



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 8

Season 7: The rewind episode

Transcript

[Katie 00:09]

Welcome to *The Internal Comms Podcast* with me, Katie Macaulay. I've spent a 30-year career helping organisations improve the way they communicate with their people.

[00:23]

From everything I've seen over those years, I'm left in no doubt that exceptional organisational performance is rooted in exceptional internal communication. In short, great organisations are built from the inside out. And on the flip side, a common component of almost every business problem I've witnessed over those years – from major disasters, to those minor yet disruptive skirmishes – is poor communication.

[01:00]

So in this show, I sit down with the leading lights from the world of business, communication and academia to explore how organisations can improve workplace communication. How do we best inform, motivate, and involve our people.

[01:19]

The curtain is about to go up on Season Eight of the show. But before it does, to hopefully whet your appetite. I'd like to share with you just a few highlights from our last season.

[01:34]

In Episode 57, we unbox internal communication at the world's most successful furniture retailer, IKEA. My guests were CEO Communication Leader, Daniela Rogosic, and Global Head of Co-Worker Communication. Guy Britt.

We had an amazing reaction to this show. And it's really easy to see why Guy and Daniela talk with tremendous energy and enthusiasm about their work, which involves communicating to 170,000 colleagues working in more than 60 markets worldwide. Here's Guy talking about how he views the internal audience at IKEA:

[02:21]

So let's talk about the nuts and bolts of internal comms at IKEA. And first, let's get our terminology right because Guy, I know that you are Global Head of Co-Worker Communication, and that term co-worker rather than internal or employee comms is deliberate. And I just wonder, why is that? And how does that shift in language influence your thinking and approach?

[Guy 2:48]

It's very deliberate. And it's based on that the people we're communicating to our people. They're humans, they're our colleagues. It's not a strange entity or where you are employed. If we say employees, then it's like, we're talking down to people, if it's internal communications, then it sounds like we're just clicking memos about or updating an intranet.

[03:12]

We're not just communicating with our colleagues, we're engaging with them, we're trying to inspire them, we're trying to activate them, we're trying to, you know, bring them along with the journey.



And, you know, communication is a two way street, we're not just pushing things out to them, we're pulling as well, we're talking to them, we're having a dialogue, we're learning from them. As much as we're trying to share things the other way.

[03:36]

So it's, it's just that human element which is so, so critical, to the way we go about it. And that comes down to the way we communicate comes down to the use of language, it comes down to the tone, it comes down to, you know, not using corporate language or not using, you know, media release template-type, ways of writing which are absolutely inhuman in every way. You know, it's robotic, so it's about having a human tone and a respectful one and respecting their time and their energy.

[Katie 04:10]

Great business leaders know that human-centric companies perform better over the long run, and especially in times of intense disruption, and change. Those are the words of Victoria Dew, Coach, consultant, co-founder of Dewpoint Communications, and a leading voice in the internal comms field.

Now, I have to say Victoria was an absolute joy to interview. I'm guessing that her background in the movie business might account for her ability to convey her thoughts in a very articulate and inspiring way. I had goosebumps actually several times during this conversation.

In this clip from Episode 61 Victoria explains why we don't want employees always trying to behave themselves at work. Instead, businesses need to embrace the messiness of the whole human being.

[05:16]

Now, I do like to do quite a bit of research on my guests before I interview them. And it was pretty clear to me very early on, in researching you and your work, that there's a golden thread, I think that runs through your approach to communication. And it's possibly best summed up by phrase you've used, which is, "human-centric businesses do better".

I just wonder if you can elaborate on this thought, and particularly what's driving the trend towards organisations becoming more human-centric?

[Victoria 5:49]

You know, this is certainly a part of my work and my ethos, and what my company is about, which comes from my work in New Zealand, you know, a very egalitarian culture, and very focused on people.

I would say that what part of my mission is proving that human-centric businesses do better, I would say pre-pandemic that was quite radical, which is sort of weird and annoying to say, but it was a much bolder statement than it is today.

