



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 9

### Episode 79 – Simon Monger, *Lifting the lid on comms consultancy*

#### Transcript

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

The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by AB, the world's first specialist internal comms agency. For nearly 60 years, AB has worked hand in hand with internal comms leaders around the world to inform, inspire, and empower their workforces building great organisations from the inside out. If you'd like to discuss new, effective, exciting ways to connect with your people, please get in touch. Visit [abcomm.co.uk](http://abcomm.co.uk) And if you do, I look forward to meeting you. And now on with the show.

#### **Katie 00:52**

Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This show is designed to inform, energise and hopefully entertain those responsible for improving communication in the workplace. Every fortnight I ask communication leaders, consultants, academics and authors to sit in my podcast hot seat, and together we explore ways to improve communication, where I would argue it really matters inside our organisations. My guest today is Simon Monger. Simon is an internal communications change and engagement consultant. He has worked with a diverse range of global organisations in 19 countries and across three continents. Those include the energy company Eon, Transport for London, Deloitte, and IKEA. Simon is also president of the UK and Ireland chapter for the IABC, the International Association of Business Communicators. And although I'd enjoyed following Simon for many years on social media, we didn't actually speak in person until we met at the IABC world conference last year in New York. And within minutes of meeting him, I think had invited him to speak at our next AB event. And I hoped I could entice him on the show. And here we are.

#### **Katie 02:24**

Now, we cover quite a bit of ground, from Simon's unusual ability to read people to how he approaches change communication. Simon also reveals what life is really like as a comms consultant: the activities, the responsibilities not necessarily in the formal role profile. Simon is one of those rare people I think, with EQ and IQ in equal measure. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. And so without further ado, here's Simon Monger. So Simon, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast.

#### **Simon 03:06**

Thank you very much for having me. it's a pleasure.

#### **Katie 03:09**

We are going to kick off in a place or with a question that might surprise our listeners slightly. Tell me, what does a deceased hedgehog have to do with employee engagement? I do hope you know what I mean here.

#### **Simon 03:26**

I do indeed know what you mean. And yeah, what a question to start with. I think this came about a while ago, I saw a picture of, unfortunately, a yes, a deceased hedgehog flattened on the road, as we've all seen, but this particular hedgehog had two very fetching yellow lines across its back. So what happened effectively was that a worker had come along to repaint the double yellow lines on the road, had seen this hedgehog, hadn't stopped to remove it, and had just painted over it because it was easier. And it might sound like an odd metaphor for engagement. But for me, it kind of boils down to if you care about your job, if you're invested in what you do, you want to do the best job that you can. That employee, no disrespect to them, I'm sure was just wanting to get the job done as quickly as possible. So they just railroaded over it. You may have seen a similar picture that made the news a while ago of a parked car, which is a little harder to miss. And someone had, again, they had painted around the parked car rather than going to the effort of having that car moved. They're just going through the motions, doing a job, taking the simplest route to completion. It's kind of a flipside of the almost a cliché we hear all the time around the JFK cleaner story with the cleaner at NASA saying to JFK, "I'm helping to put a man on the moon", that someone really understanding that their job is part of something bigger and that they're contributing to something greater than whatever their particular role is. So yes, unfortunately the hedgehog becomes a cautionary tale on what happens when you don't have engaged employees.

**Katie 04:59**

We talk about discretionary effort a lot of the time, don't we, when we talk about engagement? But that is an absolute concrete example of what we mean. Because at that moment in time, it would have taken just a little bit of effort. And that he just oh, he or she just didn't want to put that in. So yeah.

**Simon 05:17**

It's also then to not thinking feeling like you can think outside the box or go beyond your remit. Like I have a job to do: paint the line. I don't have to think any more, or I don't feel like I can have a view on how it should be done better. I'm just following process. And that's not engagement. That's rule rulebook following, and that's, yeah, that's something else completely.

**Katie 05:38**

Now my research for this show leads me to think that your career in comms was driven largely by your love of writing. And that started at a very early age. Is my research right here? Was it your love of writing that drove all this?

**Simon 05:56**

It was. I came from a very creative household, now think about it. So my dad was a professional photographer. My mum was a librarian. And she'd always say, this was back in the days when you trained to be a librarian, it was a trained profession. So I grew up around books, I grew up around reading, and you know, artistic professionals, I guess. And so for those of you of a certain age, and this gives away my age, back when I was eight years old, we used to have an Atari computer. And this Atari computer, you couldn't save anything on it. I don't really know what the point of that was. But anyway, you couldn't. So I would spend

all day just writing, I'm sure what were epic masterpieces, an eight year old would churn out, but you get to the end of the day, and I just shut down the computer and it would all be lost. And my mum said "that's a real shame, because you're putting all this effort in. So why don't we buy..." talking to my dad, saying, "why don't we buy him a typewriter?" That really does give my age away. "Because at least you'll be able to keep it and have a record." And apparently my dad said to my mum, "Okay, we'll do it. But I guarantee it will be the biggest waste of money ever." Because they were expensive. And as it happens, he was completely wrong. And I would sit up in my bedroom typing away, creating newspapers, making up stories. It really kind of kick started the whole thing. And yeah, from the age of eight, I'd been writing. And then all the way through school English was always my favourite subject. And English was the only thing I was ever going to study at university because actually, at the time, to my shame, I didn't know what internal comms was, I hadn't heard of it. This was 2000. So internal comms as a course wasn't really a thing. So I went to university to continue writing and reading, and then came out of uni going, "I want a job where I can write for a living." Journalism, sadly, was not an option, because I couldn't afford the unpaid internships and all the rest of it. So I found myself working for Eon, the energy company, and then yeah, kind of going, "What's this comms thing? I like the look of this." And perhaps a little arrogantly going, "I think I can do better than that." So I found myself kind of falling into it because of my love of writing. And I haven't looked back.

**Katie 07:58**

Is the writing part of the job? Still something you get to do and you get to enjoy doing? Or is there less of that now?

**Simon 08:06**

Yeah. And I think that obviously, there's less of it; the more senior you get, the more you start advising, and obviously now consulting, it's something that does fall by the wayside a little bit. But there are still occasions when you get to kind of sit down and crush something. And I take real joy in that. I think that's always something I'm going to love, a love of words, being able to influence, to communicate. And actually that's probably what it is more. So whatever you do as a comms professional, you're influencing. You're advising, you're trying to use words to get your point across in the best way, whether it's written or vocal. So I still get that little buzz and I still get to feed that addiction, I suppose.

**Katie 08:46**

For people who might be scared of the blank page in front of them and think that writing maybe isn't their forte. Is this a little piece of advice you could impart there? Is there something that goes through your mind that makes you focus and do a great job when it comes to writing?

