



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 8

### Episode 66 – Combatting IC isolation

#### Transcript

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#### **Katie 00:03**

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday update. Would you like to get a short email from me, never more than five bullet points long, giving you my take on the week's news from across the world of communication? This might be the latest reports, books, podcasts, conferences, campaigns that have caught my eye during the week.

#### **Katie 00:33**

I always limit myself to just five nuggets of news. So you can read it in record time, but still feel hopefully a little bit more informed, maybe even a little bit more uplifted as you end your week.

#### **Katie 00:49**

Now, this is a subscriber-only email, which was initially intended just for colleagues and clients. I don't post this content anywhere else. So you do need to sign up. But that's super easy. Simply go to [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](http://abcomm.co.uk/Friday) and just pop in your email address. It's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a try that sign up page again: [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](http://abcomm.co.uk/Friday). And thank you very much if you do choose to be a subscriber.

#### **Katie 01:37**

Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. For more than 30 years I've been helping organisations improve the way they communicate with their people. In that time there has been a revolution in the way we communicate at work.

#### **Katie 01:56**

There was a time when too many organisations saw their employees as mere extensions of the machinery. Thankfully today, smart leaders know that their employees are their only appreciating asset. They know organisational success rests on the judgement, the insight, the motivation, and the continued development of their people.

#### **Katie 02:21**

This show is all about exploring how to best connect with employees. How to inform, involve and hopefully inspire them. I invite leading lights from the world of business, communications, and academia to sit in my hot seat. Today my guest is Kristin Hancock. Her official bio begins "just a small town girl living in a fabulous world". Kristin is always looking for magic moments in the employee experience.

#### **Katie 02:56**

Kristin has 15 years experience in corporate comms, and in 2020 she revitalised the ICology brand, alongside its founder, Chuck Gose, her partner in life and work. Now I've wanted Kristin on the show for some time. I've heard her speak at various events over the years, and I've always been struck by her vivacity and insight, and her genuine passion for our profession.

#### **Katie 03:26**

We cover a lot of ground in this episode, from how to talk about internal comms to your boss and other executives, how to build a supportive community around you, some rules for life and what may be written in the stars for you. So without further ado, I bring you Kristin Hancock.



**Katie 03:52**

Kristin, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. It's such a pleasure to have you here.

**Kristin 03:58**

I'm so excited to be here. Thank you.

**Katie 04:01**

My first question is really a kind of geographical one, I guess. I know I've got listeners, literally all around the world, over 55 countries worldwide, so let's start with where you're based. Because you are a Canadian, working and living in the U.S. Yeah. And I'm just wondering, do you see or hear things in Indianapolis that you either rarely or perhaps never see, when you were in Winnipeg?

**Kristin 04:27**

That's an entirely separate podcast episode. I think we could probably have an hour long podcast episode about the differences between, well, Winnipeg and Indianapolis, but also Canada and the United States. That's a whole other topic. But there are lots of words that I use that I'm sure you find in the UK if you are visiting the US that you use and then realise 'Oh, that's not a term here' or no one knows. And pronunciations So I'm, I say "pr-oh-cess" instead of process, for example, and then as soon as I say that, inevitably, someone will say, where are you from? Because they know I'm not from the US. I still say things like, parcels and they'll say packages here. And I do hear a lot of "y'all" down here. And that's not a Canadian or British word to my knowledge.

**Katie 05:23**

But you have sidewalks in Canada presumably, not pavements.

**Kristin 05:28**

Oh, good question. Yes, I would say sidewalk. You say pavement? Interesting.

**Katie 05:37**

Next time you're in the UK, we can have that conversation.

**Kristin 05:40**

So like I said, there's a lengthy list I'm sure that we could make.

**Katie 05:43**

I know you've worked across the comms disciplines. But I've heard you say that internal comms is absolutely your passion. And I just wonder why is that?

**Kristin 05:53**

It comes down to two reasons. Number one, I love people. And number two, I got tired of crying at work. That's the truth. Like many people, I have seen what happens when internal comms is a priority and done well and taken seriously. And I've also lived the effects of internal comms being ignored, and not taken seriously and not made a priority. And that's when people end up crying at their desks at work. Right? So I think that's been my biggest lesson is recognising that when we make internal communication a priority, everyone benefits and people are happier to come to work.

**Katie 06:34**

And I guess we've noticed that more over the last couple of years with a pandemic and other things, too.



**Kristin 06:40**

Absolutely. It's exacerbated anything that existed.

**Katie 06:44**

Now I read an interview where you said that internal comms professionals often don't pitch their roles in a way executives can grasp – do feel free to fact check that quote, to start with. If it is accurate, how should we be pitching our roles talking about what we do to executives?

**Kristin 07:03**

Katie, I will trust that you have fact checked this. So I'm assuming I said that somewhere along the line. We are getting better at this at tying our roles as internal communication professionals to business outcomes, I think we're we are increasingly getting better at that. There are elements of internal comms that we will never be able to measure, unfortunately, I at least I believe that. But there are increasingly becoming more elements that we can measure. And the more that we focus on those, the more that we will be able to produce ROI on our activities and show value for our roles.

