



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 9

### Episode 80 – Nicole Bearne, *The inside track on comms at Mercedes F1*

#### 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 00:51**

Welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me. Katie Macaulay. This is a show devoted to energising, informing and hopefully entertaining those of us responsible for improving communication inside the walls of our organisations. Now I'm going to keep my preamble for this episode short, because my guest and her organisation, well, they really do speak for themselves. The F1 Mercedes AMG Petronas team competes at the very pinnacle of motorsport. Formula One is a demanding, technical and human challenge. It combines cutting edge technologies and innovation with high performance management and world class teamwork. The people at Mercedes F1, well, they design, develop and manufacture the race cars driven by seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, and the young upcoming star George Russell. The team holds the record for the most consecutive title wins, winning both the driver's and constructor's World Championship every year between 2014 and 2020, and then going on to win the constructor's World Championship in 2021.

#### **Katie 02:14**

My guest today to talk about this incredible organisation is Nicole Bearne. She is currently Head of Internal Communications, Employee Events and Corporate Social Responsibility at Mercedes AMG Petronas. She has 25 years' experience of board level operations in the fast paced world of Formula One. Now, this is a wide ranging conversation. We talk about employee voice, psychological safety, curious leaders, line managers, why face to face communication is so fundamental. We also talk about the team's attitude to failure, and how it handles issues of confidentiality, given the highly competitive nature of its work. Listeners, this really is a masterclass in how to create an aligned, inclusive and high performing culture. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. So without further ado, I bring you Nicole Bearne.

#### **Katie 03:23**

So Nicole, welcome to the internal comms podcast. what a privilege a pleasure to have you on the show.

#### **Nicole 03:31**

Thank you so much. it's really exciting to be here. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

**Katie 03:36**

Let's start with a question that might intrigue our listeners slightly. How did a postcard collection inspire your career initially?

**Nicole 03:47**

One of the biggest things in my life, and it's a thread that's run through pretty much everything that I think that I've always done is this desire to get out and learn more about the world, see more of the world. And I think that was probably sparked when I was about five or six. And I started collecting postcards. Whenever a family member or a friend of the family or somebody would go off on a holiday somewhere, I would badger them to send me a postcard from wherever they were. And I would be thrilled when these postcards would arrive with these exotic looking images on the picture front and these exotic post marks and stamps. And sometimes they would have writing in letters that I didn't understand. And I remember just amassing this big collection of all of these cards from all these places in the world and thinking, well, one of these days, I'm going to go to all of these places, and this is what— and I'm gonna go here and go there. And this is right throughout my childhood. My grandmother and grandfather, I think did a lot of cruises as well. So they'd send me something from every port.

**Nicole 04:50**

So I think that's just sparked a love of travel and a love of getting out and seeing a bit of the world that inspired me. I think initially when I was a little bit older than five or six I thought I'll be an air steward, and I'll see the world that way. But then as I got a bit older than that, and to kind of my teens, I realised actually I could become a diplomat. You know, it was a little bit James Bond, it seemed quite exciting, you could go and now live in different countries and work in embassies. And you know, though, that's what I decided to aspire to. And that took me off to university, I did a degree in Russian and international relations. And my first job after university was working at the British Embassy in Moscow, where I ended up being there for four years. And that was my sort of taste of life as a diplomat, and within that sort of interesting world of sort of diplomacy and, and communication with other countries.

**Katie 05:48**

Yes.

**Nicole 05:49**

I then left that role came back to the UK ended up working for a Russian organisation in London for a few years, travelling backwards and forwards between The UK and the former Soviet Union. And then finally, the Russian company that I was working for closed their London office, I got made redundant. And one morning, I opened up the Evening Standard in newspaper in London thinking well, I need to find myself a new job. And there, I saw an advert for the role of personal assistant to the team principal of a brand new Formula One racing team which was being set up. I followed Formula One, I thought it was a really interesting sport. And you got to go to lots of different races around the world. So here I am back on the idea of let's get out there and travel and see what I make of this new role. So I applied and was really fortunate to be given the job.

**Katie 06:46**

Just two quick follow up questions on the first part of your experience and career, I'm guessing that actually becoming a diplomat working at the embassy ended up not being anything like 007, but I thought I better check.