**Simon 09:03**

Yeah, I think there's, there's a few things. Firstly, give yourself time. Don't sit down with 20 minutes to write something, you're probably not going to be able to, particularly if you're starting out. Just start. When you sit to write an article, you often try and work out the title. And I used to start trying to think of a title. Hadn't written anything yet, so how on earth do I know what it's called yet? So just get started, whether that's the beginning, if you know



you've got a quote, or you've got a point you need to get across, get that down on paper, and then you can build around it. And often I find titles come from the content. It'll either be a direct quote from the content, something that's unexpected. Just get going. I think writer's block, I always say I'm not sure if it exists. That's probably quite controversial to say, I think you have times when it's easier and you're more focused than others. But yeah, I'm not sure as a concept. It's a thing I certainly haven't experienced, but I think you just need to get started anywhere. And then you can work around it and build from there. It's kind of like Lego bricks, you're putting it together and start with the one you know, you've got.

#### **Katie 10:04**

Yeah, I love that advice. And I agree with you around writer's block. I think Seth Godin says something really smart about this. "Professional people that do comms for a living, just can't afford writer's block." So that's quite an easy way to get round the thought. Let's talk about your career choices. Because I read a blog about you, I think it was on Rachael Miller's website, where you wrote, "Have a plan, be focused, know where you want to be in 5, 10, 20 years, have targets and keep track of success. If you don't have a plan, it'll never happen." So I've got a two part question for you, I guess, what was your plan initially starting out? And now looking back on a long and successful career, do you have any career goals left to achieve? You know, what might be the plan for the next five years? So quite a long question, but...

#### **Simon 11:01**

Yeah, no no, got you. And Crikey. There's always more to be achieved. But we'll come to that in a minute. I think back when I wrote that, it was a while ago. And yes, it was writer's block. You're right. I kind of saw it as my plan was, I wanted to be promoted, become more senior, take on more of the advisory work.

#### **Simon 11:20**

My plan, it kind of looks at life/work plan. I always had the aim that I wanted to move to London, where my family were from, but I grew up elsewhere I said I was going to do it by the time I was 30. By the skin of my teeth, I did. Just having it in mind meant you were looking for opportunities, you see things because you're already thinking about what you're looking to do. So I think it's not about manifestation or anything like that. It's just about having your eyes open to opportunity that might help you get to where you want to. So that I did. And then I started working through from a comms exec to a manager, business partnering to senior manager. And at that time, that was kind of I wanted to progress, I wanted to become more senior, be more involved, more experienced, and eventually become a consultant. And I think whereas I was quite rigid with what I said with Rachel, which was "have a plan, and be very, very clear," I've become a little bit more flexible, but late. So I have guide rails now. So I have a loose direction I want to head in, but I'm less specific about how I get there.

#### **Simon 12:22**

If I'd been super specific, I probably would have missed some opportunities. I always said I'll become a consultant in my late 40s, was what I said, that was kind of where I was headed. Well that ended up happening 10, 15 years earlier, just because I found myself in a position

where I had the opportunity to make that switch, I knew it was something in my mind that I wanted to do. And again, it was just the little light bulbs went off. So "Ooh, this is kind of opening up and I'm going to find myself free. And I've got an opportunity here. And I can afford to do it, you know, I can take the risk." But if I hadn't had an idea, and I was just going through the day-to-day, I wouldn't have even seen those opportunities. So I think it's about being eyes open. It's like they say, you know, if a woman's pregnant, you look around and all you see is pregnant women, it's because you're kind of, you know, you notice things that are relevant to you. So I do think that, you know, have guide rails that you can bounce between that see you roughly going in the direction you want to go in, but don't be too prescriptive, because you shouldn't limit yourself in terms of how you actually get there.

### **Simon 13:29**

To the second part of your question. So what's left to achieve? Crikey, who knows. I think, I mean, I've been consulting seven years. So I'm, you know, there are plenty of people who've been doing it for way, way longer. So I'm sure there is still plenty to do. I'm really enjoying working with CEOs and kind of C suite level, really advising them. I have the privilege at the moment of working with someone who is new to being a CEO, but he's not new to the business that he's in. So he has loads of experience, he understands the business inside and out, is a very different kind of leader, I think he's probably how CEOs are going to look in the future. And to get to shape who he's going to become as a leader for the next 20, 25 years, and have a part in that as well as advising him on all of the comms activity that he has, that's a real privilege. And that's something that I'm getting a real buzz out of. So I can see myself looking more and more for those opportunities to be able to do that over the next few years. But that's just the guide rail. Let's see where it takes me.

### **Katie 14:29**

Any particular secrets to success in terms of building that relationship as a trusted adviser?

### **Simon 14:36**

It's interesting, because part of me, it sounds really odd to say part of me has no clue. It just sort of happens. And that's because – I shouldn't be saying this answer – but hopefully other people will relate to it. It's because it's kind of, it's partly, inherently my personality, and it's the way that I build connections and the type of person I am. I like to see things from multiple sides. I like to have quite a broad view, broad spectrum of people that I mix with now so that I get different views and opinions. And that influences how you approach things. I think I'm also very calm. So I think when you're dealing with senior people, it's just an inherent personality trait in me, it's not something I've worked at, it just seems to be there. That's what I mean by it's always like, I don't know, I am calm. So if you talk to someone, if they are stressed or worried, or they've got 1,000,001 things going on in their head, I can kind of just keep focused and work through a problem and quite logical and rational. Particularly when they are other people's problems, when they are your own problems, there's a very different story isn't there? But where his, when it's someone else's, I can kind of work through and support and provide that consistent experience and bring my experience to bear and say, "look now I know this is the right thing to do. And this is why." So it comes down to the fact that I am quite calm, I can stand up to whoever I need to stand up to say

where you need to kind of, you know, don't be swayed by their voice and the position that that person has.

**Simon 16:09**

I think you know that you're there as a trusted adviser, as you say, you're there because you have knowledge that they might not have. So you need to bring it to bear when you're working with them. But a lot of it is personality, and then you hone, you hone those skills. So can you remain calm in a crisis? Can you advise, without a personal agenda, almost? Yes, you want what's best for the business, but that's not necessarily what you personally want. You provide what's needed. And I think that's kind of where I come from.

**Katie 16:40**

I think that's so interesting, because I think it's tempting to think about, what should I know, what important piece of information should I be imparting? What insight must I have for this person that's going to make them take me seriously? But actually, if they're bouncing from one meeting to another meeting, in and out of things, they're frustrated, or whatever it is, and there's a moment in their day when we're there with someone who is calm, measured, listening, that alone, before you've opened your mouth to say anything, it's probably a moment in their day, they're going to enjoy more than any other moment. Would that be fair?

**Simon 17:19**

Absolutely. And I think, you know, this current CEO has said, "I love talking about comms." He says, "I love talking to you, because I get to hang out." I guess, frankly, it's quite different to a lot of the other conversations he has in the day. He has a very vested interest in comms, which is, you know, a blessing. But you're right. I think, literally, particularly in this world where everything is online, because you're talking to people in different countries all the time, is bouncing from one meeting to the next, I can tell whether it's been a good meeting, whether they're completely present, or whether I need to take a moment to let them kind of calm and settle, and actually call them out. Sometimes if you see that they're not paying attention, you can kind of see they're looking between screens, you go like, is this a good time? Do you want to do this later? And just to help centre them and bring them back into the room. And I think that really helps because, yeah, I mean, we all know what it's like, if you're a CEO or a senior leader, you've got a lot of things on your mind constantly. So we need to help focus them so that they can deliver what we need. And we get what we need as effectively and quickly as possible. So they can go on to the next thing.