**Kristin 07:42**

So I think if we have a greater knowledge of other business functions, then there are more conversations that can happen with executives, and C-suite people. So I don't have a background, of course in finance, or HR or IT, but I know enough to have a conversation about those topics. And I think that's what I see professionals can benefit from, is learning some of those other disciplines, just enough to be able to have conversations with people at executive levels.

**Katie 08:14**

Just digging into that measurement piece a little bit more, you said the things that we definitely can measure. And then other things, maybe it's a fool's errand to try and measure. Is there anything in particular that springs to mind when you say "that absolutely can be measured"? And if you're going to try and measure that you're probably wasting your time?

**Kristin 08:31**

Oh, that's a great question. And I know there are people in our industry who specialise in measurement, so I would probably defer to them for some of those specifics. But there's, I mean, can you measure emotion? I don't know. I think there are some disciplines that would argue you can. And then I think there's an element of human emotions and humanity that can't be measured. And I'm not sure that we're supposed to be able to measure that because it's felt. And so those are the pieces of our roles and our activities that there is a bit of a gut feeling on.

**Kristin 09:06**

Having said that, anything with metrics behind it can be measured. And so anytime that we are tasked with obtaining data, launching a new project, or anything like that, there are all kinds of numbers that we can glean from those projects that can feed into topics like "how do people feel when they come to work?"

**Katie 09:28**

It's interesting, because when I interviewed Professor William Kahn on the show, the kind of father of the term employee engagement, what is he called it personal engagement, and there is a distinction he makes in his mind between the two. He said that he had no interest and didn't think there was any point to try and measure engagement. It's an emotional state we move in and out of all the time at work. So I think that chimes exactly with what you've just said.



**Kristin 09:55**

It does. And I think that we are doing our industry a disservice if we are reducing employee engagement to a single metric or a number. I have a little chuckle to myself when I see companies post "Oh, our employee engagement is 72%". Because, there is no way – there's no universal way, right? So who are we comparing that, number two? There's no universal metric for that. And what information have we gathered that says our employees are 72% engaged? I just, I think we are, like I said, it's way more complex than that. And I think we're doing ourselves a disservice if we're trying to come up with a single number to somehow represent this very broad, complex topic.

**Katie 10:40**

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. You mentioned that you'd like to see internal comms professionals take a keen interest and build their knowledge about other disciplines. Are you thinking about any particular areas where you think that knowledge needs to be built? And I'm wondering, at the moment, is there anything in particular, is there a topic or subject that you're investigating?

**Kristin 11:01**

If you are finding yourself as an internal comms professional becoming frustrated with an area of your organisation, my challenge to you would be to learn more about that area of your organisation.

**Kristin 11:15**

So I am relatively constantly frustrated by finance, because I am not a numbers person. And nor do I strive to be. But because I am frustrated by that I know it's an area that I need to keep learning about. Now, again, it doesn't mean that I'm going to become a chartered financial accountant, that's not it at all. But I need to know enough to have conversations with my CFO.

For example, at one point in my career, I reported to the CFO of an organisation which is very strange to many people. And I think still strange in a structured world of why an internal comms, or communications person in general, would report to a finance person. And that's why I love sharing that with people, because often people will ask, well, what should the reporting structure be? And I don't think there's one answer for that.

**Kristin 12:08**

I reported to the CFO. And that was probably my favourite reporting structure, because the person in that role, knew enough to know when he didn't know. So he knew enough to know when to bring me into conversations, and respected my discipline as I respected his discipline.

**Kristin 12:29**

Now, an interesting thing happened when I reported to him during the conversations about professional development, I really wanted to go to, I believe it was World Conference, I think that was the professional development event that I wanted to go to. And he said, "Okay, I'll make you a deal. You can go to World Conference, if you attend this finance course." What a deal to be offered to an internal comms person. I was like, oh, no, do not make me go to take a finance course. But he said, Okay, if you take– the course was called, it's very fun. It's almost tongue in cheek, when I look back on it, the course was called 'financial management for non financial managers'. So it was a course specifically designed for people who are not in finance. It was two, I think, two or three days. So I thought, okay, I will expand my mind, I will go to this course, begrudgingly.

I attended the course I was, quite literally in tears at the end of the first day, because I was so frustrated, it was out of my comfort zone. I didn't know many of the people in this course. They



weren't finance people, but they were engineers, or they were in science. So they had a background of knowledge. They weren't coming in with an English degree. So it was it was exhausting, and frustrating. And I was in tears at the end of the first day, and I wanted to just leave and go home. But I stuck it through, it was the best professional development that I've ever taken, because it made me a better business person. It helped me have conversations at the executive level that resonated with people who were in leadership because they understand numbers. They understand ROI, they understand when something has to bring value on the balance sheet.

**Kristin 14:13**

So it was it was a frustrating situation at first, but turned into a really valuable experience. And I will also say because I reported to the CFO, and this is another tip for people who are hesitant to learn more about finance, the more you can have the conversation, the more money you can ask for. So the closer you are, the fact that I reported to the CFO, well, who controls the budget? The CFO. I can have all kinds of conversations with this person about budget and resources and allocating money. So that was the other benefit of that situation.

