



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 8

Episode 72 – Adrian Cropley, *Making your way to the top*

Transcript

Katie 00:04

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by the AB IC Health Check. This is a brand new free online tool for evaluating your internal comms activities. Now, you've probably seen, you've probably used these online diagnostic tools before. Let's be honest, they can be a little lightweight, rather rudimentary, not always worth the effort of completing.

Katie 00:33

We wanted the AB IC Health Check to be genuinely useful, so we designed it to be thorough. How does it work? The tour takes you through a series of questions in six categories: insight and understanding, strategy and planning, channels, content, measurement, and professional development. Now my advice is, don't rush through these questions. Make time to sit down with a drink of your choice and work through your answers, you'll need a good 15 minutes. At the end, once you've entered your details, your bespoke report will land automatically in your inbox. This will give you an assessment of where you are today in terms of your internal comms activities. Plus, the report will be packed with insight, advice and practical hints and tips for what to do next, whether you're ahead of the game or just starting out. So what are you waiting for? Head over to abcomm.co.uk/health. Get a free, fresh expert assessment of your work and take your internal comms to the next level. That website address again: abcomm.co.uk/health.

Katie 02:09

Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This is a show to inspire, inform and generally energise those of us responsible for communicating to internal audiences. Every fortnight I sit down with a comms practitioner, consultant, author, or academic to tease out new thinking, smart ideas, thoughtful insights, all in a bid to improve communication at work. My guest this week is Adrian Cropley, who joins me from Melbourne, Australia.

Katie 02:47

Now I'm gonna guess that many listeners have at least heard of Adrian. He is widely recognised as one of the world's foremost experts in strategic communication. In a career spanning more than 30 years, Adrian has worked with clients around the world, from Fortune 500 corporates to startups. He is a consultant, trainer, coach and advisor to executives. Adrian founded Cropley Communication in 2004, and then in 2015, he founded the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence, which builds comms capabilities within organisations working to improve the skills of executives and leaders. Among many other things, Adrian is a past global Chair of the IABC International Association of Business Communicators, and he is a certified comms practitioner. He is an SCMP, a Strategic



Communication Management Professional. Now we do talk about the importance of certification for comms practitioners as part of this conversation. And at that point, there's a few acronyms, so everything you need to know as ever listeners is either in the show notes or in the transcript. You can find both at the website abcomm.co.uk/podcasts.

Katie 04:21

Now we talk about many things in this conversation. We talk about the core skills of a good comms consultant, the impact that comms coaching has on leaders, and what Adrian has learned from three years interviewing senior comms pros about their own careers. In his podcast, A View From The Top, Adrian's warmth, his wisdom, his passion for comms are completely infectious. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did.

Katie 04:58

So Adrian, what A pleasure to welcome you on The Internal Comms Podcast.

Adrian 05:04

It's great to be here. And thank you, Katie for having me. I am, I'm just so thrilled to actually meet with you and do this podcast. It's been a while.

Katie 05:12

I'm slightly embarrassed about this question, because I think when you say to somebody, you've had a long and fascinating career in communications, it sounds like it's giving something away about somebody's age. So I apologise for that in advance.

Adrian 05:27

You're, you're quite welcome to give away the age there. I know, I'm using the term of endearment these days. Everywhere I go, I can get away with a few dumb things, because I'm getting older.

Katie 05:40

I was just looking back through LinkedIn and all your experience. And I wondered, right at the beginning, was it always your intention to be in this field?

Adrian 05:50

You know, it wasn't. And I started life out as a chef believe it or not. So when I was leaving school, and I actually had a part time job washing dishes in a restaurant, because I always wanted to work in a restaurant. I just loved food. And I think it came from growing up in a household where my mother never cooked. My dad always did it. So there's a bit of a role model there. But I also watched my grandmother cook and she instilled many passions in me, cooking was one of them, and I think dealing with people was another. So I started as a chef in a restaurant. But I realised what I didn't want to do was use my passion for my paid work. So I decided to go back and study human resources and business and leadership and then started working in my first company, which was Ericsson.

Katie 06:51



Am I allowed to ask, do you now still have a signature dish perhaps?

Adrian 06:59

It's a great question, because I think that's evolved over time. I was inspired by my grandmother because I can make a decent Yorkshire pudding, and a fabulous Sunday roast. It's from my English heritage. And because my partner is Italian, I have now grown to have a passion for Italian cooking. And so I have to say I have this very combined recipe, which is a Jamie Oliver recipe, which is: it's a bread and butter pudding, but it's made with Panattoni. It has all my favourite ingredients like marmalade and chocolate and very gooey and sticky and everybody loves it every time I make it.

Katie 07:39

Oh, that's already making me think of Christmas is fun, fantastic.

Adrian 07:44

I didn't do my puddings. This year, I haven't been able to get the suet. So I went okay, puddings next year, because it's far too late. Now I like my puddings to rest a long time.

Katie 07:55

I can see you've worked right across the comms disciplines. But I've also heard you say that internal comms is very much your spiritual home. And I was wondering why that is.