**Katie 18:25**

And you touched on something there that I was going to mention towards the end of the show, Simon, but I think because you have, it makes sense to bring it up. Now, you have a unique gift, which might not be nature so much as nurture, of being able to read people very well. Would you mind sharing why you have that ability? Is that Okay? If you don't mind.

**Simon 18:48**

No, no, of course, no problem at all. And other people will have this as well. But when it came to me growing up, my mum had multiple sclerosis, autoimmune disease, that attacks

the nerve endings, basically, so that the body can't send signals properly to different parts of the body. That's the short version. And she'd had it since I was born pretty much. By the time I was about eight or nine, she was starting to struggle with walking. Then she was in a wheelchair through, certainly my late teenage years, permanently. And then the last 10 years of her life, she couldn't talk anymore. Basically, she got to a point she couldn't communicate. So obviously, when it's family, you kind of, everybody does this inherently. But we had to get very good at reading her face, because if she couldn't say more than a word or two, it's very hard to articulate what you need or what you want. So I just became hyper aware of what she was kind of giving away in that expression. It'd be like a little bit of an eyelid or even just looking looking in a different direction or trying to communicate but without words, and I didn't really put much kind of weight to it, but it does mean that I go through life hyper aware of what someone is saying. But I'm also really focused on the body language and whether that marries up, whether that matches. Someone can tell you, "Yes, I agree with you", or "Yes, I'm fine." But you can see that they're not. And I think it is something that I just I catch onto very quickly. And it's one of those things that's very seldom in the job description. But when I joined as a consultant, you're sat there going, okay, well look at the team, and I can identify who's getting on with who. where are the perhaps challenges that someone in a team who's in that situation every day might not see. That down to my mum, and we just paid for having to do that so that we could find our way and help her the best that we could.

### **Simon 18:49**

There's so much in that answer, Simon. I mean, the first thing is, I suppose that something really powerful and positive and helpful has come out of it. Awfully traumatic, horrible situation. So in some way, that's very sort of life affirming. But I'm also thinking, when you reach out to someone to sensitively say, "I don't think you're in the room," or "I don't think you're really with me," or "I don't think you really want this conversation at the moment." Or "you're saying something, but I'm getting the feeling you don't believe it"? Does that immediately, do you find, create a different kind of bond with someone, where you're just almost connecting on a deeper level instantly? Just by saying that?

### **Simon 21:31**

Absolutely. And I think it's the way that you do it. So I wouldn't phrase it, in the examples you just gave there, I'd phrase slightly differently. So I don't normally go and make a statement of fact, "I don't think you're there." Because they can say, "well, I am", and you're no further along, because they can say "well, you might think that but I think something else." I'll try and phrase it as "I've noticed that..." you know, is there something that's distracting? Is this the right time to be having this conversation? Would it be better if we rearranged it? Or whatever. So I'm trying to be accommodating. But the way in which I'm asking the question is saying exactly what you just said, and then say you're with me, I don't think you're present. But I'm giving them an out, I'm giving them a different way of saying it rather than confronting them and saying you're not with me, you're not paying attention. I'm giving them a reason and or a way to express it in a different way. This comes from, people always say it must be very uncomfortable being sat on the fence so much, but I tend to see it as a negative. I'm looking at it as there's, there's two sides to everything. So yes, that person might not appear present in the room. But I don't know what happened in the meeting



before they spoke to me. I don't know what's going on at home, I don't know what stresses and strains they're on. So if I can make that make allowances, but if I can take that into consideration, then we're going to end up ultimately with a better result. Because we want we want the same outcome, I'm on track A they're on track B, we're not going to get to the destination unless we can work together. So if now isn't a good time, regardless of whether or not they should be present, I need to make it work. So I need to give them the opportunity to reframe, to come back to do it in a different way.

### **Katie 23:11**

You also raise another important point there. And it reminded me of my conversation with Chris Voss, the negotiation expert on this show. He was saying you would say, it seems to me that oh, it would appear to me that I'm getting the impression that, see you're absolutely right, you're not confronting them. You're saying I might be wrong. This is just my just my view, which is a much softer way of saying it.

### **Simon 23:39**

Yeah, exactly. And you can be wrong. And sometimes they're just like, oh, no, actually, everything's fine. And I was just distracted briefly or whatever, and then you've addressed it. it's not hanging over you. Because we all do it, that little voice in your head, that's your own worst enemy. And they're not really paying attention, or do they think this is worthwhile? And oh, and if you just raise the point at the beginning, actually, I've had people say, I'm really glad you raised it. So sorry, I'm distracted. Our shirt, my shirt, my little laptop. I'm with you now. So just clear. It clears the air and it does build that deeper trust because you're not just coming at it from your own side. it's a collaboration and they feel they can trust you. And if they are comfortable, they can open up in a completely different way. And you can find yourself in that position of the hypnotherapist than anything but yes.

### **Katie 24:28**

Yes, I can imagine. You were very kind to speak at our last AB event. And you, I think, demystified the whole notion of change communication being something very difficult, very unique and special, standalone from everything else that we do. Can you explain why you think comms professionals shouldn't be perhaps as nervous as they are about their ability to do change communication?

### **Simon 24:59**

People may disagree with me. But I kinda feel when I started everybody said, "Change comms is something that you specifically need to train for, you need to learn all of these different models and all the rest of it." But ultimately, if you look at pretty much any comms we do, what are we trying to do? We're trying to inform, we're trying to probably change your behaviour, or get you to do something. While that's all change, if you take it back to the what do we want people to know, feel, and do, that's integral to any good comms plan. That is change comms. Yes, of course, there are nuances. And there are things that you can only learn through the experience of doing it. But ultimately, we all do it every day. The difference is between the day to day small change, and the bigger things like organisational change, rolling out new systems, transformations, all of that. Yes, it's clearly it's change on





steroids. But it's still fundamentally the same basis of what do we want people to know, feel and do as a result of what we're trying to tell them.

**Katie 26:02**

At the event you explained 'the IKEA effect' in relation to change, which I had never heard of before. Can you share that concept with us?