**Katie 14:46**

Now, I believe you've got a view on how not to create a comms strategy. And I'm asking this question because we can see from the downloads on our website that the 'How to write a comms strategy' download is probably the most popular, I think very easily the most popular. But I'm getting the impression from what I've read about you is that you'd rather IC folk don't necessarily follow any standard template. Do you have any advice for listeners about to embark on developing this strategy or updating it?

**Kristin 15:18**

That's a fascinating statistic that that's your most popular download. I'm not surprised though, you probably aren't either. I know as comms people, and especially as internal comms people, we love a good template, we love when there's something that we love, we don't have to reinvent the wheel and good for us. That's fantastic. I'm glad that we don't waste time reinventing the wheel.

**Kristin 15:40**

My concern is that there's no one-size-fits-all. So your industry is unique. Your employees are unique, all of that. I think it's fantastic. If you have a broad template to work from for the structure of something, I would also explore and encourage people to look for the experts in that area.

**Kristin 16:00**

Building a strategy is, no different than measurement and metrics, is a very specialised area of internal comms, and there are so many experts who are consultants and work for agencies in our industry, I would encourage people to rely on some of those people. And I would also say rely on some community feedback and critique when you're building that kind of strategy, because there are people who have done it before. And there will be people who do it after you. So I think the more willing we are to share the work that we're doing, the more our entire industry and our community benefits from those conversations.

**Katie 16:38**

Kristin, that is the perfect segue into my next question. How did you know? Because I want to talk to you about ICology, of course I do. Now this has evolved over the years. Can you share with us that evolution? How did ICology start, and what is it today?

**Kristin 16:55**



ICology started, as many people know, as a podcast in 2015, I believe. So my partner in life and work, Chuck Gose, started the podcast as a way to elevate the profession, to interview and explore what roles people have in our profession, to educate others. And it was fantastic. It was a great podcast. I know lots of people were very avid listeners of the podcast.

**Kristin 17:20**

As you know, Katie, having a podcast requires an exceptional amount of work and dedication. And so it ran for I believe, three or four years and fell dormant because other priorities take over, life gets busy. All of those things happen. It was quiet for a couple of years.

**Kristin 17:38**

Fast forward, when I ended up immigrating to the US, I could not work for a significant period of time, because it was illegal for me to do so. And so we decided it was a good time to build a business. Why not? While I'm not having anything to do all day. So ICology really transformed. Our original business plan, which makes us laugh a little bit now, was to have an event space business, which is really funny, because we were originally going to launch mid to late 2020.

**Kristin 18:08**

Well, thank goodness, yeah, thank goodness, we did not launch an in-person event space business in 2020.

**Kristin 18:15**

So the timing of that actually worked out for us, because we had to go back to the original plans in the drawing board and ask ourselves, what is the core of what we're trying to do with ICology? What are we? What is the goal here? And the goal really was we want to bring people together. We're trying to create community, and we're trying to do it in a different way. And so when in person events became something that was just not feasible at the time, we thought, okay, well, let's build the community. Let's get people together. What does that look like?

**Kristin 18:46**

So now ICology is a largely online community of very passionate internal comms professionals. It's become a way for people to connect and to learn together. I am happy to share that we are finally going to be doing in-person events this month in September, which is exciting. It took a while to do that. I think it also took a while for us to figure out what ICology was and where it's going.

**Kristin 19:11**

I will be very honest with people that for the first year of building this community, I really didn't know where it was going. I didn't know what people really wanted out of it. I knew we wanted to bring people together. So I spent a long time, probably a year, year and a half, really listening, paying attention watching. What are people finding value in? Where are these conversations happening? And so now it's exciting. I feel like we really found our stride and I think we're on a really exciting track to be able to do things online and in-person but ultimately, both with the goal of having a supportive community for people in our industry.

**Katie 19:51**

It's an interesting concept and a really valuable one because internal communications by its very nature tends to stay within the walls of an organisation. So it's quite hard to see what others are doing in your peer group. So I can imagine that's a massive attraction.

**Kristin 20:08**



It is. And that's an interesting point you bring up because we often find that at in-person events and conferences, it's a little bit like pulling teeth to try and get people who are in internal comms to share what's going on inside their organisations.

**Kristin 20:24**

Now, sometimes that's because they're not allowed to, which is fair, but also then that presents an interesting struggle for our industry. Because when you're not allowed to share what you're doing outside the organisation, how do we learn? What is the best practice? What is the standard? What's the baseline? The other part of it is, I think, internal comms tends to attract – this is my own opinion with no science behind it – internal comms tends to attract people who have the most wonderfully soft centres and the warmest hearts. And I think that's what makes our industry so inviting, and so magical. I also think that it can be our biggest struggle, because we are often not the people to sing our own praises. And we're often not the people who are going to put our hands up and say, "I did something amazing. That worked really well". Right. And we don't, you know, you see that in PR and marketing, right? Those folks know, they put their hands up, they're happy to share that's, you know, it's a standard to try and share who's done the best work.