Adrian 08:08

It is because I was very fortunate. I think I've had a very lucky career because I worked for a number of years in HR in Ericsson. And then it put me across a lot of things, including, obviously, the obvious HR stuff like recruitment and development, but I was very heavily involved with the training side of it. And we had an internal consulting organisation that I was in at that time. And this is going back probably 25, 30 years ago. And I remember the CEO coming to me and he said, "Adrian, I've been asked to get or establish internal comms for the organisation. So I need to appoint an internal comms manager, would you be interested?" and I remember looking at him and going, "what the heck is that?" He says, "I have no idea." He says, "But you talk a lot. So it's to do with communication. Maybe you can go and find out."

Adrian 08:08

So I was, there I was been at an organisation for a number of years, and being confronted with something new. And when I went out and started doing the research, it was very, very few people doing internal communications. There was a few names. I think of England and I think of Bill Quirk and his name was bandied around and people like Shel Holtz and Angela Sinickas are working in house at the time. And they didn't realise it then. But you know, I look back now and I go, wow, I was in that pioneering stage of internal comms. And we were inventing it. And so we were coming up with what was internal comms and how it operated for an organisation and I don't think any one of us at that time really wanted it to be a writing job, which it was being pitched as at the time, the person that did the company newsletter. But I remember having a conversation with the CEO at the time, and I said, you

know, I did my research, and some of it said that it's about writing, and I am just a bad writer. And he went, "Adrian, we have tonnes of communication issues within the organisation. So maybe we need to think about this very differently." And I think that was the conversation that made me realise you're quite right, and this is something that I've got a passion for. A passion for changing the culture of the organisation when it came to communication. And I guess that's why I call it now 'my spiritual home'. Because as much as I've navigated communication across the disciplines, internal comms will always be my home.

Katie 10:45

It's fascinating stuff to think how far sighted that leader was to realise that it wasn't just about plainer English, for example, or tighter editorial style.

10:55

How do— how do— you know, when do we ever come across CEOs like that? I've worked for a tonne since that particular one. And I'm kind of going, Oh, my God, I was spoiled in those days, because he really got it. Together. And I say together because we worked very closely. You know, he's running an organisation right across Australia and New Zealand, he actually went on to be the head of Ericsson globally. And at the time, I remember was poking me going, "when are you coming to, to Sweden that but I had great opportunities to work with Sweden and develop Ericsson's first global strategy for internal comms at the time and developing the first training course. So it was great opportunities at the time. But he had such foresight, and it's the foresight we need to see in all of our leaders in organisations.

Katie 11:40

You absolutely. When you look back on the progress that internal comms has made over the past few decades, how do you feel about that? Are you really pleased with what you see? Or do you feel slightly frustrated?

Adrian 11:54

A little bit of both. The frustration I'll start with, then I'll tell you what I'm very, very pleased about. Is the frustration of how long it has taken to get, and I don't want a turn at the seat at the table, but getting the buy into internal comms within organisations. And it still frustrates me that some organisations don't get it. And I look at big corporations today, who you think should be the maturest when it comes to understanding that communication is everything to building relationships within organisations, that they still don't get it.

Adrian 12:32

But I guess it also comes down to the internal communication professional within an organisation. And I see some amazing internal comms professionals out there who are really having the right conversations with the executive. They are the advisors, the trusted advisors for the organisation. They're looking at outcomes for the communication that they do within the organisation, and then the Executives get it. So I guess there's a little bit of a mix between, I'm very proud of those that are really putting their stamp on internal communication globally. And you can see the organisations are benefiting from it. But we've

still got a whole lot of organisations that are not getting it. And some of that is to do with the internal comms professionals still thinking their job is the writer, and the organisation thinking that's their job, you know, just do as you're asked to do, and just communicate, I don't really care if it's an email or what to post or a newsletter, just get the message out there and make them change. And we all know, that's not how it works. So, I guess there's a little bit of mix of pride and frustration. But I mean, we've got to say how far we actually have come when you think about the tools and particularly the measurement tools now that are available for internal internal comms practitioners.

Katie 13:56

Just digging into your work as a consultant. Do you think you have a particular trait, or personality characteristic that you draw on that you use more than any other in your consulting work?

Adrian 14:10

I think I've learned to listen a whole lot more than when I worked in when I started working in consultancy. I got so used to being on top of things within an organisation and you were working at such a fast pace to get stuff done. And I think moving into consultancy, it was really about stepping back and listening to what the real needs are. And the more that you have that silence, the more people tell you. It's a little bit like counselling really, you know when you're on the phone with your friend and you just— you do just ask the question every so often, they just give you so much, and I think that's a trait that, you know, I've had to develop but I'm quite comfortable with that. Now. I used to hate the silence, but I think it's a very powerful tool.

Adrian 15:00

The second most powerful tool, I think, is, is actually asking really good questions. And so when you shut up long enough, you actually can think of the questions by listening exactly what it is that people are talking to you about, and having a very comfortable conversation that you walk away with the information you need to actually fix the problem. And I that's quite powerful. Because how many times do we have people that'll take a brief on something, they're going, "Oh, my God, I've got all these things off the shelf that I can give them." And they're thinking about the plug and play while they're having the conversation. And I teach this a lot in in the training that I do with communication professionals, is step back, ask really good questions, listen really well, and you'll get the information and you'll uncover the real business need to drive your communication outcomes.