**Nicole 07:02**

No, and that was the interesting thing for me, I think I had this sort of slightly rose tinted view, perhaps from the movies. I'd been I loved every minute of the time that I was in Russia. I had a fantastic job. I was working with the cultural section. So we were looking after all of the sort of cultural relationships between Great Britain and Russia at the time, Soviet Union at the time. We had visiting art exhibitions and touring theatre groups going around the country. I looked after all the British students that were studying in the country as well on various different study programmes. It was a fabulous role. But it was a very insular, you did end up interacting much more with the people that you worked with, and the people that actually lived in the community around you.

**Katie 07:48**

Oh, my second follow up question, it felt remiss of me not to ask this question, given where we are in the political world at the moment, East and West, is whether you had any reflections on how we perceive Russia today and what's going on? Because I assumed, and it sounds maybe wrongly, that you'd probably got friends still in Russia and understood the country and the people in a way that we don't get the opportunity to. But I just wondered if you had any reflections on where we find ourselves today with East West relations, I guess?

**Nicole 08:24**

Yeah. I mean, it is a difficult one. it's a really personal one for me. So one of the reasons that I did move out of the diplomatic world, was because I met a Russian, and married him. Suddenly, he's, we are now divorced and he's my ex husband, but he lives back in Moscow. And his mother is there as well. So my ex, my mother in law, and my son is half Russian.

**Katie 08:48**

Wow.

**Nicole 08:49**

So for us, actually, it's a really personal world. it's incredibly sad at the moment that the current political situation means we can't go out to Moscow and see family, and family can't come here to visit us easily either. My son, I think that's a big loss. Yeah, obviously great that we have FaceTime, and we can still communicate and we can still keep in touch with family out there. But it is a very difficult situation, I think, for anybody who has that, that connection with that country. And also, I think, because over the years, you know, I absolutely adore Russia, I adore Russian people. They seem very cold and distant on the outside until you get to know them. And then when you do get to know them, they are incredibly warm, incredibly generous, very funny, have a great sort of dark sense of humour, which really appeals to me, and they are brilliant people to be around. They just love life in a way that I just really connect with. So not to be able to have that interaction and to be able to see the people that do mean that much to you is quite hard really.

**Katie 09:53**

Yes. Thank you for sharing that Nicole because I think it's quite rare. We get to see the personal lived experience of something that we all read about and see on the news all the time. So thank you for that. So initially, you studied Russian and international relations, but you decided to go back to university to do a Master's in organisational behaviour and psychology. I guess I've got a two part question. One is, that sounds quite a brave decision, actually, to go back to study. So why did you do that? What was that experience like? But then I'm also really interested in how your understanding of organisational psychology shaped your approach to communication?

**Nicole 10:36**

Yeah, no, absolutely. It was a bit of a mad decision. I went back to university as a mature student, it actually really started when I did the CIPR our diploma in internal communications, which was something that I did, really to underpin my own theoretical knowledge of internal comms and give myself a bit more of a basis, a foundation in understanding the strategy and strategic way of approaching it. So I did the CIPR diploma, and for my dissertation, I focused on employee voice. I was looking at the barriers to authentic leadership voice within organisations, I wanted to understand how internal communications professionals could support leaders to be more human in their interactions with employees and less process driven. And I was reading loads of academic studies around authentic leadership, around creating dialogue in this sort of, in the organisational space. And in it, I just became fascinated with the sort of insights that I was getting from organisational psychology studies. And the way that that can actually give you an understanding of what employees feel, and how they behave within an organisation. And I think that by having a better understanding of those sort of elements, that those those dynamics, I guess, it means that organisations actually can design more effective communication strategies.

**Katie 12:17**

Absolutely.

**Nicole 12:18**

As an internal communications, professional, I can help to foster sort of those positive attitudes and behaviours that will, ultimately, ideally, translate into improved wellbeing, improved productivity and all of the byproducts that we're looking for. So that's kind of why I became interested in it, I think it was really just finding those insights into what motivates people at work, how they interact with their work environment, how they form relationships with colleagues, with managers, how they respond to various different types of communications, and how we can better reach and interact with with our colleagues. But it was a little bit of a mad decision, as I say, because I was was very mature student at the time, I'd literally just, I think I'd just become quite menopausal at that point in time as well. So I was dealing with menopause, studying, working full time in a busy job, and my son's doing his GCSEs as well. So it was all a little bit like a perfect storm.