**Kristin 21:28**

Internal comms is very different. It's a very unique industry. And that's what I love most about it. And it's also our biggest challenge. So part of what I hope ICology helps people do is find their voice and find that confidence to be able to share with our industry and put their hands up and say, "I'm doing great work. Here's what it looks like." Or "I'm really struggling with this. Has anyone else done this? And can you help me?"

**Katie 21:52**

It's so funny, you're making me think of the difference between internal comms award ceremonies that I've been to, and PR ones, and–

**Kristin**

Aren't they shockingly different?

**Katie**

One's all about rah, rah, rah and chandeliers. And yes, all the rest of it, and the other one's very sedate, and everyone's got everyone else's backs and no one's tooting their own horn.

**Kristin 22:14**

Right. And that's, and that's the magic of our industry. But it's also such a challenge for us. I'm like, "No, we're doing amazing things. It's okay to brag about yourself, trust me."

**Katie 22:24**

Do you find that you have a typical member of ICology? Do people tend to be at a certain stage in their career?

**Kristin 22:32**

I wouldn't say there's a typical member in terms of seniority in their career, I will say there is absolutely a common thread. And the common thread that I've seen over the last year and a half is we've resonated with folks who previously felt very isolated at work.

**Kristin 22:52**



We know that in internal comms, because relative to marketing, PR and external comms it's a newer field, and so you are often the only person at your company who is doing internal comms, and you may be doing other things alongside internal comms, that may not even be your exclusive role. And so those people, there's no one for them to bounce ideas off of there. They often, as we talked about earlier, they often don't even report to someone who has an internal comms background.

**Kristin 23:23**

So it can be a very isolating role and a very isolating place to be where you feel like you're making it up sometimes. And I think that's what I've seen with people who have joined ICology is there are people who are looking for that community, there are people who are looking for their peers. They're also people who are typically looking for more out of the industry or wondering where to go next.

**Kristin 23:46**

So it's not so much whether they've been in the industry for a certain number of years, it's more that they're at a point in their career where they don't really know what the next step is. Again, our industry is relatively new, so you know, there's not a clear path, like there might be in marketing, where you're a Marketing Associate, and then a Marketing Specialist, and then you're the Manager, and then you're the Director, then you're the VP, right. Internal comms, there isn't always that path. there's starting to be, but it's not as common. And so I think that's where we're all looking for "what is next for me personally, but also what's next for our industry?"

**Katie 24:22**

Yeah, that's so interesting. I've noticed throughout this entire conversation about building community, you haven't used the word networking. And I'm wondering, I'm wondering if that's deliberate. I have a feeling you don't like that term, and you prefer another term?

**Kristin 24:37**

It's intentional.

**Katie 24:39**

It's intentional. What? Tell me what you don't like about the phrase, first of all,

**Kristin 24:43**

Here's the thing. It's not that I don't like the phrase networking. It's that I think it's become a term that is dreaded. And so now, I just try not to use it because I think sometimes I worry it scares people off. I think it's so important that we give language to things, of course, but then I think what happens is this term networking gets overused.

**Kristin 25:02**

I think sometimes we spend too much time debating what term to use, whether it's networking or employee engagement versus employee experience versus, you know, all these terms that we coined, and they're all important. But they can be very vague and I think networking can be very vague. So it's less that I don't like the term and more that I know it conjures up fear. So I try to use other words like connecting. Or I ask people, "What is the goal?" So if you think if you're thinking to yourself, wow, I really need to network more, dig deeper, and ask yourself what does that mean? What do you mean by you need to network more? Are you trying to learn a new skill? Are you trying to get a new job? Are you trying to get a promotion? Are you trying to, you know, find a mentor? Those are all very unique things and unique goals.

**Kristin 25:54**



So if, you know, finding a mentor is a goal, then reach out to people one on one that you admire in the industry, ask them if they have time or, my pitch, join ICology, we've got a great mentorship programme. It's learning a new skill again, is that reaching out to people in those industries? Is it finding associations that offer classes in that particular skill? Are you looking for feedback? Do you need to find a community where you can post strategies or documents that you want people to share? So it's less about networking, and more about being more intentional about what the goal is when you say networking?

**Katie 26:30**

Yeah, what I like about that approach is, from the recipient's point of view, if you're reaching out to somebody with a very specific ask, you know, I admire your ability or your knowledge or experience in Y. And I'd love to find out more about Y, that's probably going to elicit a better response. Because it's directed, it's targeted, it's meaningful. You've done your research.

**Kristin 26:52**

100%.

**Katie 26:53**

I'm like, I really like that approach.

**Kristin 26:55**

And I think that anyone in our industry, and I'm sure, Katie, you would agree with us, too. If you had someone reach out to you and say, "Hey, I really admire the work that you're doing in our industry, would you be willing to chat with me for 20 minutes?" Of course, of course, you would, I would, I would think the vast majority of people in our industry would be honoured to have that request and help someone out, or, I've got this document, would you be willing to read it and give me feedback on it? Of course. Right? So I think that's, that's like you said, there's a more direct or intentional way of clarifying what you're looking for when you're talking about networking.