**Simon 26:12**

Indeed. Yes, hopefully, the mentioning of IKEA isn't too traumatic for people. But yeah, it came down to, it was a study that was done early 2010s. That found out quite a curious thing that people, they were given a Billy Bookcase, which is the most the highest selling item that IKEA sells, I believe they were given a premade one. And they were given the flat pack one which they then had to build themselves. And then when they were finished, they were asked to value the two items. So a monetary value to be put on each. And it turned out that for the item that they had built themselves, despite it being exactly the same as the prebuilt one, they were prepared to pay up to 63% more for the one that they had invested time in, and that they had built for themselves. And that's because there is a personal attachment. It's a demonstration of your ability, or lack thereof, depending on how good you are at it. But it's like, it's going back to the days of when you're a kid almost, you paint something and you go and show your parents like, "Look, I made this." And that has an emotional connection that you can't underestimate. And it's the reason why we have, you think about cocktail masterclasses that you can go on, Build A Bear workshops, all of these things, there's such a rise in demand for people who can go and experience things where they get to create. And that's really important when it comes to change. Because the old stat around from McKinsey, around 70% of all transformations fail. 70%, that's a number to think about. Well, what do you do to be one of the 30%? You need to involve your people in the change they need. They need to have skin in the game, they need to be invested in it. And the only way you really do that is if they genuinely have a say in what that change looks like, how it's delivered. All of these things are really important for you actually, coming along on the road feeling like you're a part of it. And then you value it more highly, because you've not been done to, you've actually been involved in the process.

**Katie 28:17**

The upshot of that is that we need to find aspects of the change that have still yet to be crafted, decided, identified, and ask the crowd essentially, get people involved perhaps to actually build the solution. That would be the idea.

**Simon 28:34**

There's a model called the SCARF model, which, to my shame, I have just forgotten exactly what it stands for. But effectively what it is, David Rock came up with it, so have a Google. Basically, there's a trade off. So he suggested that there are certain elements like security, how involved you feel in a change, where you can have your certainty impacted during a change process. And he suggested if you can negatively impact one of them... So I'll use an example in a minute. But if you negatively impact one, you need to positively impact another. For the example I always think of is you're having an office move. And let's say that you have a colleague who used to sit outside the CEO's office, regularly able to talk to that

person just by virtue of their location, and now you're moving them and in the new environment, their desk is going to be in front of the toilets, let's say. Now you're making that change because your facilities team sat down and went right, we're moving these people from A to B, there's just a floor plan. As far as they're concerned to that individual, their status is automatically negatively impacted because you've moved them from outside the CEO's office to outside the toilets. That then means that they're going to feel badly about the change. They're not going to be keen on it. They don't want to – they'll want to know why. So you look at that and go "Okay, if that's something you need to do, fine, but what can you do, where you can have that individual help, perhaps, to design what your workspace looks like? Even things like choosing, it sounds ridiculous, but choosing furniture, making that new place feel more like a home and something that they're invested in, that can help to offset the negative balance. So I see it like a seesaw. it's not to say you avoid doing what you need to do. But you're more conscious of the different elements, then you make sure you're providing some of that balance and investment in it so that hopefully, they feel less negatively impacted. And as an aside, I actually think the desk outside the toilets is not a terrible place to be. Because some, if you need someone to make a decision, and you're in the office, there is nothing better than grabbing somebody when they're on the way to the bathroom, because they'll make a really quick decision. But anyway, that's another point entirely.

**Katie 30:44**

Absolutely right. So SCARF, we will put the link in the show notes to David Rock's model, but status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. I didn't have that in my head; I did look it up. But it is a useful one. There are lots of models. And I don't know whether this is part of the – what maybe is slightly nerve wracking about the whole area of change is that there are so many different models and frameworks. The one that springs to mind is Kubler Ross, the change curve, which is really a model for grief, the five stages of grief, I think it was... Was it a psychiatric nurse that came up with it?

**Simon 31:27**

Yeah, I believe so, yeah.

**Katie 31:29**

Are there any models as apart from the scarf model that that you use in your work or one that you prefer more than others?

**Simon 31:36**

I want a bit of a magpie with it all. So I think they all have a place, even the Kubler Ross change curve, which yes, hopefully not every change is like grief, crikey, that would be, that'd be a bit much, but some of them are, I think it's useful for telling you that there is a process people go through, and people are at different points on that process at any given time. So I think that's quite a helpful reminder, it's not everybody on the bus and off we go.

**Simon 32:01**

There are a couple of others. So there's something that I've started reading about nudge theory, which I didn't know so much about. But that one I find fascinating, partly because

maybe it appeals to the slightly manipulative, Machiavellian side, Machiavellian in a good way, where you're, you know, it's indirectly trying to take people on a journey, where you've shown them in little, little nudges of how change is already working. And they see provide evidence of how it's working. So that people start to then see "oh, okay, this is benefiting the people around me, I want to be in on that, I want to get involved." So it's quite subtle, it's indirect, it's less scary, it's not enforced change. it's actually a way of bringing people along with you. it's quite collegiate.

### **Simon 32:49**

And the other one is ADKAR, which is A D, K, A, R. And that's awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement. So again, it's kind of like SCARF. There are different ways of positioning it. But it's basically around making sure our people are aware of what's happening, what's going to change, what's the future gonna look like? Do they have a desire to change that? Have you really helped them understand why it matters? Why they should come on this journey? Do they have the knowledge to change? Do they know how to change and how to do what's required? Do they have the ability? So you can have that knowledge but not be able to do it. Do they actually have the ability to change and come on that journey? And then once you have changed, you reinforce by constantly reminding, "This is where we've come from, This is why we change. This is where we're headed."

### **Simon 33:37**

So, you know, these are these are good frameworks. These are useful to work into a plan. I don't use one in its entirety, I take the elements that I like, I still apply though, you know, the old 'know, feel, do', and by putting it together, I think you end up with something that works for you. And depending on the organisation, you kind of need to understand these because some organisations will work their whole change programme around a specific model. So if you don't know them, it's going to be hard. But obviously, you can learn something when you're in it. As long as you know how change works, that the steps you need to take from a comms point of view, you can adapt to a new model.

### **Simon 34:16**

There is one more that I like from Rosabeth Moss Kanter's called Kanter's Law, and I'm paraphrasing slightly, in the middle, everything looks awful. Everything looks like failure, because you're in the middle, or it certainly can do, because if you're in the middle, you've forgotten where you've come from. Nothing's familiar. You're in the midst of a change, but you also haven't reached where you're going yet.

### **Simon 34:38**

I'm gonna bring that up at our next management meeting actually, it might be where we are at the moment. It's good to know that actually, maybe you are supposed to feel that in the middle of change. Maybe that is the sign you are in the middle of important change can't quite remember where we've come from. Where are we going?

### **Katie 34:38**

Yeah.

**Simon 34:38**

So you really need to be focused on "Okay, when you're in that middle kind of perfect storm, how are you keeping people focused on where they're headed?" Now, that's not the model, it's just a theory, but I love it. Because it's so true. You sit in the middle of it, you just go oh, what are we doing, you know, the right place? Oh, we actually had it get where we're trying to go. it's just a healthy reminder and I just agree.