Adrian 15:55

So I think that's one I've learned in consulting. The scary one that I never have got over is, is pricing things up. I have no idea. Maybe it was that a gene that I was missing when I went into business to begin with, I'm sure I'm sure there's others in business that go to kind of go, "Oh, my God, getting your head around that one is really hard."

Katie 16:16



It is hard, I say to consultants that have got a lot of years' experience, who is shy about pricing their work correctly, that you're not just giving the client half an hour, an hour or a day of your time, you're giving them 30 years and a day. And you should price that accordingly. But people don't always get that.

Adrian 16:33

Well, Katie, I love that because it you're quite right. And if you think about it, and not to get back to the age thing, when you've been around a long time, you've got an awful lot of value to give. And it's not always about the fresh and the new idea. It's really about the tried and true. Been there got burned by it got the scars bought the t shirt now that let me share this, but in the context of 'how could we possibly do this differently?'

Katie 17:06

A totally agree about smart questions, and actually think that you can walk away from a conversation with your head held high feeling that you've really made a good impression, just through asking smart questions. Because in general, sometimes your questions will be helping your stakeholder work something out for themselves, you're almost directing them to the end result, by the way that you're asking them. Does that make? Am I barking up the right tree?

Adrian 17:34

That's the absolute key to it, isn't it? Because it's what you want them to do is realise, two things, is that they actually have the answer, you're just taking actually helping them tease it through. So when you're asking them about audience and they're suddenly going, oh, yeah, maybe an email is not the way to go with this particular solution. Because I've got a remote workforce that work in mines, right? And it seems like common sense to us. But until you start exploring those questions, and they start going, yes. And secondly, it gives value to them. So what you're doing is you're, you're asking them smart questions, then they go, Oh, my God, very reflective, that was really great. And your value changes between being the person that just says, I want an email and you scurry off and you type it, to, I had a really good conversation, I learned a lot about myself what I'm trying to achieve. And then the next time you're talking to that executive or that client is debriefing on how well this went and what changed as a result of that great conversation that we had.

Katie 18:48

Yeah, that's nice too, actually making that a kind of virtuous circle. I like that a lot. I'd love to ask you about your executive coaching practice. And again, I'm just really curious about this. Is there a sort of common impact that coaching has on executives? You know, Are there patterns that you've seen now that you've been doing it for some time?

Adrian 19:11

You know, there is. I mean, even though every individual is different and when you go into the discussion with an executive and say, Look, we're leading you down a path of coaching. To me the common theme is about insight on self. And this is why recently, you know, I've just got an- got accredited to deliver emotional intelligence reports. And I'm using that in



my toolkit with executives, because what they're really looking for, and they don't know it at the time, is often they come along going: I need to communicate better. I need a coach on this one. Actually, you need to understand yourself better, the people that you lead better and then how you make that connection through communication.

Adrian 19:55

You know, there's that whole gap that we talked about knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and that's the gap we're filling in organisations. I've just applied that in the executive coaching is, is what's the knowledge that you need to communicate better? What attitudes do you need to have around it? And that attitude of being open and transparent and listening and all of those sorts of things? And what actions do you need to take? So how do we close that gap for leaders between what they say and what they do? And if I focus on those three things with executives, that works really well for them to gain that insight. So the rest is all about the tools. So whether it's an emotional intelligence report, or a DISC report, or a Myers Briggs, I'll use those tools to bring that out.

Adrian 20:43

So I guess, you know, what I've learned is that commonality in leaders is that they come into it not quite knowing what they want. But actually what they want to do is connect with people better. And that's what they get out of it. And you suddenly go: Ah, there we go. I've had executives come back to me, like four years later, and then Oh, my God, Adrian, I still reflect on that conversation when we did that coaching. And I have such relationships in work now because of that journey that I took. And it wasn't me it was there anyway, I was just teasing it out.

Katie 21:19

You were sort of facilitating it. I'm wondering, though, is it possible to make every leader, no matter what their style is, a better communicator? I'm also assuming in that question, that we're not actually changing fundamentally who somebody is because that would be impossible, I'm guessing

Adrian 21:40

Impossible, absolutely impossible. It is working with the style that somebody has. So there's, and I think a lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to change people through training and development over years and says, right, this is the way you do it. I think we've learned these days to go, let's work with somebody's style, and then how they communicate better. Because that, just looking at themselves and their interactions and their skills and abilities, and the needs of others. And, and by some sort of miracle, we kind of look at the audience. And that's what we're teaching them, look at the audience, it's the audience that controls everything, not you. So if you're an ego driven leader, and you're you know, that's who you are, as a personality, the more you're aware of that, of what the need is for the people that you are leading, the better that connection comes. So absolutely. And in fact, Dr. Neumann, who developed the Roche model of emotional intelligence, said that emotional intelligence can be taught, so it actually, it says it's not this adage of they're a born leader, yes there's born skills of leadership, but it appeals to a certain group of people. So that



inspirational leader that will always get on board because they're super friendly, and all of that. But that doesn't mean that's always the perfect leader for the different audiences. Right? So we've, we've got to work within the, understand that needs, what people want, and how do we fill that gap by understanding self?

