued?

**[Katie 11:33]:**

It's interesting, because I think at work we often get into the mode of trying to identify the problem, dissect the problem, we even talk about root cause analysis, you know, 'Let's dive deep and really find out how this problem is manifesting, what's causing it.' Appreciative Inquiry, it still solves problems. But it does that in a slightly different way. And you've talked about these generative questions, but I wonder if you could explain a little bit more about why Appreciative Inquiry works so well and maybe give some examples of the types of questions you would be asking when faced with a problem. You'd be asking, rather than 'You always do this?', 'Why do you always do it? It never works for me? How come it works for you?' A different kind of questions.

**[Jackie 12:23]:**

So' answering your question, look at Appreciative Inquiry that it doesn't ignore the problem, it approaches the problem from a different way. And' so, the two practices we talk about often in the book are generative questions and positive framing. Let's take a step back at what is Appreciative Inquiry? So, Appreciative Inquiry is that you are intentionally going to go discover the best of what was, discover the best of what is and discover what is possible. And, you know, you can go to the Appreciative Inquiry Commons, and it's a global portal, and you can go deep and wide into Appreciative Inquiry. And if you think about work as a manager or a colleague, imagine going to work approaching a problem with starting with discovering what is going on right here, what is the best with our people in teams. And that's what Appreciative Inquiry is about: no matter how wrong or bad, there is something going right.

**[Katie 13:28]:**

And that's a place that we start from, I suppose also those questions about focusing on what is going right, or what would make it go right, or when it has gone right in the past, what was happening that isn't happening now broadens the viewpoint, doesn't it? It's their expansive questions that create new knowledge rather than, for example, a blame game, which says, you know, 'Whose fault is this?' I guess that's part of the shift as well.

**[Cheri 13:57]:**

And you actually used some of the terms that we use to describe what a generative question does, is all of us come with our worldview and a set of biases, and we're looking through the lens of our experiences, and the way we see and understand the world, our belief systems, including whether we're hydrated enough or somebody just yelled at us. And the idea with generative questions is to broaden the view, kind of widen the, what we see and what we are understanding. And, so, a generative question, first and foremost, can make the invisible visible, like 'What am I assuming?' 'Where am I?' 'What's the other person assuming?' 'What do they know that I don't know?' That would be important for me. And then

generative questions also create shared understanding: 'How do you see it?' 'How do I see it?' 'What are we trying to achieve?' 'What's our common goal?' And then you also mentioned generating new knowledge, you know, 'How did you do this at the place you worked beforehand? Maybe we can bring some of that in?' Or you even mentioned, 'This never works for me. Why does it work for you?' 'We could easily turn that into a, you know, 'What is it that you do?' 'Tell me about a time when you did this, because it always seems to work for you.' 'What conditions make that possible?' 'What are you doing that I could learn, so I get new knowledge?' And then, of course, generating possibilities, disrupting the current state of things so that we can, you know, broaden the possibilities for what we might do in the future.

**[Katie 15:40]:**

As you're talking now, Cheri, it makes me think that the mindset, your personal mindset going into a conversation, is so important. Because how often do we go into a conversation wanting to make our point, or one thing, the other side, wanting to do, 'I've got five minutes, and I want to tell you this thing, and I'm going to be polite for the first 30 seconds. And then I'm going to get straight into telling you what I think.' Whereas what you're describing is a mindset shift where we go into a conversation out of pure curiosity, we are driven by our curiosity, to ask questions, where we actually are quite excited by the fact we don't know the answer. And that excitement and that curiosity keeps driving more questions. Would that be a fair analysis?

**[Jackie 16:30]:**

Absolutely, Katie, and your curiosity will naturally have you asking generative questions, which you're doing a great job of so far.

**[Cheri 16:41]:**

It doesn't mean you go in without an idea of what you want, or even something you're wanting to advocate for. But you don't hold on to it so tightly. I had a friend of mine who was a therapist, and he made a one foot by one foot square behind his desk. And before every client came in, he would stand in that square and for one minute closed his eyes and remind himself 'This is all I know, this is all I know'. So that he wouldn't go in thinking he had the answers. And instead going in with curiosity about, you know, what does this person know that can be the answer for themselves?