**Simon 35:21**

Exactly. And you know, we're not hardwired for change. We hate change as a species, we don't want things to change. It's not actually in our, necessarily, in our best interest to change. I used to be the worst for it, which is ironic, given that I can sell it now. But I used to. I used to like certainty, knowing where things were coming from. The idea of doing what I do now, where you're constantly in flux, you never quite know what's coming tomorrow, it's a mindset shift. And you're right, when you're in that middle, I guess, if you don't quite remember where you've come from any just starting on that journey. If you don't quite know where you're going. That's a problem. But that's a different point. But I think yeah, it kind of it shows people are in the process. And I think so many leaders and companies look at we're going from A to B, and they look at particularly with system changes, they see it as it's just a system, so we replace it with a new one, and we're done. Now, that's the easy bit. That's the 5%. The 95% is bringing your people along. It's a behaviour change, every new system is a behaviour change. So you can't just think it's a system. And then that's why 70% are failing, because the people get left behind them, they just focus on product output.

**Katie 36:32**

I want to come back to the nudge theory briefly. There is the 'Nudge Unit' as part of the UK Government. And if, we'll put a link to it in the show notes, but the communication service, the government's communication service, I believe, has quite a lot of information about about the nudge theory, which as you say, is all really behavioural science, isn't it? It's all about how how to influence our brains. And our brains being... The line that always makes me smile whenever I read about behavioural science is that basically we think less than we think we do.

**Simon 37:06**

Yes, absolutely. There's something about, like 98% of decisions. We think we make rational decisions. We don't. We don't make rational decisions about anything. You think the massive purchases, buying cars, buying houses, you approach it in a very rational mindset, don't you? You sit down and go right, well, we need these things. And I'm sure we all go to sit there and think well, yes, it isn't a rational decision. it's probably not as much as you think it is. And that's okay. I think as long as, you know, and you're aware of it. But we have this thing where we think, well we used to think, hopefully less so now, you come to work, and then you're this rational bots that kind of come in and do a thing and you only think rationally. We are emotional through and through. And you just have to be aware of how that impacts every day, particularly when it comes to change, because you can rationally understand that something is the right thing to do and still not want to do it.

**Katie 37:59**

One of the things I noticed when I was researching for the show is the number of different organisations you've worked with. I mean across sectors, so KPMG the law firm Freshfields, Transport for London, IKEA, the energy company Eon... And what goes through your mind when you walk into an organisation for the first time? What's your approach to those first few days and weeks?

### **Simon 38:25**

I think, you know, a lot of those companies you highlighted, they were at permanent jobs as well, they just set me up very well for consulting. I wanted to move around intentionally because I believe that internal comms is similar across all industries, it's because people are people wherever you go. And that's largely what the work is about. But the nuances come down to the type of industry that you know, the sector they're in, the type of work they do, but fundamentally, it's very similar. So when I go in somewhere new, I guess the first thing I'm doing is I'm being a detective. So I'm sat there going, okay, how do you know, I know, I know what I need to do. And I have a pretty good idea of how to fix whatever problem it is I'm brought in to do. But there will always be nuances. There will always be quips in the system. I'm finding out who gets on with who, who has the influence, and it's not necessarily the person with the title, or layer flat structure, you know, is it a matrix organisation? Or is it quite hierarchical? But I'm just kind of coming in with a fresh pair of eyes, and just looking and trying to figure out how it all fits together. What are the pieces?

### **Simon 39:29**

I actually quite like it when I go somewhere and realise there's an assumption I've made elsewhere, but when you work there, and you know, oh, hang on a minute. It might have worked like that everywhere else, but this place is different. So I think that the next point is around being agnostic. So I try not to make assumptions. Just because I've worked somewhere before, doesn't, you know, in a similar sector, or even with IKEA I've worked with them twice. Very different experiences. So while it was the same place and there was only a year in between each one, there were differences with the people I was working with. So you can't make assumptions that places don't change, or that you already know what it's like. So go in and explore it at face value. The other thing, I think, is fix something quickly. Find a thing, anything. So if you know there's something that's wrong, doesn't even have to be a big thing, that there's always this feeling that, you're a consultant, sometimes people don't always warm to that, so teams might look at you a little bit warily, and say no, why is this consultant being brought in to do something that we're perfectly capable of doing. And that is often 100% true, it's just that they haven't got the bandwidth, there's too much work or there's a slightly more specialist piece of work coming up. So you have to win people over. And the way you can do that is by helping them solve a problem quickly. So it might just be setting up a newsletter so that they can share news in a more structured way, it might be something far, far bigger, but find something that you can fix quickly, so that you can demonstrate straightaway that you're actually going to make a difference. And this is back to the psychological theme of the rational versus emotional thing. They just want to see you delivering and feel like they've made the right choice of bringing you in. So give them something that shows that very quickly. And then you can take the time to build a much bigger change, whatever else it is that you've been brought in there to do. But yeah, ultimately, most organisations are more alike than they are different. Sometimes they need

to hear that as well. So sometimes you'll sit down and they'll say, oh, no, were unique. And I just have a little smile to myself. Probably because I don't think many places truly are. But you can be special. That's something else entirely. And that's what they've been really they mean, we have something special, something about us that is that is different. I just think unique is possibly not the word. There's a lot more in common. And that's a good thing.

**Katie 41:56**

I like that, not necessarily unique but special. I think that is spot on. The other thing you mentioned that is so interesting, and it's around momentum, isn't it? Some things that we do take an awful long time, and isn't it funny how we can go just "we need a bit of culture change around here"? I've got a Wednesday afternoon, I'll do that for you. But you're absolutely right, there is something quite important about that sense of momentum and an early win, almost to calm people down so that they're a little bit more patient for the longer term initiatives that are going to take some time.

**Simon 42:37**

Exactly. And particularly because, as you say, everything takes forever. And actually, unless you're somewhere for a substantial stint of time, you're probably not going to finish everything. So in culture changes, that is the big one everyone's talking about, "we need to change our culture" or, you know, "we need higher engagement." And, you know, start talking about engagement. But it's it's not something that you kind of own as an individual, engagement and culture change are outcomes of what you're doing. It's not the thing that you can do. So you kind of— I need you to engage our people, it's like, well, okay, there are things I can do that will help improve engagement 100%, it's not a switch that I flick and suddenly it's done. But ultimately, you know, we always laugh because we kind of, I think when you've been in comms for a while you get to a point where you'd like to think, okay, well, you know, we've moved beyond the world of posters, and what have you, but you know what? Sometimes you can't beat a good poster. Yes, they do still work and newsletters still work and printed magazines can still work. And they're tangible. They real, people love them. And sometimes just doing that, picking your battles sometimes, it can win people over. It's ridiculous how often that happens. And that then opens the door for you to be able to do actually what you're really there to do.

**Katie 43:56**

I can honestly say, in a manufacturing unit, just a couple of weeks ago, the leadership team got quite excited at the thought that "oh yes! The posters behind toilet doors!" and I was like, I cannot believe I'm having this conversation. But if that's where you need to reach your people, we can go back to the good old days of reaching people. It's absolutely fine.

**Simon 44:16**

I love it. The term 'dwell time' was always one of my favourite euphemisms. But it's true, right? It's dwell time. So okay, that's a delicate way of putting it.