Katie 23:22

You're making me think of that George Bernard Shaw quote, which is something like "the problem with communication is the illusion that it's taken place."

Adrian 23:32

Yeah, that's it.

Katie 23:33

But that's, that's the leaders' problem, isn't it?

Adrian 23:35

It is, absolutely. And if there was one big difference these days, I think, I don't know what you think about this, but it's about authenticity more than ever, because people like I've seen communication as a powerful tool. And I think we're seeing a lot more propaganda come back into our communication and manipulation through communication. So I think the next edge of communication is about authenticity, trust, the ethics around communication. All of those are becoming really important issues in today's age, they really are. Because I think people see the role models and saying, "oh my god, they're so popular because they tell a whole bunch of lies and manipulate people but they get this popularity and that popularity creates revenue, right?" If it's on something like Insta or or TikTok, or, or something like that. So I think we really as communication professionals now need to start focusing where it's important to say, actually, communication is about doing good. It's not actually about doing bad in the world.

Katie 24:58

I can see you're a pro because that is the perfect segue, actually to my next question, which is: Well, it's all about the I thought I have to ask you about the International Association of Business Communicators. And I guess we both need to declare an interest here because I sit on the executive board at the moment, you're a past President of the entire Association. Let's still ask ourselves the tough question. The tough question for me probably is, we live in an era when, as communications professionals, we can get so much for free online, or it appears to be free, let's put it that way. And maybe we can say it's varying quality. But what role does a professional association like the IABC play in today's era?

Adrian 25:48

That, you know, and that's a really important question. And I'm glad you declared that right up front. Because I, I have been part of the IABC for many, many years. As a past chair, one of the, the initiatives that I kicked off was looking at the global standard for communication professionals. And that came about because when I joined the IABC, and there is amazing history in IABC, in terms of people that have been around for many years as part of the

profession, but they used to talk about IABC as having the global standard. And I asked a question, which was, so is that written down anywhere? You know, it's like the dumbest question in the book, but turned out to be the best question, because the answer was no. And so we had to uncover this secret sauce. And I don't think it's just a secret to IABC. I think most associations over time, what they have done and associations, the old, were all about defending the standard or developing the standard in which the profession adheres to.

Adrian 26:50

So we look at it like the medical or the legal profession, there is standard that you follow, there is codes. And that really is the role for professional associations in communication. But I just don't think we have the voice that some of these other professions have. Because if you think about if you're going to be an accountant, you go and get your CPA or MA or whatever your equivalent is in different countries. But it says an employer wouldn't employ someone unless they've got that. Yet in communication, you could have an APR, or you can have your SCMP or your CMP. If you did it through the GCCC, I think we've got as an association in IABC and all associations have to say what is our role in the professional to continually professionalise have things like voices out there in the community going, "Actually, this is right. And this is not right. When it comes to communication." Calling out some of those things. I know there's lots of voices around when Donald Trump was was was president, there was a lot of frustration, but there's nobody really going actually, no, you can't do this. And it's actually illegal to do that. And so, associations should be advocating for that really clear role of: you're professional, this is the standard, it's all about getting your things like your certification, ongoing education, and basically advocating for the profession and having a voice in the world that is united. So I think organisations like the GA where you've got, which is the Association for Associations, should be playing an even more important role in bringing that intellect together from the different associations across the world, and starting to get on a common common platform. I think we need the UN for communication now is like, we need the whole coming together and going right, what is this for the world?

Katie 28:50

I just want to say as a side note for listeners, under a link saying 'certification', we will put links there to what Adrian's just talking about in terms of the G Triple C and so on. There's lots of acronyms that we use in this but all the all the links will be there.

Adrian 29:05

Okay and Katie can I say for those communication professionals that really want to demonstrate their value to organisations, and we know that they're capable, but having things like certification after your name is actually elevating the profession as a whole. So, I mean, don't even do it for yourself, do it for the whole profession to say, if we unite and say it's really important that we have the credential to run our roles within organisations, and encourage employers to adopt certified communication professionals, then we'll elevate the profession.

Katie 29:42

I can't not ask you a slight philosophical question at this point, I wonder? Well, it's just that we live in an era and you've sort of alluded to it where facts aren't facts. Truth is hard to find. Trust is in sharp decline. Edelman tells us that we don't trust anyone, in fact, employer media is probably more trusted than anything else at the moment. Do you anticipate that we're going to hit a lull here and bounce back from this? That it will self correct over time? Or do you actually worry sort of for the long term survivability, if that's a word, of facts? For example.

Adrian 30:21

It's a really good philosophical question. Because, you know, I have thought about this quite a bit. And I'm not sure I know the answer to it. Because the way we see the landscape at the moment is still very, very tumultuous. There's a whole lot of healing that needs to happen after the COVID years, there's still a lot of frustration happening for people. And therefore there's the filters are off on communication. I think there'll always be a swing back, you know, I was looking at something the other night on TV, and it was kept talking about, you know, the, the rise of fascism again, and all that sort of stuff, and you kind of look at the world, and it kinda, it keeps going through these cycles. So the far left, far right. And it's like, why can't we just have a happy medium harmony. But that's what makes us human beings, is that there's always this diversity. And I think the world will always have an ebb and flow, whether we're towards the end of that deterioration of fact, and, you know, we're, we're into this, but I think people will grow tired of it. And I think we will swing back. So I think there will be, well, this is my hope, that there will be a lot more people engaging with that we're over lies and deception and untruth. But the problem is, what do they believe? And I think that whole education piece is going to be absolutely critical to this. Because, you know, if you don't know, you might follow somebody that you trust, or you think you trust, right? I think there'll be a growth in more work done on easily finding the facts versus the lies. And I think we will drift back that where we might move into an era of a little bit more civility. But I think it's going to take a bit of work to get there.