**[Katie 17:24]:**

Wow. Oh, my, you've just blown my mind with that. That is so clever. That is so clever. And, we live in a world – and I was going to come back to this at the end this question, but I just can't not mention it now – we live in a world where we talk about polarised societies. And, for me, what I always think about when I hear that phrase is someone being really certain that their rights, I wonder whether that's a very intelligent position to hold? And, actually, what we should really be doing is always hoping that we're going to uncover something new that's going to jolt us slightly out of our very confident, certain position,

or, you know, almost kind of welcome it in. This is what I believe, but hey, you know, maybe there's something else out there and I'm, I'm open to it.

**[Cheri 18:13]:**

Absolutely. It's, it is really, it's a valuable question I think to be asking.

**[Katie 18:19]:**

So, right, let's talk about techniques, how we can make this real so we can impart to listeners some sort of tactical advice. So, you have a three step process, Name it, Flip it, Frame it, would that be correct? Can you talk us through those steps and how, you know, how we can use those in everyday conversations to make our conversations more meaningful and worth having?

**[Jackie 18:44]:**

Sure, so you've just described what positive framing is, which is one of the two practices, and think of positive framing, we're trying to connect you and I, so when you name it, you name the problem. When you flip it, you just ask for the positive opposite. And then when you frame it, you need to keep going. And I would ask you, Katie, that if the positive opposite was true, what would be going on for us? What would really be happening? And, you know, one of our favourite stories and actually how we kick off the book is about Alicia, and she is in charge. She's in a medical centre. And lots of people have experienced this problem and industry that you're in. And our problem was low patient satisfaction scores. I work in a university, we have low student satisfaction scores at times. And Alicia went further. At first, she was blaming and naming the nurses and everybody was in this defence mode because we were all focused on the problem: low patient satisfaction scores. So, when she flipped it to the positive opposite, it was 'what we want high patient satisfaction scores'. Okay, let's keep going if the positive opposite is true. What's going on in this medical centre? What is going on in our hospital setting? Well, patients are delighted with their care and service. And, so, she asked these nurse managers to go out and to come back at the next meeting with stories that patients were delighted with their care. And that really caused the energy, I would say almost a positive contagion going around in this hospital that what were examples of quality care, and who was providing the care and how were they providing the care. And so, they began to share stories and realise that there was a lot of great care going out. And that's what the search in the quest was for, was 'What makes this a great hospital?' And, remember, positive framing draws people into the conversations and inspires engagement. And people began to talk about what else is possible in high-quality care.

**[Katie 20:57]:**

Also, I mean, it just strikes me that that is a nicer conversation to be in as well, isn't it? And, I know, you know, 'nicer' is not very technical. But people are drawn into conversations that are positive, and slightly hold back, and want to get out of it's only natural conversations about where things are going wrong. So, imagining a state where all our patients are happier. I imagine that just brings out, you know, more

positivity in general, our brains are wired, well, you tell me about the neuroscience behind this, you have a whole section in your book now about the neuroscience! But I just wonder if you could sort of share some of that with us in terms of what the neuroscience is now talking about in terms of Appreciative Inquiry and why it works.

**[Cheri 21:45]:**

Sure. And it's for those people who are sceptical or so far as you've been listening, you're kind of thinking, 'Oh, this is nice, and it's kind of warm and fluffy.' It's actually hard science. And, if you, if you're listening, I invite you right now just to take 20 seconds and recall either a negative conversation or a conversation that you've been in, where you were really focused on the problem or the negative. It was a conversation below the line. Bring that to mind. And then check in with your body. Notice what's happening. And if you were like most people, when you check into that conversation, your muscles get tense, you might feel a pit in your stomach, your breathing will get more shallow. If you're wearing a smartwatch, you might look down and notice your blood pressure went up, your heart rate went up. Our conversations actually have a neurophysiological effect on us. They impact our nervous system. And anytime even a modest threat to our system, it changes our biochemistry. And the more threatened we feel, like if we are the person who is being criticised, our brains don't really know the difference between a sabre-toothed tiger and a threat to the ego. And, so, we immediately go into a fight or flight response. And you might say, 'Well, that's all well and good. But why is that a problem?' And the reason it's a problem is because what our brains do is they channel more oxygen and nutrients to our muscles, and those parts of our body that will help to keep us safe. And they take it away from the prefrontal lobe, that neocortex, the executive functions, emotional intelligence, creativity, all of that goes out the window. And, so, if we want people in our organisations to really be able to bring their full potential to solving really challenging, complex problems, putting it in a way that gives them access to creativity and connection, critical thinking is important. So, again, if you're listening, think of the last time you were in a great conversation, maybe at work around creating possibilities. And then check in with your body. And what you'll discover is there's this relaxation response and energy comes up and you suddenly become more, you know, creative and you stop thinking about 'me' and you start thinking about 'we'. Your field of vision broadens. And, so, the conversations we have aren't inconsequential. They, in fact, are in it. They impact our health, our relationships and our potential to be successful. So, it's not only nice, it's really vital to use this approach.