**Katie 44:32**

I've heard you describe being a consultant as part unblocker, agitator and therapist, three quite different roles. You've told us a little bit about the therapist, but more around the



unblocker and agitator... I guess this is the bit of the work where you are deliberately being a little bit provoking. Is it that you can do and say things that potentially you couldn't do if you were firmly on the payroll?

#### **Simon 44:59**

Yeah, 100%. I think it's one of the things I enjoy the most is when you start, you're brought in with a very specific remit to fix a problem that they know that they have very often, you're there to do a job, you're not looking for long term promotion, or opportunities like that. So there's less risk to speaking your mind. Now, of course, actually, in an ideal world, there wouldn't be any risk to anybody speaking their mind. And that should open promotional opportunities, if you are the one who does challenge appropriately. But we all know it's a little bit different when you're the other side of the table. So very often, when you're going to that detective phase, you'll talk to people, they will tell you all the stuff they've been trying to do, and then you go, "Okay, I'll just say that." Now as oversimplifying it a little bit. But I can say things that even though they've been banging on about it for months, and months and months and not getting through, I can say it once, and then they'll go, "oh, yeah, we should do that. Because he said." Which is, it's ridiculous. Because I've said exactly the same thing. And I'm always very upfront with teams, if I'm going in and working with a team, it's like, I'm not claiming credit, I'm just coming in and I'm there to unblock and help you get things through to the people that they need to get through to, and then to help you to move things forward. And sometimes that is more involved. And sometimes you are literally unblocking things by identifying a problem that other people might not have seen, because they're there in the day to day, super hard to lift your head up and focus. But quite often, it is genuinely just sense checking what they've been trying to do, and then saying in a different way to the people that they've been talking to, and getting things moving.

#### **Simon 46:41**

So I think that's the unblocker bit. And the agitator bit is fun, because I've only discovered it quite recently. And I'm loving this, because you get to go in and just prod and poke a little bit and kind of just go, "I'm just gonna test this theory just to see if this works. And I know it makes you feel a little uncomfortable. But let's just see, see where we go." And again, because you're not really taking a risk you're there to do a thing, and it either works, or it doesn't work. And that's fine. But you get to change ways of thinking, or bring other people into the business who are perhaps not the type of person that that organisation has had access to before. And that brings with it new thinking, innovation, all of the rest of it. But you can kind of do it quite deliberately. That's why I call it agitating. it's that deliberate step of just go, I'm just going to put this person here and just see what happens around that group. And then I'm going to just see what happens over here. And it sounds quite clinical, but it's not, it's always done with the best interests of the organisation at heart and the person you're working with. But you do have that freedom to intentionally rock the boat, because if they Don't want that, then you wouldn't be there. And if they genuinely Don't want it, you go, Okay, that's fine, we'll do what's needed. And then you can move on and leave them to it. But I think more often than not, you find people will commit, and they're looking for you to bring that different thinking. If they wanted more of the same thing, then they'd have that from the people they've already got, they're looking for something new.



**Katie 48:15**

Are you happy to give an example of that? I'm imagining putting somebody on a stage that wouldn't normally be on a stage addressing an audience they wouldn't normally address around a topic that's normally not spoken about. I mean, I don't know if I'm barking up the right tree that I'd love to hear an example.

**Simon 48:30**

Yeah, so it can be that. The other example I would use is around getting a coach for somebody. So sometimes having a personal coach for an individual. I intentionally went after someone who I was put in touch with, fabulous, fabulous man, really, really good coach, coaches huge names, celebrities, MPs, all kinds of people all over the world. And he's just a fascinating man to meet. But he's completely unlike anyone who the business had seen before, in terms of the way that he dressed, his personality, his background... And by bringing him into the business— he's quite confrontational. But he is incredibly down to earth, knowledgeable, calm, he's a brand and comms expert, but bringing him into a more traditional business perhaps, or a business where they wouldn't, there's no way that this person would have found him as a coach, because their paths would never have crossed. But because I was able to kind of go, "Okay, I'm gonna give you a couple of options, meet two people and see who you'd like to be your coach." And they immediately went for this guy.

**Simon 49:38**

That was like, Yes, that was an agitation to see what would happen. And if you'd gone with the other person, who would have been equally brilliant, I have no doubt, that would have been fine. But it was just, it was an opportunity to see where did he want to go? How does he want this journey to go with with the company? So yeah, it can be lots of different ways that you can be pushing someone to present in a way that they might not be comfortable with, but that can backfire as well. For me, it's about the voices, it's about the freedom of thought, the difference of opinion, that's the way to really agitate and just get people opening their minds a little bit.

**Katie 49:38**

Wow.

**Katie 50:16**

You're making me think that part of your secret sauce, Simon, is coming back to the way that you can reach people. Because I'm guessing there's something you saw there and you thought, "this could fly, it's a risk, they won't see this coming. This is gonna surprise them. But I've seen something in you that makes me think you're gonna go in this direction with a totally unconventional personality." And I think I think it might be that you're seeing something that maybe others aren't seeing, or they're not even seen in themselves, potentially.

**Simon 50:49**

Yeah I think it's definitely, in that particular case, it was down to all businesses have a culture and a way of working and this is a sales business, so it's quite a masculine energy, it's quite "rah rah, we're going to achieve," you know, "we dominate, we do all this!" and like, okay, we

just need to soften this a little bit, you know, you're surrounded by alpha males, who can give you that view. And I'm not saying that's bad, but where are you getting other opinions from? Can we introduce a different voice into that mix, who isn't your traditional alpha male, and frankly, I fit into that box. I'm not I'm not an alpha male type. And that's why I think he likes talking to me, because he gets a different opinion from me, and a different perspective on things, than he would get from other people on his team. So yeah, it's about the balance. When I build a team, I'm always looking at how do we get people who are distinct but complement each other? So as a whole, it works really well. But you can actually end up with quite different personalities on the same team. And it's about what they do together and how they collaborate. That's where but the real secret sauce is, I guess, how that comes together.

### **Katie 51:59**

Absolutely. I love your posts on social media. And we'll put the links in the show notes so that people can follow you for themselves. You are authentic, you're also strategic, I always feel that there's a message behind what you're conveying. And I admire your authenticity, because it's something that I I feel I struggle with, I have to be honest. I'd just be keen to get your thoughts on vulnerability and the power of vulnerability. Thanks to Brene Brown, we know a lot more about this, but I'd be keen to hear your personal experience, I guess.

### **Simon 52:34**

The real truth of it is that vulnerability is the opposite of vulnerable. So showing vulnerability is actually a real strength, because you have to be confident in who you are, to do it, because when you're comfortable with your strengths and your development areas, then it helps you to be to be more vulnerable. it's interesting, you say that most of my social media is strategic, because in all honesty, I don't always feel like it is. But so I'm glad that it comes out in the sense that it is strategic, particularly Twitter, I was one of the early ones on it back in whatever it was 2010, I think about 13 year anniversary pop up recently, which is terrifying. I just started using it. And I decided very quickly it was going to be somewhere where I could be myself, mainly talking nonsense. So anyone who follows me, good luck. But hopefully there's some good in there. But it was just a place where I could you know, voice thoughts about whatever was going on: the good times, and the bad, because we all we all have challenges and social media is so often presented, it's the perfect bits. So you know, Facebook and Instagram are full of pictures of people having marvellous holidays, and lovely meals and all the rest of it. And of course we all, that's what we all tend to post because you share the best bit, but that's probably 2% of your week. Hopefully it's a little bit more.