Katie 32:17

Yeah, I couldn't agree more with you, Adrian. That sort of brings me on to the next question. I'm trying to work out a segue I can't quite get there. Your retreats sound amazing. I know this is a new initiative. So talk me through this. So what first of all, what sparked the idea of retreats for comms professionals? Because it sounds lovely.

Adrian 32:37

You know, it does, it does sound lovely. And I guess it came from a lovely idea, to be perfectly honest. And I guess, bouncing off what we were talking about before, this disconnectedness and this era that we've been through through the pandemic, in the last year or so we did a huge piece of research through the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence, my colleague, Sia Papageorgiou, led a great initiative to look at the mental wellbeing of communication professionals. Now springing off of that report, we kind of knew that poor old communication professionals have been doing it tough. Now, yes, we love a crisis. But when a crisis has gone on for two years, and we've been suffering it ourselves, but we've been focusing on everything else, and the world hasn't taken a pause,

life keeps going, that we're seeing a lot of that burnout. And so what we're really wanting to do is reconnect people with themselves again.

Adrian 33:37

So this, this idea of this comes from, you know, I sat there, probably back in 2020. In fact, no, it wasn't, it was 2019. And I said, "I next year, I want to run a retreat for communication professionals in Bali, because to me, it's a great place to go and relax and reconnect and do some therapies." And something people don't know about me is I actually am an ayurvedic lifestyle counsellor and I have studied Reiki as well which hasn't come into the communication mix till now. So now we're gonna shift I'm Reiki counsellor, when did you start writing and being a comms person, but it's these worlds collide. So my business partner Sia had gone on a retreat in Queensland, she came back so pumped up. She said, "remember that retreat in Bali?" She says, "Well, I've met this amazing person called Serena and she ran this holistic retreat." And so we've been talking with Serena Mulder, here in Australia, and Sia myself and we've now pulled together a four day retreat.

Adrian 34:49

Now we're launching the first retreat in in Australia next year in a lovely place here in Victoria called Hepburn Springs. It is a healing centre. So we're taking people away. And we've got sessions that are about personal development, as well as health, relaxation, mental health, and also thinking about their careers. So how do they change their lifestyle within communication, to actually kind of take a different approach that they can actually manage this burnout for a lot more years? Otherwise, we're just seeing people leaving communications, like we're seeing doctors leave hospitals moment. So I think there's a real need for it. But it's kind of sparked this, this whole idea which I'm loving, because the last call that we had is like, right, we're going to start this one in Australia, but we are going to run them around the world. And we're going to have the retreats, we're calling them Alive Communication retreats. And then we're having what's called Totally Alive retreats, which are a week long, intensive. So it's four days, this one, and the next one will be probably six day retreats, and we're going to do one in Bali, we're looking at Kerala in India, we want to do one in the States, want to do one in Greece. So it's kind of taking momentum. It's there. I'm like, I'm so excited about it. I'm like, "Oh, this is really cool. It's combining all my worlds," and in fact, will probably give cooking lessons as well.

Katie 36:23

Fantastic. Sign me up for Greece. Oh, my goodness, me. Am I right in thinking that you're also thinking of building in some kind of volunteering opportunity in some of those locations as well?

Adrian 36:40

Yes. So when we do the longer retreats, one of the things that I felt was really important that we did is how we support each other as communication professionals. So the reason I want to go to places like Bali, maybe Indonesia, or Thailand and have these longer retreats in India is to be able to say, now the place that we go, let's invite communication professionals locally, from different organisations that may not be able to afford support or

consultancy, and bring them in for half a day or a day, and work with the individuals on the retreat to get some advice and coaching. And create that bond between communication professionals in this busy western world to communication professionals in developing countries that really need support. So there's the community aspect, we want to weave into those advanced retreats.

Katie 37:40

That is super, super smart, Adrian, because also I think we know, when money doesn't change hands, there's a value of giving yourself and giving your time that for some reason means even more when money doesn't change hands. It's interesting, isn't it?

Adrian 37:57

It is and I think if you think about this way, you and I and many hundreds of others volunteer, right, because when that money doesn't exchange and just say right throughout my career, I go, can we work harder for my volunteer work than I do for my own? You must have had the same, I was like, Oh my God, I've put X amount of hours into the association this week or, or my charity we we actually support a school in in Kenya in Mombasa, for preschoolers. So we actually fund the building every year. I mean, look it sounds dramatic, but you know literally it's it's it's dead cheap to fund the rent for the school building for the entire year. And then you know, I have four sponsored children and Sia has has I think she's caught about six sponsor children a year through the school so we pay for their education, and just doing things like that or contributing to ideas or trying to find supporters for that, I think gives you much more energy. Isn't it funny how our paid job is just a means to an end, but the rest is what fulfils us.