**[Katie 24:57]:**

There's scientific evidence behind the niceness, there's a reason it feels nice. Let's imagine I'm an internal communications manager. And, deep down, I believe my company values are really just posters on the wall. This is a common problem with lots of organisations. So, you know, we say it, but we don't actually do it. We don't, we, you know, we don't deliver that kind of behaviour day in, day out. In fact, maybe where I work people's behaviour seems almost in direct violation of our values (that actually can be unfortunately going on as well). So, to help me as that internal comms manager better understand and

solve this problem – and this is putting you on the spot, ladies, I do apologise for that – but what kinds of generative questions might I ask both employees and leaders to get under the skin of that problem and solve it?

**[Jackie 25:57]:**

So, I would say, Katie, if you're the internal communication manager, I would probably want to have just a conversation with you first, and to really understand, why do you think there's a problem? I mean, I don't want to ignore the problem. And I would want to say, 'You know, why do you, Katie, believe there's a problem, and it's just posters on the wall?' And I would get a feel for that. And, so, just the conversation that you and I are having together, then I would ask a generative question of 'How do you live the values? What values are important to you?' And I would want to just be really curious about this, Katie. And then I would say, 'All right, should we have a conversation with our team?' And then you could, and you and I might get really excited and say yes, and, and we could bring in the flip, and we could name it? We don't live our values? What's the positive opposite? We live our values. Okay. So, if we live our values, what does our team, our culture look like? This is a great place to work. And then we can get into generative questions to ask with our team. And then we could spread this through the organisation and really have a very what we'd call a 'strategic' conversation of what values mean, the importance of values. 'What are our values?' 'How do we live our values?' Knowing that it's key to our culture and well-being?

**[Katie 27:21]:**

You asked something upfront, which I thought, 'Oh, I'm not sure I've ever done that', which is to turn round to the person who's made the diagnosis and say exactly what you've just said. But before we get even get into the problem, a positive question: 'How do you see the values?' 'How do you live the values?' 'Which one of those values really matters to you?' And immediately get the person you're talking to to connect with the values on quite a personal level, I think is quite powerful in itself, actually, just as you say, to frame the whole of the conversation going forward.

**[Cheri 27:58]:**

And I also think that is the kind of thing it doesn't matter at what level of the organisation you're at, you can always ask that question of 'How can we better live our values?' And if we were living our values, how might it impact productivity, performance, teamwork, a sense of belonging, retention? Those could be the kinds of questions that leadership then, you know, if we could tie our values, ask questions that tie our values to the bottom line, things that leadership cares about, they'll take an interest as well.

**[Katie 28:40]:**

I've heard you say when a team or organisation really embraces Appreciative Inquiry, it permeates people's language and the language changes. You already talked about conversations above the line and below the line. And you've heard people say, 'We need to name it.' And I thought, as you were saying



that, actually, how often do we think about the elephant in the room? Am I thinking this in the right way? That sometimes we do actually need to identify, say out loud what the problem is? When you're saying 'name it', have you actually seen teams kind of embrace this and it changes the way they actually talk to each other in a way? That's the way, you know, they've truly got it and understood it?

**[Cheri 29:22]:**

Yes. And, and yeah, well, you what you just said was exactly what we have heard back from people is, you know, if a team was kind of spinning around the problem, and they're not, they're not clear, they're just kind of spinning, and somebody goes, 'Wait a minute, let's, let's name what this problem is, and ask questions so that we can get clear on what it is.' And what people have told us is just that simple process, it's like taking a timeout and stepping up to the next level up and go adding a view from on top of it so it's not about the people. It's about 'what's the issue?' 'What is it that we want?' 'What's the positive opposite?' 'And what do we really want to be talking about?' And it completely changes the dynamic.