[06:21]

I think the pandemic has really accelerated this trend that we would call looking at human-centric workplaces, for some of the reasons I mentioned about you know, that you mentioned that collision, of work and life. So I believe that if you are relying on actual human beings to run your business, right, which is to say, you have a business that is not 100% run by machines, or robots, or AI or non-human things, right? If you have actual human beings, messy, human beings with lives and feelings, and dreams and goals, if you're counting on those creatures to run your business,

[07:05]

which I believe I don't know a lot of businesses that are not, maybe you've come across them, but I haven't, then it behooves you to enable and be able to access all of their humaneness, right, that what we call whole human, all of that messy human.

Because the best and smartest people, and what I hear a lot of is companies that want to hire the best and smartest people, so let's just assume that that is the kind of human that one is looking to have run the organisation. The best and smartest people don't just innovate, create, collaborate, lead nine to five, and then go back into their little boxes, like a robot until you go get them the next day. Says me.

[07:51]

So creating a world of work where people can be their, you know, authentic, and air quotes "selves", because that word is sort of overused, but not inaccurate. Creating a world where people can be those selves bring out the best in people. And that is simply better for business than having a company full of people who are trying to behave themselves and look good all the time.

[08:15]

So like, so you know, when you're staying at someone's house, you know, speaking of house guests, and you're paranoid about breaking something, right? Like your paranoid, you're gonna like, break a glass or something, and you're gonna be a bad house guest. And because you're nervous, you of course, you drop a glass or you spill nail polish remover on the dresser or, you know, you break a chair or something happens, right?

[08:40]

And I think about that a lot, because haven't we actually essentially been living in a world of work that was kind of like that? Where we're always uncomfortable like in this country, you know, that you can get fired on a Tuesday, right, that precariousness. I think a lot about women teetering around offices and high heels like literally very precarious, you know, and you think about like, how on earth like, what a stupid idea, you know, what a bad way to get the best out of people.

[09:11]

And then suddenly, we ended up in this world where we kind of got comfortable in our yoga pants, and we could finally breathe. And we discovered we could do really good work, and actually breathe and not have our feet hurt all the time, and not constantly feel like we were about to spill nail polish remover on the dresser.

[09:29]

So, you know, AI and machine learning and robots are getting very, very sophisticated. But at the moment the roles we really need people to do humans involve some of these traits and attributes that are we associate being very human and not which is not to say that robots and AI won't get very good at these at some point. But for the time being in things like creativity, synthesis, empathy, imagination, intuition, strategy, communication, critical thinking.

[10:00]

So the jobs of the future are very likely to be about how humans enable technology, and how we work alongside it, at least for sort of the next 10 to 15 years. And I don't know about you, I really don't dare think longer than 10 to 15 years, it seems a very long time away. One of my favourite futurists Bob Johansen would say, the next 10 years is going to be a love story about humans and machines, and how we work alongside.



[10:26]

So by 2025, machine learning AI machines will have eliminated about 85 million jobs around the world. But it will have created 97 million new jobs. And those jobs are not about people behaving themselves. And they're not about people being cogs in a machine. They're not about pressing a button or punching a time clock. Those jobs are the ones that are going away. So if you love those jobs, you're going to be in for a rude awakening.

[10:56]

These new jobs and what we really need people to do is about analysing, synthesising connecting the dots. It's things like you know, data analysts and scientists and, and digital marketing and strategy and process automation, how we become specialists, right and how we connect dots and take all these kinds of very human attributes together and make sense of the world and enable technology.

[11:19]

So if that's the world that you're building, and that's the world of work that we're creating, then really creating a human-centric workplace where those people can thrive is, I believe, mandatory. And then when we come back to internal communication, you see how creating what I think of as surround sound a mesh of touchpoints, and employee experience and communication is critical to that. That helps people to do their best work.

[Katie 11:50]

Martin Flegg, or The IC Citizen, as he is known on social media, has more than 20 years' experience in communications, as well as being a consultant, he's also a tutor on various CIPR qualification courses, including the Specialists IC Certificate.

In this clip, Martin and I are talking about the current state of the internal comms job market.

[12:19]

What I have seen quite a lot of is clients who will come to me and say, as soon as I got into the role, I realised they just wanted me to SOS: send stuff out. And they thought they were being hired for a strategic role. I think your point so well made when you said: what is the role of internal communications inside the organisation? How is it perceived? I'm doing a piece of work at the moment where I'm speaking to a leadership team, one on one, six members of this leadership team.