Katie 39:06

Yeah. Oh, Adrian I love all this this is fantastic. You're a pro and I can tell you're a pro but there's proof, there's proof A View From The Top. You've not only a pro but you've been spending. is it three years now? Talking to professional communicators through your show A View From The Top, has it really been three years?

Adrian 39:32

It has. I can't believe it's been three years and I try and do a monthly episode, doesn't always work out for me quite that way. I aim for a monthly episode but you know, it depends on you know, everything else that you're doing. But I'm really really enjoyed doing and I really because because I run the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence with Sia, one of the things that that I wanted to do was ensure that we pass on that knowledge to up and coming communication professionals. And so, you know, I started A View From The Top, just to have conversations, and I asked, you know, it's not as interesting as your show because you asked lots of really great questions. And I ask the same ones all about that. Where did your career go? And how did you get to where you are? Because the learning, and I also get people to share tips. And the learning for the people that are listening to the show is immense. The funny thing is, my market was two up and coming Junior communication professionals. But I hear so much back from significant communication professionals that are just loving that affirmation of their career in the guests that have been on it. And it's

been really interesting, because that's where the feedback, so it was, wasn't the market that I expected. But I'm like, "Oh, we'll take that if people aren't getting something out of that, that's great." And it's it's a little bit like yours. I mean, there's so many people get so much value out of listening to, to your guests on this podcast,

Katie 41:01

They are just always such fascinating conversations. Have you noticed a common theme? I guess, we, you know, it gets called a golden thread. I'm trying not to use that word, actually. More terminology. Yeah. Is there something that you think is a common theme that runs through people's careers? Have you started noticing a pattern?

Adrian 41:21

I have, it's interesting. We didn't we didn't actually think when we went into podcast that we were doing research, but you are, which— I've just had an idea now, while I'm talking to you is we might have to get together and have a book about the things we've learned through podcasting.

Katie 41:38

Oh, I like that.

Adrian 41:40

A little educational material. Because the thing that I've been picking up from our guests is the way that as they've moved through their career, what they've done is found how they add value to the organisation. And it almost seems like everybody that's been on the show, has said "my career kind of really took off, when I started talking about outcomes." Now, they don't all word it in the same way. But it was "when I could prove what I was doing was changing the workplace through communication." And that's been quite insightful, because we talk about it a lot, but I'm listening to a whole lot of professionals that have put that in practice. So that they've earned the right they're working at the table, they've moved from order taker to strategic advisor, they're all the common threads that go through the guests on the show. And so to me, it's affirmation, it's, it's, you know, it demonstrates that this stuff is what we need to do. And the earlier we can do it in the career, the better, because I've actually has some young professionals on there that have their career took off very early. What has been also very nice is that I have had a few people on the show, who then went on to be CEOs of organisations or charities or whatever. So they have made that lovely transition that once they were operating in the C suite as the advisor on communication, to then take that next step to say, well, actually, I'm the business leader with communication skills.

Adrian 43:19

In fact, one of your former guests, I always remember having a conversation with Russell Grossman, oh, yeah, man. And he's, he's just, he's just fabulous to talk to. But we had this this amazingly philosophical conversation around that shift between being the person at the top of the organisation as the communication professional, to the person that's at the top of the business with the communication skills, so that the business person first with the

comm skills second, and it was in fact, Russell, who when we were doing the career roadmap stuff that had suggested business leader as being one of those career paths, and that was the fundamental change. And I think we're seeing people do that now. Which is wonderful to see.

Katie 44:06

There's a lot more, yeah, understanding amongst leadership communities now, I think, than ever before. And I think you make an important point there and I don't want us to sound ageist in any way and I mean, ageist in, in the sense of being for decades and decades of experience, because actually, why not at the beginning of your career, make the most of the fact that internal communications now you can legitimately be a strategic adviser. You don't have to wade through treacle and corporates go to I often say this organisations get the communicators they deserve. Go to an organisation where your skills can really flourish from day one. So

Adrian 44:47

And that's such an important point, Katie, is if it is not the right organisation that is helping you get where you need to be and you're doing all of the right things, get the heck out! They don't deserve you. And they literally don't deserve a great communication professional, don't let that be the hold back in your career. And you can do these things very early in your career as well, because, and this is why I talk a lot to younger communication professionals because I'm not the average X-Gen-er that talks about, "well, you got to earn your stripes, you need to sweep the floors before you can actually, you know, write the press releases." If you can be demonstrating your value early in the career, you will rise to the top very quickly. And I always remembered so hopefully you've got time for a very quick analogy for you. I had a graduate out of RMIT University here many years ago. And I remember him joining my practice because I went in there I was because I sit on the the advisory board for the university in the PR degree, which is kind of laughable when I'm the internal comms background. The interesting thing is I went and I did a number of talks within the university. And I remember this young guy came to me every time I was in there, and he did this networking thing really well. He was in my face talking about how much he enjoyed my talk and all of that. And he was really kind of smooshing right? Now I knew the conversation would come one day is will you have a job for me in your organisation. And I was pleased when it did, because he was a very bright, rising star, and I thought, well, he's going to go places. But day one, I employed him, day one in the business, I said: "now you are on a short path here." And I don't mean to sound really negative about this, because there is only so much I can do for you in an agency, you're a bright individual that needs to build their career. So let me working in this agency, let's get these basics, right, let's get you equipped to go into bigger organisations and move on. This guy within four years, he spent three years with me, and then another four years into another organisation ended up as the Head of Marketing. Now, that's quick career progression for somebody that's come out of university, into that senior position. And that's because it was from the onset, this is how you add value. These are the types of conversations you need to have. So it can be done. And I would advise any young individual, I often do in the podcast, is get a mentor talk to one of



one of the crusties like me, or the many others of us that are out there. Now you notice I didn't include you in the crusties, there.