**[Katie 30:16]:**

Have you seen situations where it actually takes a degree of bravery to name it? Do you think there's some difficult conversations that people are just too fearful in certain cultures maybe, to actually say it straight and there's this skirting around the issue? Have you have you seen that? Have you come across that?

**[Jackie 30:37]:**

About a week ago, so we have this Monday Kickstarters, where we bring people all over the world together for 30 minutes, and somebody can bring in an issue. And a woman brought in an issue. The problem was her employee was demanding an apology from her. And she said, 'The goal of this person demanding an apology from me.' And when before we flip to the positive opposite, we asked this lady on the Monday Kickstarters, we said, 'So is the problem that this person wants an apology? Or is the problem situation? What are we trying to name it?' And she paused and breathed. And she got really clear, she says, 'The problem is I don't know what to do.' And so we focused on 'I don't know what to do.' So, we didn't focus on that, given that person, the apology or the situation. But she focused on the problem: 'I don't know what to do.' The positive opposite is, I know what to do. And then the frame we landed on was creating respectful, productive conversations in the workplace and generative questions. So, you can read about the situation on the blog. As Cheri said, when she was talking about widening the screen, widening the view, the importance of really naming what's the problem we really want to address here?

**[Katie 31:59]:**

Yeah, how often do we go off solving the wrong problem?

**[Cheri 32:05]:**

I think the other thing that's important is some people are fearful of naming something. If they're in a culture that doesn't welcome challenges to situations. And, so, creating an environment that makes it safe for someone to say, 'We really need to deal with this issue.' And having the response be, 'Oh my goodness, you are absolutely right. Let's name it.'

**[Katie 32:41]:**

Presumably, actually, you can use exactly the same approach if you find yourself in a culture that won't allow for constructive feedback? So, again, you can use Appreciative Inquiry to say, 'Well, I did it once. And it worked. But normally, I can't. So what was going on in that situation? Where actually it did work? And I felt I was allowed to do it, able to do it, as opposed to these other times?' Could you use it to challenge a culture like that?

**[Jackie 33:15]:**

Absolutely.

**[Katie 33:16]:**

There's a chapter in your book about 'whole system conversations'. And I was fascinated by this because one of our roles, or part of our role as internal comms people, is to try and get conversations going across teams, across departments, sometimes across an entire organisation. I just wonder if you've had any experience of this, any insight into trying to make a conversation with many people?

**[Cheri 33:34]:**

There are many number of ways of doing that, and like scaling whole systems with Appreciative Inquiry, and this is actually where Appreciative Inquiry began, and what the frame for it was for probably 20 years, which was on whole system engagement following something called the 4D process. And that was having conversations to discover the best of what is or, just like you just mentioned, 'When have I been able to do this? When was I at my best? And what did I value about myself and other people in the organisations? What conditions made that possible?' Because if we can find those moments of positive deviance in an organisation, we can spread them. And then the second D in this 4D process with Appreciative Inquiry is to dream, to imagine 'What's the future we want? Imagine, if these pockets of positive deviance, imagine what it would be like if they were throughout the whole organisation. What would we be able to do? What would relations relationships look like?' And, so, people begin to be very concrete in how things would be different in the future. And what makes Appreciative Inquiry at this whole systems level different is that future image is grounded in their experiences of having already done this. They know they can do it. What's stopping them from doing it all the time? It's 'What are the kinds of conversations do we need to be having?', but also, and this third D is design, 'What do we need to design to make that future come true? How do we change our systems, our structures, our policies, our procedures, the processes we use, so that it is natural for us to be, you know, how do we create those conditions across the organisation?' And then, finally, the final D, which originally was destiny,

sometimes deploy, now the term deploy as is being used, because that really encompasses taking what we've designed together and putting it into practice. And I think what makes a whole system conversation is not we're all talking together at once, but Appreciative Inquiry begins with paired interviews. So, I might have a whole set of questions and interview you about your stories, your vision of the future, the opportunities you see for creating that future. And everybody in the organisation either participates in those interviews over a period of time, or you could bring the whole group together and people go off in pairs. And then when they come back, again, it's not the whole system engaged in a conversation, it's groups of six to eight that look at those interviews and they find the common themes and that then gets reported out to the whole. So, it's this kind of weaving of whole system back into the small conversations. And it's conversations that are worth having for the organisation.