[12:59]

And it's really interesting to ask these individual leaders what they perceive the role and value of internal communications? Now they've got a very sophisticated understanding of it. So we're good. But I think that is crucial. It's almost the question you should be asking in your interview, isn't it?

[Martin 13:15]

It is, and you know Katie, it's a question that I have asked time and time again, as I call it, the killer question. No, you just say to people at the end, you say, so what is internal communications for in this organisation? And you'll get all sorts of different answers. And actually, I think, you know, from what's said, there, sometimes you can, you can work out whether it's, it's almost stay or run.

[13:38]

Let's be sensible, some people are quite comfortable and very skilled at creating very good content, that you know, that hits the mark with employees and resounds with them. There's nothing wrong



with that. But it's just that, you know, if that's not with you, and that's the only thing that the organisation wants, then are you going to be happy in that role?

[13:56]

If you've got more of a kind of a strategic kind of aspect to your professional skill set and your mindset. And actually, you're not just happy with sending out stuff, to be able to make a difference or to know that what you're doing is making a difference in the organisation.

[14:14]

And you know, if leaders won't let you do that, because leaders have a very, very big influence, perhaps the biggest influence of all on organisations, about what internal communications, in fact, is for and how it's practised inside the organisation. If you aren't in tune with that, then you're going to find it quite frustrating and quite difficult to operate there.

[14:36]

And, you know, there's a there's a great there's a great book by Liam FitzPatrick and Sue Dewhurst. It's the yellow book, but now it's the red book because they've just republished, I haven't gotten the red version yet, which is the updated version. The early chapters are about are about what internal communications is for in the value space is that it occupies you if you look at those values spaces, that can be a starting point to kind of working out what it is that you really want to do in internal communication and the sorts of practitioner that you want to be.

And having got that kind of in the back of your head, when you are interviewing for jobs that could kind of be your frame for then kind of working out well "are these people on the same page as me?" when it comes to what internal comms is for, and which value space it occupies, and whether that's the same value space I want to be in.

[Katie 15:30]

We heard there, Martin mentioned the dynamic duo that is Sue Dewhurst and Liam FitzPatrick. I was delighted when Sue and Liam returned to my podcast studio to talk about the second edition of their book, *Successful Employee Communications: A Practitioner's Guide to Tools, Models and Best Practice for Internal Communication*.

I first interviewed Sue, and Liam, way back in Episode 17. And what I loved about that conversation, is that it was packed with practical advice taken not just from Liam and Sue's academic work, but from plenty of first-hand experience.

In Episode 62, we continue the theme. Here's Sue explaining the first steps to take when a stakeholder comes to you with a comms request.

[Katie 16:23]

An essential part of being an effective comms professional is obviously identifying the real problem that needs fixing. And this came out quite strongly in your book, how should we respond to a stakeholder who says, for example, "I want a set of posters and intranet banners about my wonderful new change programme." Sue, you mentioned there are three questions to ask at that moment. Just wondering if you could share those with us?

[Sue 16:51]



I can, I can. I think the temptation is, isn't it... It feels a bit infuriating when somebody comes along and it seems as if they think they know more about communication than us because our brains are primed to like status. So, it's quite natural that we would do.

[17:05]

I think it's worth reflecting that it's often suggested that we should start asking 'why?'. You know, "Why do you want a poster? Why are you asking me this at the last minute?" It can make people feel a bit defensive? It's also suggested that we should really learn to say 'no.' "No, you can't have your video. No, you must have it this way." And, but, given that human beings like status, the people coming to see us also like status, so it can put their backs up if we start saying 'why' or 'no'.

[17:31]

So, our suggested alternative approach is to basically build a bridge between what we want to talk about, which is the outcome, and what they want to talk about, which is their poster or video, whatever it might be.

[17:43]

So, three steps, the first step is to basically acknowledge that you've heard them and say something nice, I like to say. So, if you imagine that somebody's come and ask for a video, you might say, "Okay, so you want a video, it's actually really helpful that you're asking me about this at the start of the project, because it does mean that we can do a great job of the communication. So, thank you for that."