### **Simon 53:52**

But I saw Twitter and thought, okay, I'm gonna use it to talk about mental health to talk about my own experiences in life just like the you know, the good days, the bad days, everything that comes up. Yeah, I'm gay. So I grew up in closeted, like lots of people I didn't really come out till I was 18. And then once I started that process, we got to the point where I was like, well, I'm not going back now. I'm not gonna hide a part of who I am. Because I'm much happier now. And so I took that into social media, wherever and you're gonna see, warts and all, This is who I am. And I will talk about Disney World and the fact that I'm

obsessed with Disney, I will talk about diversity. I will talk about mental health. I will talk about comms a bit. Yes, I do even manage that. You know, all kinds of stuff, but that's who I am and what it's done over the years. it's become a marvellous filter.

#### **Simon 54:45**

So you'll be surprised how often I get a message from someone. it's probably about every other month now. But at one point, it was at least once a month with a complete stranger concerned that I'm over sharing on social media. And I'm like, "Well, thank you for your concern," because I believe it comes from a good place. I always start with that. But ultimately, it's my social media. So I get to choose what I share and what I Don't share. And that means actually, it acts as a filter, even when it comes to work. Because if you see that and go, Oh, I'm not I'm not sure about that, or that's a bit too much for me, then we're probably not going to get on, and therefore we're probably not going to work well together. Because I bring, you know, the whole work self and real life self, there's not a huge difference with me, they're pretty much aligned. So I kind of see it as you know, if you look at that and go not for me, that's fine. That's Okay. That is it. Rita Patel, put up a quote ages ago about, you know, "If you're everyone's cup of tea, you'd be a mug." And I'm sure she hasn't claimed that that's hers exactly, but I love that because it's true. You can't be for everybody. It is about just identifying your tribe, your crowd, and it has become a great filter. And I get so much out of it.

#### **Simon 55:58**

You know, you hear so much about, I'm on the bad side of TikTok, or I'm on the bad side of LinkedIn, how do I get back to the good side? And, and I look at that, completely baffled, because you see what you curate. So if you're on social media, posting negativity, seeking out the controversial or this, that and the other. That's what you see play back to you. I go on LinkedIn, I see nothing but lovely comments and posts with useful content, and articles and all that, I see that because hopefully, that's what I'd put out. And it's what I've sought after. I'm not even going to deign to try and give any tips. But I just think what's worked for me is I've just gone on, and decided I'm going to be me, and there was a period in my life when I wasn't. So I see no reason to go through that now. If you like it fantastic. Come along, then I hope it's useful as well as fun sometimes. And if I'm not for you, that's also totally fine, frankly, saves me wasting time, investing energy into relationships, or business relationships that probably aren't going to work out in the end or aren't going to be satisfying and energising for me.

#### **Katie 57:09**

I love the idea that it almost, as you say, pre qualifies people to work with you. When we're talking about personal storytelling, corporate storytelling is something we're all being asked to do. And it's absolutely impossible to manufacture something, well more people try maybe to manufacture something that doesn't exist, but it usually backfires. Most companies at the moment, most clients we're working for want a compelling company narrative. I'm just wondering what your perspective is on all this? what makes a good strategic narrative? And how can listeners maybe get to create one? what are the steps involved?

#### **Simon 57:47**

Crikey, we could do another entire one on entirely this topic! First point straightaway, to have a good strategic narrative, you need a good strategy. So what you sometimes see is organisations creating a strategic narrative in absence of a strategy. So they think, well, if we have the narrative, we need a way of explaining what we're doing and what we're looking to achieve. And it kind of becomes their strategy, but they are two very distinct things. Firstly, you decide what your business wants to do, how you're going to get there, then you turn that into a narrative. So I encourage everybody to constantly push back if you're asked to come up with a narrative first. But I think really the kind of the steps the content wise, it's like a novel, think of it as as fiction. Where are we going? You have a beginning and a middle and an end? We are here? what is our threat? Or the burning platform? Why must we change? What's one of your perilous bit in the middle? And then what will it look like when we've got where we're going? So a large part of the narrative, particularly when it comes to strategy is you often have a strategy covering a number of years, it can feel very kind of amorphous, like, Okay, where are we going to be in 2030s? It's seven years away. So you need to break it down into steps which are, Okay, This is where we're going. These are the milestones along the way. This is what it will look like when we get there.

### **Simon 59:11**

The important thing about a story, if you think storytelling goes back hundreds 1000s of years, we have cavemen writing on walls, ever since, it's about connecting people, and it's about feeling. So you very often forget the words that you read, but you very seldom forget how it made you feel. And that's really what a narrative needs to do. It needs to impart a feeling, it needs to inspire. It needs to excite, it needs to... whatever it is that your company is looking to do, you need to create that feeling because the feeling remains long after the words have gone. So I think that's the intangible thing that you're kind of trying to do. Yes, it's the common purpose and direction. You don't want people in lots of different boats merrily rowing off in different directions, everybody is going the same way, we use the phrase north star so much, it's a bit of a cliché, but it's true. it's like kind of this is where we are headed. This is what's guiding us. And also, it needs to encourage ownership basically.

### **Simon 1:00:15**

So again, when you come back to change, whether it's changing your it's strategy you're talking about, we all need to take ownership for it. Because if we don't, we're back to being done to again. And the moment I feel done to, I stop caring, I stop listening, I'm not engaged, to use that word again. So really, it's about creating the feeling, being clear on the destination, showing how it's ours, we all have a role to play in getting ourselves there. And we will all share in the success when we get there. But it ultimately comes down to we are hardwired for stories, from where my kids, from eight year old me sat at the typewriter, my masterpieces is what, it's what we want. As human beings. it's how we connect. So they can be incredibly powerful when they're done well. But I say, again, doesn't replace your strategy, you need the strategy first, then you'll Have a narrative.

### **Katie 1:01:11**

That's incredibly helpful. Thank you very much, Simon. Before we go to those quickfire questions, I did want to mention the fact that you are also president of the IABC's chapter for the UK and Ireland. I wanted to give you a shameless opportunity to plug the



association basically. And I have to declare a vested interest, of course, because I sit on the international board. But what is it about the IABC? That means that people should join should attend our events and so on, give us a shameless plug.