**Katie 27:31**

I was looking at the various roles you've had over the years, Kristin, and sort of wondering about the various internal comms challenges you've faced. There was one in particular that really stuck out, you were the comms manager for the College of Registered Nurses in Manitoba. So just to paint the picture for listeners, you've got an audience here of around 14,000 registered nurses, so they're not technically your employees at all, but they are licenced through you. You've got their personal email addresses, but not their company email addresses. And they work all over the province. And just to put this into perspective, for listeners, Manitoba, nearly three times bigger than the UK. And of course, they work in healthcare, so they're not sitting at a desk or in front of a computer. Now, many listeners will have either remote, mobile, non-desk-based audience. So on behalf of them thinking about this challenge. Where did you start?

**Kristin 28:32**

Well, first of all, I want to give Katie props here for doing the most research for any podcast I've ever been a part of. Katie knows more about Manitoba than anyone else in the UK, now, you get a badge of honour.

**Kristin 28:48**

So yes, the College of Registered Nurses, for anyone in the UK or the US, is our licencing body for registered nurses. And as Katie mentioned, Manitoba is a huge geographic area. And also much of it is very remote. So there are registered nurses who are working in areas that either don't have internet



or have very spotty internet, cell signals are often not great in some of those areas, or even if they are at a major healthcare setting, they're not sitting at a desk.

**Kristin 29:21**

The role that I was in managing communications for the organisation was not a new role. So I was fortunate to have a predecessor who set up a very robust system for communications. And really, the broad statement for how we reached all of them was that we did not rely on one single form of communication. And so you know, when people talk about print being dead, I'm like, no, it's not. It's not dead and it never will be because at the time, I don't think they do anymore, but we produced a quarterly magazine for registered nurses in the province and it was mailed to all 14,000 of them and that was part of how we shared information. Now that's not a great way to share urgent communication, of course. But it was a great way for us to share more long-form information and dig deeper into some topics that they might need to learn about.

**Kristin 30:10**

We relied on internet for some, right, we did webinars and things like that. We also relied on phone trees, we relied on fax machines, on, you know, print, on in-person communication, there were times where we would do, they would jokingly call it a road show, that we would travel to different areas and say, we're going to be in this town and you know, please come out, we're having a town hall, whatever it is. So it's really about it's about meeting people where they are, and it's about not relying on a single medium to get your message across. Because it just would never, if we relied solely on email, we would be missing 1000s of people for urgent information.

**Katie 30:50**

It's so funny. Just today I was having a conversation with a client about print. And she's got this very remote dispersed workforce. They're not plugged in in any way. They don't have any work email addresses for them. There's certainly no intranet, no mobile app, nothing like that. And we were talking print, and it is absolutely right, in certain circumstances, isn't it? And the way digital communication has moved on, you can now integrate print within a digital suite with things like QR codes, etc, etc. So really interesting.

**Kristin 31:25**

Yes. 100%. And yeah, that was a big part of what we relied on, right? And there's an element of print as well that because of the work that we were doing, and the nature of it being, at times, very formalised and needing to be traced and tracked. Print is the way to do that, in many cases, right? We would have to mail things, have them signed, you know, whatever that is, and have people sign for them. Yeah, it's an old form, but it is useful in many cases still.

**Katie 31:56**

So Kristin, getting personal. If I asked you, what's a baggage claim? Does that mean something to you?

**Kristin 32:08**

It does, it absolutely does. This is a term coined by – everyone's getting a little glimpse inside Chuck's and my marriage, now – this is a term that Chuck and I coined fairly early on in our relationship, because we are all carrying baggage.

**Kristin 32:23**

I hear people use this term about someone having baggage like it's a negative thing. It is a fact of life, that when we have life experiences, we carry those emotions and that baggage with us throughout

life. Now, the goal of that then is to claim what is yours, and carry it with patience and compassion and a little bit of humour never hurts as well.

**Kristin 32:46**

So in relationships, we acknowledge when we're carrying something forward into another relationship that should have been released as a baggage claim. So we will say "is that a baggage claim?" Or you will own it yourself and say, "You know what, I think I'm having a baggage claim moment, because this is something I'm carrying forward that I shouldn't."

**Kristin 33:05**

The funny thing is we've realised this happens at work today. This happens. It absolutely does. It happens in our professional lives. If you have had an experience in a job with, let's say, a micromanaging boss, and you leave that job and you go to another job and your new boss is not micromanaging. But you are hypersensitive to that activity, because it's what you know, right? That's, the baggage you're bringing into this new role. So it is on us, it is our responsibility to claim what's ours, process it, manage it, deal with it and leave behind what isn't ours to carry.