[18:05]

And then you get permission to ask questions. You know: "I want to make sure that I do a good job here. Is it okay if I ask you a few questions?" Great. And then you build the bridge. So, you kind of reflect back what they want. So, you say "Right, so let's imagine that we've made your video. And let's fast forward, let's imagine it six months from now. Video's gone really well. Everybody's watching it. It's brilliant." And then you kind of cross the bridge and you say something like "In business terms, what do you hope is going to be different as a result?" Or you might say something like, 'What are you hoping people will be doing differently because they've watched it?' And then you don't mention the video again.

[18:43]

So, hopefully, people go, "Oh, that's an interesting question". And they start down and then you keep them down that track and you start asking them, you know, you do, feel, know, and kind of what people do now and what have you. But it's just, it's a way of meeting people where they are and moving them gently on rather than going 'no', 'why?' and getting everybody's backs up.

[Katie 19:08]

My guests often talk about the importance of internal comms practitioners getting up close and personal with the strategy of their organisation – not just the documented version, but the strategists themselves.

So, for some time, I wondered whether we could tempt a senior comms executive and their strategy director on the show. And last season, we finally made it happen.

[19:36]

For Episode 59 I headed to the UK head offices of Canada Life in London's Square Mile to interview Nick Harding and Alana Renner.



Nick Harding is Chief People Officer at Canada Life UK looking after People Experience and Corporate Development.

Alana Renner is Head of Communications & Engagement and reports directly to Nick. The mutual respect Alana and Nick have for their each other and their work was clear throughout this conversation. But, are there ever areas of tension or disagreement?

[20:18]

So spill the beans, is there ever a point of tension with it? You're trying to achieve something strategically, and you know, IC want to go off in a different direction or a challenging in a certain way. This is where you get to sort of bear all about how it works, or do you always see eye to eye?

[Nick 20:38]

Oh, no, right, the beauty of the relationship is I can, I'm sure at times, sit in a strategic bubble and Alana will bring me back to reality of how we should be thinking and executing. So, I think there has to be, but that's really important that we come at it from both angles, right? There is a strategic ambition that is fundamental. And there is also what we have said to the organisation, how the organisation is feeling about, how do we do that? And I'm not saying for any minute, that doesn't mean that the IC team have not got a strategic lens, of course they do. But there's very healthy dynamic, I would say. Alana, please comment.

[Alana 21:27]

Yeah, I think if you don't have that ability to be able to hold up that lens, I think, then it's very difficult to do your job effectively. Because what I'm really keen on is that we are measuring how we are doing. And we're measuring the right things to either be able to chart progress or spot when we've got an issue.

[Nick 21:52]

I think I'd say also, whether this is a Canada Life UK issue, I'm not sure. But we've certainly had a very conservative approach in how we communicate, very corporate approach. And from the get-go, that has not been the style of our communications. And it's been very healthy. I think if you if you were to look back a couple of years to the approach that we would take, to the personality now that we have in our communications, and that constant driver from Alana and her team to actually be more authentic, and really be true to what we are doing and be less of that corporate voice stuck in the boardroom. That's a big change that we've seen in the last 24 months.

[Katie 22:43]

I think lots of people would like that Alana, I get taught me about how you make that work, then that authenticity, bring it alive the wall, is there any sort of any particular secrets of success?

[Alana 22:54]

Okay, so there's something about being human isn't there within an organisation, I think, particularly through the pandemic, where being human became so important. And actually, if I think about Canada Life, and what's right at the heart of what we're here to do business for what we're here to do for our customers, and the role that we play through various different life stages, we've really got care at the heart of what we do. And yet, there was a, there was almost a mismatch in terms of tone and approach, which you felt when you walked around the floors. In the days we did walk around on the floors. But yet, we were being quite corporate spouses. So, I think it's important for people to come through and be a human.