**Simon 1:01:46**

Indeed, I will do and yeah, so for anyone who doesn't know, it's the International Association of Business Communicators. So you've got a global association of 1000s of business comms colleagues all over the world, who you have access to. And frankly, that is one of the biggest selling points is the sheer size of the network and the speed of access that you have. I can remember joining in mid 2019, not knowing that we are about to have a pandemic. So that proved super useful. And then just messaging people on Twitter going "Hi, I've just joined IABC, would you be up for a chat? And not a single person said no, every single one of them said yes. And I had amazing chats. And all of a sudden I've gone through hardly knowing anyone in Australia to knowing at least 20 comms professionals in Australia, in Canada, in the US, in Africa. And it's an incredible network of people that I just wouldn't have had access to in the first place. I think the other thing about the IABC is this search, this quest for excellence that we have. So really focusing on you know, we have a code of ethics that you sign up to when you join, there's a standard that we uphold, we have career assessment tools that can help you understand where you are, where your strengths are, and where your weaknesses, access to training. And I think the other thing that you can do, that I've really benefited from so far is you can get experience. So roles you might not have access to in your day job, particularly if you're in a permanent job, you might not be able to sit on a Board to to be a pPresident of a chapter, to get involved in an international committee like you do, or to be part of the programme advisory committee that works on designing what the world conference looks like. All of these opportunities are available if you want to commit to it and give of yourself and the cliché in the IABC, which is 100% true, you get out what you put in. So if you engage, if you go oh I fancy having a go at that, you'll find a bunch of people who really want to support you. And you get to try a whole host of things make a whole host of people and that benefits your career. Because you can say I was on the board for three years, I've worked on an international committee that's, that is valuable. And that's on top of all the events that we have, the great speakers that we get, I can see myself being a lifelong member now. I'm surprised it took me so long to find them.

**Katie 1:04:12**

Thank you so much. Oh, that's really helpful. Are you okay to hop over to those quick fire questions?

**Simon 1:04:19**

Let's go for it.

**Katie 1:04:21**

What trait or characteristic do you possess that above all others has most led to your career success, do you think?

**Simon 1:04:30**

Oh, the word I always use is "chameleonic". I still have my core self, don't worry, I know who I am. But I am definitely quite good at being flexible and I can fit in more or less anywhere. So I go into an organisation. I can understand kind of what behaviours work well, they're how can I become a part of that group? Frankly, how do I relatively quickly stop looking like an outsider? How do I fit in? And I have been able partly probably because I moved around a lot in my permanent role, but I've been able to kind of harness that and be able to adapt, fit in and get the trust from them because they see me as one of them. And not necessarily somebody from outside. Now that depends. There are some places you go where you want to be seen as outside and very distinct. But if it's the sort of role where you're going in to be part of a team, then yeah, being able to be a bit of a chameleon, it's genuine. It's just dialling up certain parts of your personality and playing down others. So it's not fake. But it is just adapting so that you come across in the best in the best way that I organisation.

**Katie 1:05:34**

How would you complete this statement: world class internal communication is...

**Simon 1:05:42**

Ohhh... communication that drives the agenda. It builds a movement, and it leads to change. Now, not everything not everything does those things. Sometimes we're just writing an article. But generally, I think, yeah, the comms that matters drives the agenda, it builds a movement, leads to change.

**Katie 1:06:00**

I love that idea about building a movement as well, that really appeals because it's got that facilitation aspect to what we were talking about before where, of course, we can't do culture change, we can't do engagement. But we can build a movement that slowly creates that kind of change and that kind of momentum.

**Simon 1:06:22**

Exactly. I think we're back to nudge theory.

**Katie 1:06:27**

If you had to make one book recommendation, and I know that might be difficult to our listeners, what would it be?

**Simon 1:06:35**

That was incredibly difficult. But I went back to the one that constantly comes back to me, and I'd be amazed if people haven't already read this. But Start With Why, Simon Sinek will always come back, as I remember reading that when it came out and it was revolutionary in the sense that, you know, people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. And that is so so true. It's not a huge book. It's very succinct. I think he's done a lot of great things since as well. But all kind of along the same, I think, Start With Why it was really original. It really kind of captured my way of thinking. And it's helped shape how I approach comms and how I approach the way we, you know, when it comes to messaging, really understanding what's in it for the, for the audience, and why people work for a company that they work for. Some



of them, it's about money, a lot of them, there is a lot more to it than that. And it's really tapping into that.

**Katie 1:07:30**

There is a great, it's not great quality, but there is a much watched TED Talk, where he first talks about that drawing circles. Again, we'll put a link to it in the show notes. Finally, we give you a billboard for millions to see and you can put on that any message you like Simon, what are you going to put on your billboard?

**Simon 1:07:52**

So I have one obvious one, but I'm going to cheat and have two, if I may. So the one that I immediately thought of, a mix of a Mel Robbins quote where she basically said 'Don't take advice from anyone that you wouldn't trade lives with.' Oh, so this point of, yeah, you know, we all we all take a lot of feedback and advice. And of course, that's good. But yeah, if it's not someone who you admire or someone that you kind of, you know, you could see yourself doing a little bit of what they do, or you see some commonality, it's okay to ignore some advice. So yes, Don't take advice from anyone you wouldn't trade lives with. And the other one, 'stop taking yourself too seriously.' We all we all fall into this, but I think honestly, you know, life, life is short. It can be hectic, it can be busy, but it's still okay to have some fun. And sometimes things go wrong. it's fine. Laugh it off, learn from it, move on. So yeah, be a bit lighter, I think.

**Katie 1:08:46**

Simon, thank you so much for appearing on the show. This has been a wonderful conversation.

**Simon 1:08:52**

Thank you very much. I really enjoyed it. I hope it's useful.

**Katie 1:08:58**

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. Do subscribe if you enjoyed this episode, because we have some great guests still lined up for this season, including the author of The Joy of Work and Fortitude, Bruce Daisley, Charlotte Carroll, who is the Head of People Communications at Unilever, and the very welcome return of Sally Sussman, Executive Vice President and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Pfizer, who will be talking about her new book, Communicating to Open Minds, Move Hearts and Change the World. I can't wait for that one.

**Katie 1:09:39**

So if you did enjoy this episode, I would be very grateful if you could give us a rating on Apple Podcasts, that just gives the algorithms a little nudge and helps your fellow comms professionals around the world find this show. Thank you.

**Katie 1:09:55**

For all the links that Simon and I mentioned, head over to AB's website, that's [abcomm.co.uk/podcasts](http://abcomm.co.uk/podcasts). You'll find the transcript there, show notes and our entire back





catalogue of 79 episodes. My thanks to Simon, our producer, John Phillips, sound engineer Stuart Rolls, and my lovely colleagues at AB, all of you keep the show on the road and I am immensely grateful to you. And finally, my thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. Until we meet again, stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.

#### **Katie 1:10:40**

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast was 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 and campaigns that have caught my eye during the week. I always limit myself to just five nuggets of news. So you can read it in record time, but still feel a little bit more informed, hopefully a little bit more uplifted as you end your week. 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 is super easy. Simply go to [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](http://abcomm.co.uk/Friday), and you just need to pop in your email address. It is equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a whirl, that signup page again, [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](http://abcomm.co.uk/Friday). And if you do choose to be a subscriber, I look forward to being in touch.