**Katie 13:27**

Wow.

**Nicole 13:30**

But it was, it was brilliant. And I absolutely loved being back in at university and in that learning environment, and absorbing all of this information and interacting with my fellow students and having some really brilliant conversations about how we can improve the world of work, to having better understanding of the psychology of people within that organisational setting.

**Katie 13:58**

Just coming back to leaders and them being able to find their authentic voice, be themselves, what would be your advice to someone who's trying to coach a leader to find their true authentic voice? Is there one piece of advice or one thought that they should have in their head that will help them more naturally get to just be more themselves, I suppose?

**Nicole 14:21**

I think for me, and sort of what came out of my CIPR research was just identifying the the individual barriers that people have in place. You know, as leaders, there are certain, we have expectations of ourselves, which we place on ourselves. And it might be you know, well I'm the leader so I can never be wrong. I'm the leader so I can never show that I don't know. And I think for me, the first step is actually being aware of those traits that you may have, and then putting some steps in place, and having the courage really, to put those steps in place and to say, actually, I don't know everything. And I don't have to know everything because I'm paying brilliant people around me to know everything. I can be fallible, I can admit failure. We did a piece with our leadership team around failure, and actually how they have learned from failure. And they were very open and honest about admitting where they failed. So that was one of the key things is really for leaders to recognise the barriers that they put in place for themselves through their own life experience, or what they've built in their own personality, to take those sometimes just brick by brick, start to take those barriers down a little.

**Katie 15:39**

Yeah, that's great answer. I want to come back to failure in a little while. But I think we need to do a little bit of scene setting in terms of, I guess, people might be interested in what is actually the size of your workforce, What's the makeup of your workforce? How do you communicate with people? Just some of the basics to set the scene for listeners so they can get a sense of your sort of everyday environment as it were?

**Nicole 16:05**

Effectively, I mean a Formula One team is a high performance engineering company. So we have a workforce of about 1200 people based in a factory and campus of offices and workshops and things, about an hour north of London, in the countryside, so lovely setting, very rural. And within that team of people, we have quite a lot of different types of roles really, from my perspective, that means lots of different types of audiences.

**Nicole 16:37**

So we have a very large operational, factory based contingent of people who are focused on manufacturing the parts that make up the car, testing those parts to ensure that they are going to be fit for running on the car, and then assembling the car itself. They're not desk based, most of them are operating machinery or assembling cars. They work across different shifts. So we have an early shift, an afternoon shift and a night shift. So again, we're looking at how do we coordinate our communication so that we can reach all of those different shifts. We also have a weekend shift, who just come in Saturday, Friday-Saturday-Sunday, or Saturday-Sunday-Monday, and we don't really see them that often during the week. So that's one of our major audiences.

**Nicole 17:28**

Then we have our designers, and aerodynamicists, who are office based, predominantly. We don't do a lot of hybrid working, we tend to like to have everybody bouncing ideas off of each other in a face-to-face environments. And most people that are based in in the offices, they are highly specialist. They're highly educated. We have a very high percentage of people with Master's degrees and PhDs. They're very driven engineering brains. So they're problem solvers. And also left field thinkers and people who are usually not afraid to challenge what you're doing and ask questions, difficult questions. Yes. And usually, they all wanted to work in Formula One, they've set out to get into the sport, and this for them is a dream come true. So that's their motivation, a lot of the time for being in the team.

**Nicole 18:20**

We also then have the race team, a team that are largely remote, they're very often not in the factory, or very rarely in the factory, they're in 23 different countries around the world at different points of the year, working across different time zones. So again, they're kind of classic remote audience.