Katie 47:38

You're absolutely allowed to though.

Adrian 47:40

You've got the button that turns this thing off, right?

Katie 47:45

It is interesting when I listen to people who talk about the secret of success so often people mentioned, who you spend your time with, is there a phrase like 'you end up as the sum total of the four people that you spend your most time with', something like that? Being really strategic about that, in the sense of saying I need a coach, or I need a mentor I think coaches more than mentors, I think there is a big difference isn't there. A mentor someone who comes along and says, Well, in my day, we did it like this, why don't you. Whereas the coach is much more about facilitating a conversation, as you say, to find out what you need to do and what you're really thinking and where you really need to go next.

Adrian 48:27

We do have to have that differentiation between what a coach and a mentor is because you can have lots of mentors within your organisation and people that are senior in roles and whatever else and that's great for a sanity check. But a coach is somebody that's really gonna kinda whip you into shape. It's a little bit like doing the boot camp, isn't it? I haven't quite got my head around that one. I went on one and they didn't like it because they were telling me that I had to do push ups. But that's not me. Business Coach, I can do, fitness coach, no.

Katie 49:00

No, no. Although it's making me think the one thing we haven't mentioned there in the whole sort of gamut of this type of thing is reverse mentoring, and shadow boards, which I think is an interesting idea. Where leaders, yes, deliberately seek out guidance and insight from maybe a younger body of people or just a different body of people basically.

Adrian 49:26

Can I give you a real example of this one? This this was fascinating. When I worked for Ericsson, here in Melbourne, they had level 42 in a building in the central business district. It was an innovation hub. And I remember employing, I don't know whether it was strictly legal, my next door neighbor's 14 year old to come in and break software and hack. That was the whole concept of the place. Literally reverse mentoring is there coming in there again, but "that's shit I can break through that one really easily," right? So there's all these great engineers with great egos being deflated by 14 and 15 year olds who would come in and break stuff, right. But it was teaching them, this is what we need to do, or when they looked at it and said, "That's really boring". And in fact, one of my coaching clients I've been doing a whole tonne of coaching with Unilever over, over a number of years, which has been

a blast because I've had communication professionals at all levels. And one of the the youngest of the coachees that I've had, they employed him basically straight out of high school, put him into a communication function in the social media area. And he's— a lot of what we were talking about in the coaching is how to break through these 'crusties' that say "oh, you can't do it this way." And this is the thing that needs to be pushed, you actually have to demonstrate, like, try it. It can fall flat. But you know, you don't learn unless you make the mistakes. And he put in place some campaigns that were really edgy, right. Most of us of the generation we go "Oh, my God, you can't say that." But they do. And they get away with it. Because that's what the generation of today want. So I think there's real power and knowledge in being able to do that. And I think you know, I mean, not forget everything you've learned, but respect everything you've learned. But you've always got more to learn. And you need to look to that generation to say, what are we not getting right? How do we need to do this differently to connect? Yeah, it's a little bit like me going, "I'll never do a TikTok, ever. Right?"

Adrian 51:44

Maybe I will one day. I don't know. I just can't see it right now.

Katie 51:50

No, me neither. But what I love is that my 15 year old son sends me the Tik Tok of the day in a text message. So I get a curated version of the billions that are released every minute of the day I guess. I get the one. It's usually something to do with a kitten. I get the one that I need to watch.

Adrian 52:12

All I get is visions of my friend's seven year old that's twerking all the time now. And I'm going "where on earth is she getting this from?" Its TikTok. Oh, really?

Katie 52:21

Yeah, absolutely. Have you got time, Adrian for those quick fire questions?

Adrian 52:27

Yes!

Katie 52:28

So what trait or characteristic do you possess that perhaps above all others has most led to your career success?

Adrian 52:37

I think it's the trait of not having the ego. I leave the ego at the door. I think it is just about being wildly optimistic about things. You know, I get very proud about the stuff that I do. And I get really happy when things are really successful. But I'm almost just as happy when things fail or go wrong. Because my expression, and anybody that that has worked with me will tell you it is: 'well what did we learn from that?' And I tell myself, constantly, when something goes absolutely pear shaped, what do I learn from that one?



Adrian 52:38

I think we're quite embarrassed about at AB calling ourselves a bit of an egoless culture. Because I think there's a feeling in the creative agency world that you should have big egos wandering around thinking that they're, you know, little gods of their empires. And we really genuinely don't. So you're making me feel much more comfortable about our lack of ego.