**[Katie 36:48]:**

Wow. That's like qualitative research on steroids.

**[Cheri 36:55]:**

Exactly.

**[Jackie 36:55]:**

No, I would just have said one sentence that people really commit to that which they've been invited to engage around in design.

**[Katie 37:02]:**

Yes. When we feel that we've had input, when we've been listened to, when our voice has been heard, absolutely. But Discover, Dream, Design, Deploy strikes me as a fantastic framework for any change initiative, any change programmes. It's really flexible. In your book you explain how important it is to be in the right state of mind and there's a quote that I loved in your book, "Our resting body mindset lies beneath the surface of present awareness. This means we're at the mercy of subconscious drivers such as judgement, assumptions, biases, and low blood sugar," which I think Cheri, you mentioned earlier on, should just tell us what needs to be happening internally. First, how can we get ourselves in the right frame of mind? I mean, are there questions we should even be asking ourselves before we ask those other questions of others?

**[Jackie 38:00]:**

What happens first is I think you know, in your mind, your heart, your body aches, you know, when you are falling or you're below the line. And if you don't know, if you had a smartwatch on, the smartwatch would probably tell you what your blood pressure was, or your heart rate and if it was below the line. And just the tuning in, saying, just the act of pausing and breathing, gets you back up to that line. And beyond that line, and Cheri talked about that earlier, how important that is to pause and breathe. And then you can become curious and ask yourself, you know, 'Where am I? I feel, I'm starting to feel better.

And why am I here? And how did I get here? 'And it could be as simple, as you said, 'I didn't drink enough water, I didn't get enough sleep.' And then you begin to ask yourself, you know, 'What's going on here? What am I making up? All right, what are the facts? And, and might I need to ask for a do-over or what triggered these reactions, so I can be very aware?' So, these are the kinds of questions you can ask yourself, to get you in that place. And that space above the line which is appreciative. And, remember, appreciative is 'I value you, Katie.' 'I value the situation.' And 'We're going to add value to the situation.' And then you just keep going from there.

**[Cheri 39:23]:**

If I could add one other quick thing to that. And this goes back to the pause, breathe, get curious [being] kind of warm, fuzzy, and the science behind it. When you pause, it interrupts where the nervous system is going or where it is. And, then, when you take deep breaths, it actually stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. So, it begins to slow down that stressful biochemical response. It slows down the dump of cortisol and testosterone in the system. And once that slows down, that begins to change your body chemistry. And, as we talked about, when you slow down those hormones and neurochemicals that create fight or flight, you get greater access to the whole of your brain. And curiosity is a positive emotion. If you can get curious, it automatically means you have access to creativity and higher-order thinking.

**[Katie 40:32]:**

How important is checking you are understanding someone correctly? People can use certain words, and then you wander around the choice of that word, and you think 'Is that significant, that word, or have they just pulled that word out of thin air?' And then you have to stop. And you have to say 'When you use that word, what do you actually mean by it?' And I find myself doing that. And I don't know if it's annoying to people or not. But it's that's checking that you truly understand. That must be such an important part, I'm guessing, of this whole process.

**[Jackie 41:06]:**

Yeah, language is key. So, if you think of Appreciative Inquiry, and there's the first principle, social construction, David Cooperrider reminds us our words create our world. So, our words are creating that moment. And they're beginning to define that next moment. So, language is so important, and it's socially constructed. And we have to understand when somebody mentions a word, how do you see it? And how do I see it? And how do we see it?

**[Katie 41:36]:**

It just builds another layer and level of understanding, as you say. We'll flip over to those quick-fire questions, if you don't mind. If you could go back in time, what careers advice would you give your younger self?

**[Jackie 41:51]:**

So, my daughter is my younger self. And she's 22. And, I said to her this morning, I said, 'Find your passion and purpose. Take time.' I said, 'You have the rest of your life to work. And you're only working if it feels like work.' So, I think I would tell adventures, leaving your comfort zone and get very, very curious, don't let anybody put a damper on your curiosity.