**Katie 33:41**

That is so interesting. I'm thinking about all those focus groups where I walked in and started to talk about, you know, the implications of some new transformation programme, and everyone is hyper cynical, and you know, feeling very negative about the whole experience that's about to come. And you realise that they're focusing on something that happened to maybe five years ago, where there was a change that was really badly managed, and half of them, more than half of them, probably didn't even work for the organisation at that point. But that experience has become part of the ether in the culture. So these baggage claims are really relevant in terms of our audiences as well, aren't they?

**Kristin 34:24**

And wouldn't it be great if we started every meeting or big project with "Okay, everyone, we are all laying our baggage on the carousel and who would like to go first and acknowledge that you are bringing preconceived ideas, stereotypes, expectations, like what are you bringing and let's leave it all on the table. And then let's start fresh." That would be a great way to start meetings and projects.

**Katie 34:48**

It would be a cathartic moment for everyone I think.

**Kristin 34:53**

Absolutely.

**Katie 34:54**

I'm an incurable romantic. So I really want to believe that internal comms was what brought you and Chuck together. But was that really the case?

**Kristin 35:05**

That actually is the case, yes, I will feed your hopeless romantic ideals. Yes. We met at a communications conference years ago. And Chuck was speaking, and I actually I don't know if people know this part of it, I actually heckled him on Twitter. And I made a joke about his, I tagged him in it, I made a joke about his presentation. And that's how the conversation started. That was our first interaction was on Twitter. So it was fueled through the internal comms industry. But ultimately, I guess it was Twitter that brought us together.

**Katie 35:39**

It's lovely to hear some positive things coming out of Twitter at the moment, that's all I can say. I noticed a photograph on Instagram, this is going to sound like I've been stalking you, so apologies. My research goes deep sometimes. But there's a framed message on a table in your home, I believe that says Rule One: We are kind. And that got me wondering, are there other family rules? And if there are, would you be comfortable sharing them with us?

**Kristin 36:08**

So first of all, social media is for stalking. So I applaud your efforts and digging deeper. So that photograph on Instagram was actually from our wedding celebration, which we were finally able to have after postponing for several years due to COVID.

And we, when I moved to the US, we created a bit of an instant family, Chuck has two kids. And so this week, we kind of became this interesting blended unit. And as anyone knows, well, I guess in any family situation, even if it's not a blended family, challenges come with blending people and roles and living spaces and all of those things together. And so one night, the four of us had a bit of a coming together moment that was fueled by a frustrating scenario. And so we decided that evening that we needed some house rules, and we developed the four of us these house rules, we put them – originally they were on a whiteboard – we've since had a beautiful framed print made of these rules that isn't our kitchen. And so there are 13 of them, I won't go through all of them, but they have things like we put our phones down during meals, we make fun a priority, we say we're sorry, we share our emotions, we make our guests feel welcome. You can tell that we wrote it in 2020, because one of the rules is 'we wash our hands', which it would have never been a rule before 2020. But that was something that we added that year.

**Kristin 37:34**

So it's rules that, some of them are a bit tongue in cheek, you know, some of them are very emotionally authentic. But it was a fun, and very real way for us to decide what we wanted the house to be like and what we wanted the four of us to be like as a team and as a unit. I think in many ways you could translate that exercise into your professional space, and maybe develop some team rules for your workspace, even though I know we're not always physically in the same space anymore. But the sentiment of it still stands.

**Katie 38:07**

I love that. And I agree I couldn't help thinking these could be team rules. These could be company rules. Absolutely. What's different about a rule and say, you know, we wash our hands, or we are kind, we put our phones down, is that they're not nebulous values, like professionalism and integrity, that compassion, which means 59 different things to 59 different people. It's a rule. I mean, it's clear whether you're doing it or you're not doing it. And that's, I think that's quite powerful there's power in that simplicity isn't there.

**Kristin 38:37**

And there's also power in the four of us doing it together. Right? It wasn't it wasn't Chuck and I saying "Alright, everyone, here are the rules of this house." And here's what everyone has to abide by. So one of the other rules, one of the kids wanted the rule to be that we always have strawberries available as a snack. And I said well, so that's fine. If that's really important, that's fine, but there are external circumstances that might make that impossible at times. We live in Indiana, we do get winter here. I can't always get fresh strawberries. So the rule actually says 'We try our best to have strawberries

available' because I said I'm happy to keep that as a rule, but it needs there has to be a little bit of flexibility

**Katie 39:16**

Flexibility with the fruit, guys.

**Kristin 39:18**

Exactly.

**Katie 39:21**

Before we skip to those quickfire questions, I have to ask you about another one of your passions, which is astrology. Now you write, another quote, so you know again, if this is wrong, do tell me: "Astrology describes how the sky narrates the human experience. It validates who we are, and offers guidance so we can achieve our highest potential." That sounds absolutely amazing, doesn't it? What's sparked your interest in astrology? And yes, tell us more.

**Kristin 39:53**

Like many people my interest in astrology came out of a time in my life where I felt very helpless and maybe a bit hopeless, and I was looking for guidance, I was looking for reassurance, I just was, I was trying to feel comforted during a really, really challenging time.