Adrian 53:41

I think life's too short, isn't it? To to get– I mean, have we all got upset in the past by things or things, of course. But the more you kind go, you know, like, get over it. It's happened. You've learned something from it. Let's move on. And so I was very tolerant of mistakes, when I was when I was a leader. I was managing a team. I always remember one particular day and it was (sorry, another short story.) But we were doing our very first webcast for for Ericsson global, very first, right, and to do a webcast back in those days, and we're talking 25, 30 years ago, you had to have a room full of IT engineers and equipment. Because to stream it. They had to encode it as it's going out, like literally nuts, right? So the encoding machine, and everything. I had teams of people working on all the logistics. We had the head, Head of Ericsson globally in Melbourne. He was giving the delivery of his talk to the entire Ericsson world right across the globe in real time. So we'd advertised it, we did everything. Somebody had forgot to get a licence for more than 75 people to watch it. This was supposed to go to 1000s. So literally in the room, I'm managing the logistics, all these people in the back of the room. And I just remember all these heads starting to bob up as he started his speech, right? And they're all talking, and I just quietly went up and I went "I realise something dramatic is going on right now. Do nothing, say nothing We will just have to deal with it later." So I didn't know till the very end that literally only 75 people got on to that first webcast. Okay, well, I'm gonna have to have a very interesting conversation with my CEO. After \$100,000 spin, I'm doing this.

Katie 55:52

Everything is a learning experience.

Adrian 55:54

My first question after that one was, so what did we learn from that one?

Katie 56:00

Yes, yes. The first question is, do we have the licence for the rest of your career?

Adrian 56:06

That was, that was really, that was probably one of the moments where I thought this could spell the end of my job.

Katie 56:15

Yes, I can imagine. Oh, my Goodness me. So how would you complete this sentence? World class internal communication is...?



Adrian 56:24

...is the communication function that has the ear of the Executive delivering outcomes for communication. How's that?

Katie 56:35

Nice, thank you. Is there a book, it doesn't have to be a book, but any other kind of resource, report, website, whatever that you would recommend to somebody, if they wanted to become a better comms professional?

Adrian 56:47

You know, it's terrible when we both belong to IABC, because when my, the first book I'll mention is the IABC guide for practical business communication. And I only say that, because I authored the first chapter of that book, which is on leadership and coaching. But I will, side note, I have to say I was absolutely mortified when it was offered for free, right? Talk about leaving your ego behind! Is it because it was the worst chapter? Or... But I had that moment. And then I went, Oh, actually, no, because that was the first chapter of the book, they just went first chapter and then you pay for the rest. That moment in time where you went, Oh, was it that bad they had to give that one away? And the reason I say that one is certainly for people that want to do certification, because the whole global standards built around that. And it's the first time they've merged the handbook with the global standard communication professional, and then had the chapters on that one. So not, that was not a dirty plug, because I was an author of that book. Or one of the authors of that book. But the one that has always been my favourite Why Should The Boss Listen to You? by James Lukaszewski.

Katie 56:47

Oh, I don't know that one.

Adrian 57:33

It's a great little book. And he's got some great hints. So James, not only has operated in communication, but he is he is the business leader. And so he is a long term communication professional. He has worked with many organisations at that business leader level. And so he shares a lot of tips and insights about how to influence the executive. And he's got a great little model in there called the three minute drill. It is you know, how to have a conversation with an executive that's got very little time and one of the things he says, you know, as a communication professional, you need to shut the hell up and stop talking, and just give them exactly what it is that they need to have to make that decision. And sorry, the third one, I have to say is The Trusted Advisor, which I think is a fabulous book, and another one that that talks about how we how we get the ear of the organisation and the executives, and they're all apart from the the IABC book, they're all quite old books, you know, they're going back 10 or actually almost 20 years, some of them. but I found them such valuable references.

Katie 59:15



Links in the show notes as ever listeners. And finally, Adrian, then, we give you a billboard, a bit of a metaphorical billboard for millions to see and you can put on that anything you like, what are you going to put on your billboard?

Adrian 59:30

The billboard would be exactly my my quote is: "what did we learn from that?"

Katie 59:37

I love it!

Adrian 59:42

I just couldn't help it, because that's always been my saying. Because it's, and I have to say, sorry, if there was a second billboard, I would say, "For God's sake, call yourself a communication professional. Not a communicator." That would be my second billboard. But now "what did we learn from that?" would be by Billboard moment.

Katie 1:00:06

Fantastic. Adrian, it has been such a pleasure to have you on the show. Thank you for joining us in your evening, my morning. from the other side of the world. This has been incredible. Thank you.

Adrian 1:00:17

You are quite welcome. It's been such a pleasure talking to you, Katie.

Katie 1:00:25

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and a transcript of today's episode, head over to AB's website, abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. My thanks to Adrian, our producer, John Phillips, and sound engineers, Stu Rolls, and my wonderful colleagues at AB for keeping this show on the road. And finally, my thanks to you for joining us. Plays if this show have risen by more than 600% this year, which is a great testament to the growing interest in and the importance of internal communication. If you would like to help other IC folk around the world find the show, please could you give the algorithms a little nudge by giving us a rating on Apple Podcasts? So until we meet again, lovely listeners, stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.