[Nick 23:48]

Yes. And perfectionists, we were awful perfectionists. And you've told us actually, it's better just to say-

[Alana 23:54]

Yeah, there's a lot of perfectionism. Yeah. So it used to be quite difficult to sign anything off. And I think in the first six months, I think I took the challenge as: be moved from PDF to person, you know

[Katie 24:11]

Lily Goodman D'Amato, began her internal comms career at Paris Baguette, cafe chain with 3000 locations around the world. In Episode 65, she explains how her approach to internal comms is greatly shaped by having worked in exactly the same frontline entry level jobs as many of her audience.

This first-hand experience has profoundly shaped Lily's approach to connecting with some of the hardest to reach employees. So, I was interested to hear can other internal comms practitioners replicate this firsthand experience?

[24:54]

Is there a way of imitating that experience? So, if you can't get that hands-on experience, is there another way of getting that insight into the people actually doing the day-to-day work, do you think?

[Lily 25:01]

If you can (I understand that a lot of people are working remotely and things like that, maybe even across the world now that we can work remotely) if you can invest your time for a week, two weeks, however long possible to spend training in the frontline manager role, or even sometimes the base entry-level roles, that will give you everything you need.

[25:25]

Because from an office, home office, corporate office, whatever, there's only so much you can understand about what comes up. So, I found that frequently to help with efficiencies I've been asked and I have done or the instinct is make a checklist, let people know exactly what they need to do all day. And you see the checklist and you're like, 'Well, that's fine. That's doable, right?' But you're not considering all the other things that come up throughout the day, an unhappy customer, your refrigerator goes down, and these checklists then are breeding more checklists, and you end up with resentment right from the field to the corporate knowing there's that underlying feeling that I felt it in many companies, that corporate (which is a term I don't love using when I'm a part of it, because I don't see myself that way) but corporate is so out of touch from the day to day and so that trust, that feeling of 'We're one team and we're here to support you as the corporate office' goes away and you more feel like an authoritarian out-of-touch king trying to tell you what to do, thinking you know better when they've never done it themselves.

[26:38]

So, if you can't afford that investment of time and going to a location and doing that, because I understand that we all have obligations and KPIs and all of that, find time to get one-on-ones with those frontline managers, and really talk to them about their day and what they go through and what's going well, what doesn't go well, how can I help? Those are three questions that will make somebody feel so heard: 'What's going well? What's not going well? And how can I help?' They'll feel supported in a way that they wouldn't otherwise if you're just helping them with a checklist.



[Katie 27:16]

Mike Roe has spent a 28-year career in the police force serving as a senior detective and eventually Commander.

Today, he is CEO of Tensense, which has built a diagnostic tool that generates business insights for leadership team based gathering intelligence from employees. Mike is also a coach for other CEOs and C suite executives.

In many ways, Episode 63 was an entire lesson how to lead empathically in a complex, and complicated world.

I ended the interview with my usual quickfire question – I had no idea what Mike’s answer was going to be, but it ended up being the perfect summary of our discussion.

[28:18]

Finally, we give you a billboard for millions to see you can put any message on that billboard you like, what's your message going to be?

[Mike 28:28]

My best mate in the world is my nine-year-old grandson, Woody. And this was, honestly, this is a fascinating little anecdote. We were walking along. And he was saying, and we were talking about being a class leader at his school at his primary school. And he was telling me why he didn't think this kid should be the leader. This is not right. It's not right. And I said to him, go on then, Woody, give me the three attributes that you would look for in your primary school class leader. And these are what he said. And these are what I put on the billboard: teamwork, kindness and good ideas. That'd do for me, I don't need to read Patrick Lencioni or anybody else.

[Katie 29:15]

Wow.

[Mike 29:16]

Because often as leaders, we think we do teamwork. We're full of bloody good ideas. But the bit we often miss is the kindness. I thought: this is out of the out of the mouths of babes.

[Katie 29:29]

Season eight of the show kicks off next week on Wednesday 14 September with fortnightly episodes running until the end of 2022.

And if you *are* already a fan of the show, I'd be really grateful if you could leave us a review on Apple podcasts. We have more than 60 reviews so far; if we can get this number to 100 we will help more IC professionals around the world find the show.

So, my lovely listeners, until we meet again for Season 8 of the Internal Comms Podcast, stay safe and well, and remember – it's what's inside that counts.