**Kristin 40:13**

So I actually flew from Winnipeg to Toronto for a four or five hour astrology reading, which sounds as nutty as it was. And so that sparked my curiosity, that would have been back in, was it 2015, or 2016? So it's been a few, it's been quite a few years now. And since then, I've just never stopped being curious and learning about it.

During the pandemic, when I was living in the US, and for this year, almost a year and a half that I couldn't work, I was looking for things to fill my time and realise there is a four-year certification programme, that I could start and become an astrologer. And so I started that, and I'm in the middle of it. And it's been fun, first of all, but it's also been so validating, because there's just this link between astrology and everything. You know, if you are doing Myers Briggs at work, or you're doing the colours, personality test, or all of those things, they all tie in together, and astrology, in many ways is no different. It offers some insight into who we are as people, and how we interact with others. And I think more than anything else, this world could use more people who know themselves more intimately before we interact with others, because it promotes this radical self-acceptance.

**Katie 41:32**

So is the idea that the moment that you are born into this world tells you, and how the stars are aligning, the planets are aligning at that moment, tells you something quite deep about yourself. Is that am I barking up the right tree?

**Kristin 41:50**

Yes, that's a great way of describing it. Yeah. So your birth chart is a snapshot of the sky at the moment that you took your first breath. And from that snapshot, we can see parts of your personality, we can see some challenges that are inherent to who you are, we can see the gifts that you have. And we can also see the narration of a story that will unfold throughout your life and some of the opportunities that might be presented to you.

**Katie 42:17**

You said you were going through a difficult time. What made astrology help was, being, I guess, clearer about who you really were and what the future might look like, again, am I— would that be fair?

**Kristin 42:32**

Yes. And I would say it's, it was two things. Part of it was, like I said, this radical self-acceptance, where the woman that I met with pointed things out about myself, some of which were a little uncomfortable. As we all know, we have parts of ourselves that are a little uncomfortable to acknowledge. But it was a way of looking at myself, that wasn't critical. It was a way of looking at myself in an exploratory way and in a way that reminded me that that's who I am. And so some of these challenges that I've beat myself up for can be superpowers if I look at them in a certain way, and if I work with that energy, and if I know that it's there.

The other part that I find validating about astrology is that everything comes in time and everything is cyclical. And so when something is really challenging, and when you're in the middle of an absolute storm, it's not going to be forever. And that's part of what I find reassuring about looking at astrology as I can look at, okay, you're in the middle of something right now. And I'm telling you that because I'm validating for you that what you're experiencing is very real. This is very challenging right now. And you've gone through challenging things before, and you will get through this challenging thing as well.

**Katie 43:49**

It's that thought, isn't it: this too shall pass?

**Kristin 43:52**

Absolutely.

**Katie 43:52**

There's a perspective that's so helpful. I really like that. And knowing yourself really does help when it comes to things like professional development as well, because we don't want cookie cutter comms professionals, do we?

**Kristin 44:07**

Absolutely not.

**Katie 44:08**

We want people to explore their unique traits.

**Kristin 44:11**

And we want people who are moving into leadership who are very self-aware. We want people who are emotionally intelligent, who know themselves who, as much as they can, can see the blind spots. No, that's an oxymoron. But you know, to know your strengths and to know the challenges and to be able to work with people who complement that, or to be able to acknowledge when you're experiencing conflict at work, what your role in that conflict is.

**Katie 44:37**

Again, I'm thinking about Professor William Kahn because I sort of listened to what he was telling me about great leaders and I said: "So to summarise, we're talking about great leaders have this ability to be open and honest and are comfortable with uncomfortableness and all these wonderful things."



And he said: "Yes, Katie, that's all correct. You've missed one thing out that's really, really important: They are comfortable with their own human messiness, first of all."

**Kristin 45:05**

Oh, that's beautiful.

**Katie 45:07**

Exactly what you've just said is that they're absolutely comfortable with who they are, all the nice and the not so pretty parts of themselves. Yeah. Really interesting.

**Kristin 45:16**

Yes, absolutely. So I am someone who is very uncomfortable with conflict. I am very conflict averse. I want everyone to just get along. And for things to be nice and smooth and happy. And I don't want anyone to yell at anyone. That's not how life works. And so I spent many years in my adult life beating myself up saying, well, I should be more comfortable with conflict, and I should be more assertive in conflict situations. And then part of what I've learned about myself is that that's just not who I am. I'm not so— I'm always there's always going to be some level of discomfort for me when it comes to conflict. That's okay. It's because I care so much. So how can I use that discomfort to remind myself that I'm feeling uncomfortable because I really care about this person? So channel that into this conversation.

**Katie 46:05**

Yes. Such good advice. Can we skip to those quick-fire questions?

**Kristin 46:11**

Yes please.

**Katie 46:14**

What would most surprise people about Kristin Hancock?

**Kristin 46:18**

I drive a pickup truck. I think that would surprise people.

**Katie 46:26**

Fantastic.

**Kristin 46:28**

Every time I go somewhere people assume the truck is Chuck's. I'm like, no, actually, it's mine, I came with it from Canada. Yeah. I also have an extensive knowledge of quotes from The Simpsons.