**[Katie 42:17]:**

I like it. Cheri?

**[Cheri 42:19]:**

I would give myself two pieces of information. One would be, 'Don't figure it out. Don't feel like you have to know. But instead, follow your curiosity. Follow your intuition. And really stay curious, that it's okay to be figuring out because you are creating your future.'

**[Katie 42:48]:**

Yeah, that's so interesting. I think a lot of people think that they have to measure their value in certain, certainly in the eyes of stakeholders, in knowing the answer. And I don't know what that's about. I don't know whether that's about the stereotypical, often male role models that's created of people that are all-seeing and all-knowing, and a click of a finger have the answer. But, actually, you know, it's actually quite okay not to have the answer, but to be confident enough just to be asking the questions to get to it. I think that's really powerful.

**[Jackie 43:25]:**

And I think this goes back up also to leaders using conversations worth having. We're all mostly uncomfortable when we don't know, to be able to be comfortable knowing is a wonderful skill to develop. But it's okay to not know, but I, my guess is, biologically that is very unsettling for us. It kind of probably creates low level stress. And, so, anything we can do to make that into a benefit instead of a stressor would be helpful.

**[Katie 44:02]:**

As well as your book, of course, what other book or any other resource would you recommend we should all read to become better conversationalists?

**[Cheri 44:12]:**

Still my top right now – mine changes depending upon what I've been reading – but my top one right now still is Adam Grant's *Think Again*. It's a wonderful correlate to using the two practices and that notion of staying open.

**[Jackie 44:28]:**

And that's why I let Cheri go first because um, I might have said that one, too. And Cheri is a voracious reader so I'm going to tell you two books if I can really quick that Cheri has reminded me to read. And the first one is Carol Dweck's *Mindset*. You can take anybody, especially the people that are underserved, or people who have stereotypes, and you can take anybody and help them have a growth mindset to achieve that what they wish to achieve. And I think again is great. The other one is a classic. It's called *The Four Agreements*. In *The Four Agreements*, every agreement ties (in my opinion) to what we're saying in *Conversations Worth Having*.

**[Katie 45:15]:**

Ah, thank you for that. Can you complete this sentence? World-class conversations are...

**[Cheri 45:20]:**

...going to change the world.

**[Jackie 45:26]:**

I was just going to throw in the subtitle of the book: they're worth having and they can feel productive and meaningful. Engagement that can create environments that work for all. And Cheri's right, it's more than a game changer, it's a life changer. It can be such a life changer.

**[Katie 45:41]:**

Finally, we give you a billboard for millions to see. And you can put on that billboard any message you like. What message would you like to put on your billboards?

**[Jackie 45:54]:**

Since we are each humankind, be the kindest human possible.

**[Katie 46:00]:**

Oh, very nice thought.

**[Cheri 46:02]:**

And I would say: your greatest power is in your conversations. Please use them to be a conversational change agent.

**[Katie 46:15]:**

Ladies, thank you so much for appearing on The Internal Comms Podcast.

**[Cheri 46:20]:**

It's been a great pleasure. Your questions are wonderful, and it's been a wonderful joy to be here.



**[Jackie 46:27]:**

Thank you, Katie. What you do, your communications podcasts, they're the heart of how people interact.

**[Katie 46:34]:**

So, that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the full transcript head over to our website: [abcomm.co.uk/podcast](http://abcomm.co.uk/podcast). If you did enjoy this episode I'd be extremely grateful if you could give us a review on Apple Podcasts. That would just help other IC pros out there find our show. We still have some great guests lined up in this season, including two well-known figures in the IC world from either side of the Atlantic. We have [Victoria Dew](#) and [Martin Flegg](#). So, you may want to hit that subscribe button today. All that remains is to say a special thank you. Thank you for choosing the show. And especially to those who reach out to me to say how much you're enjoying it on LinkedIn and Twitter. I do try to respond to every comment. And thanks to you, lovely, lovely listeners. This week we reached the milestone of more than 100,000 downloads of the show, which is truly awesome. So, until we meet again, stay safe and well, and remember: it's what's inside that counts.