**Katie 46:45**

Oh,

**Kristin 46:46**

that's that is also maybe something that would surprise people.

**Katie 46:51**

Are you going to share a favourite quote with me? I've got to ask.

**Kristin 46:55**



Well, I know that's a good question. Do I have a favourite Simpsons quote? My favourite episode is the chilli cook off. So for any Simpsons fans out there, that's my favourite episode.

**Katie 47:06**

Links in the show notes, guys. I mean, all the important links, astrology, The Simpsons, it's a smorgasbord or whatever it's called.

**Kristin 47:16**

Yes, it really is.

**Katie 47:18**

So how would you complete this sentence? World class internal comms is:

**Kristin 47:26**

World class internal comms makes people feel like you are talking directly to them.

**Katie 47:33**

Oh, nice.

**Kristin 47:35**

That's what I think. I think the people feel like you hear them, you see them and you are talking directly to them.

**Katie 47:43**

I love that that comes down to really knowing your audience, doesn't it?

**Kristin 47:46**

Yes.

**Katie 47:47**

Yeah. So is there a book that all comms professionals should read?

**Kristin 47:53**

Something I just finished reading is a book called Fans First. And the author is Jesse Cole. And it is a book that is not at all about internal comms, but it will change your view on how you create and mould your employee experience at work. The basis of this book is it's written by the owner of a minor league baseball team in the United States.

**Kristin 48:18**

The team name is called the Savannah Bananas, okay. And their entire existence is counter to how baseball is run in this country how the business of baseball works. They don't sell sponsorships, they have all-inclusive ticket pricing. They do all of these incredible things for fans that everyone said when they launched that's never going to work. Right? You have this is the way that the business of baseball works. This is how it has to be done. And they said no, we're not doing it that way. We're doing it our way. Because we are going to do this with fans at the forefront of everything we do.

**Kristin 48:55**

Now internal communicators, we are not all working for baseball teams and fans, right? But if you look at your employees as fans, what are we doing for them? Are we truly creating a culture that is fans first or is employees first? And I think in many ways we're not. But in many ways we can and there





are very simple, easy ways that we can make that happen. So I would encourage everyone to read that book and I will give my husband credit for that because he actually purchased the book. But I read it first because I found it on the kitchen table first and now I recommend it to everyone.

**Katie 49:36**

But it's interesting, the word fan, again, you said earlier I think you know language is really important. And we talk a lot in internal comms about advocates and ambassadors and champions. But actually fans is a much more active participative and emotional word, isn't it, and if you can create a fan it's so much deeper than an advocate, isn't it? I love it.

**Kristin 50:00**

It is and when you have fans, those people are going to go out– think about the things that you are a fan of, or the artists or whoever you are recommending them. “Oh, you've got to listen to this song, you've got to watch this show you've got you know”, so if you have employees who are fans have the culture and fans of what you do as an organisation and coming to work. That's more than half the battle.

**Katie 50:26**

Yeah, if you if they can be fans of your purpose in the world as an organisation that's hugely valuable. So finally, we give you a billboard, and you can put on this billboard, a message for everyone to see. It's entirely yours to be as creative as you'd like to be with it. So what message are you going to put on your billboard?

**Kristin 50:48**

I will put my personal mantra that I say to myself, when I'm having a challenging day: ‘you are in the right place, at the right time, all the time’.

**Katie 51:00**

Lovely. I like that .

**Kristin 51:01**

A great thing to read. I think everyone needs to be reminded of that when we are impatient, frustrated, whatever it is, or if we are experiencing a joyful time and fearing that it might end or fearing that something bad might happen. No, no, you're in the right place, at the right time, all the time.

**Katie 51:20**

Also, that chimes with me when it comes to mindfulness and those moments in the day just to be a bit more present. And not let the day just slide by.

**Kristin 51:30**

Absolutely.

**Katie 51:31**

Kristin, this has been an absolute joy, this conversation. Thank you so much for your time.

**Kristin 51:35**

Thank you, Katie. This was so much fun.

**Katie 51:40**



So that's a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. My thanks to Kristin, and to you for choosing the show. Plays of The Internal Comms Podcast this year have risen by an astonishing 750% this year.

**Katie 51:57**

Anyway, for show notes and a transcript of today's episode, head over to AB's website. That's [abcomm.co.uk/podcasts](https://abcomm.co.uk/podcasts).

**Katie 52:10**

And finally, I have a very special announcement to make. There is just time to register your interest for AB Thinks Live.

This is a special free event exclusively for in-house internal comms pros. The date is Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October, and it's in Central London. I will be speaking along with a great lineup of presenters or leading voices in employee comms. Our theme is 'ripping up the rulebook'. We will be sharing how we aim to think differently and buck conventional wisdom in comms.

All you need to do is email [events@abcomm.co.uk](mailto:events@abcomm.co.uk) to find out more. We have only a few spaces left, so to register your interest for this I suggest you may want to send that email today. The address again [events@abcomm.co.uk](mailto:events@abcomm.co.uk).

**Katie 53:14**

So until we meet again, my lovely listeners, do stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.