**Nicole 18:40**

And then we have the business support functions. So you know, every organisation has them: HR, legal finance, marketing, we have a travel office logistics, all of these people. And a lot of them are not technical in focus, and maybe didn't have that dream of working in Formula One. So they've sort of worked, come into the industry through various different routes. So we have to be mindful that, you know, they don't necessarily understand all the technical terms that the engineers will be using when they're talking. So a lot of explaining has to go on around some of the acronyms that maybe people are using in the technical world. Some people have been with the team for over 20 years, well, no 25 years. But we have a large amount of new starters as well. So again, we've got people who've been on a long journey with the company and then people, quite a large chunk of people who've only been there for the last year or so. It is still predominantly a male environment. But we are seeing more and more women coming into the industry. We have, I think within our business support functions we're actually about 60% female, right? But within our technical areas, we're still only about 9% female and our ethnic diversity is still not where we want it to be either, but it's creeping up slowly in places.

**Katie 20:03**



Just interested in the size of the race team? Because obviously a lot of attention on your drivers, on Lewis on George, but I'm guessing there's quite a few people around them that, as you say, the show that's on the road that moves around all these different locations. What's the size of that team?

#### **Nicole 20:22**

It's a circus! Yeah, we turn up in a town, we put on a show, we then plan everything go to the next town. Yeah. Yeah, it's about 100, 120 people so 10% of the organisation is travelling to races, the rest are not. And that's one of the common things, people, when they find out you work for a Formula One team, they say, oh, you know, must be great going to all those races. But yeah, 90% of our team members never see the race. And so watching on TV, what we do try to do is to make sure that on the Friday of the British Grand Prix, we actually close the factory and take the whole team down for the day. So they can at least see the fruits of their labour running around on the track and spend a bit of time just absorbing the atmosphere of what it's like to be at track. It's part of our sort of key learning structure really for every every employee to actually experience of understanding how things work at the circuit.

#### **Katie 21:20**

And see it in practice. Yes, yeah. And it also must be a massive team bonding session as well, I imagined being together for all of you to be in together through a race. Yep. In terms of reaching people and channels, I am thinking and correct me if I if I get this wrong, I'm just thinking, you have to sort of strike a bit of a balance there. Because you've got some quite discreet types of people, we've got your engineering types, the clever people that like probably to see your working out, they like the detail, they want the detail. Then you've got other people potentially who aren't so technical. So as you say, more layman's language. You've also got a team that's quite remote in many ways from the crew backup base, but you want them to share the same messages, the same story, the same sense of culture. So in terms of actually physically reaching people in the channels you use, what do you rely on most would you say?

#### **Nicole 21:21**

We, as an organisation really value face-to-face where we can. So a lot of what we do is built around some form of a face-to-face briefing. Yes, so important information, when we've got that to go out will either usually be via Teams live, for example, or in a face-to-face briefing in the factory, or via video with, you know, we'll record videos with the senior leadership team, very short little clips, and we'll put those across you know, across to the organisation. It's then uploading those to as many different channels that PDF so that people can reach them in the way that is most suited for them.

#### **Nicole 22:57**

So for example, we have a weekly email digest, which goes out on a Wednesday, which just pulls together as in a sort of short newsletter format, some of the key messaging from the week. We'll do a race debrief after each of the races. We use digital screens in the factory for those who are not desk based so that they can access information via the screens as well as you know, just as they're working, or as they're passing in the workshops. Uploading

information to our SharePoint intranet for people to just dip in and find it when they're looking for it as well. So I think for us, it's keeping the channels to sort of a core small core of channels. But we haven't gone down the route of creating, you know, an employee app, for example, because we find that actually, people seem to be quite comfortable and our engagement rates are pretty good with the channels that they're used to. And I think taking an organisation that has so much going on through a big change piece, like okay, so we're just putting everything on your mobile phones now. It's not necessarily the right route for us as yet. But yes, what the future will hold.

**Katie 24:07**

I'm interested in your reflection, I just happened to be running a focus group yesterday. And I won't mention the organisation but a bunch of very much operational colleagues, you know, that's how they see themselves, very much working on their feet, and not in front of a screen. And for whatever reason, the change that this organisation has gone through most of the face to face briefings had gone completely. And also their sense of engagement and morale had dipped, and I couldn't help but link the two things in my mind. And I don't know from your experience, whether you feel that's quite accurate, actually. What importance do you place on that face to face interaction, particularly between a colleague, say, and their line manager or their team leader?

**Nicole 24:58**

If you look at Media Richness theory, which is a communication theory, the richer the media, the better the communication will be transmitted. And there is no richer media than having a dialogue. And so where you have complex information that people need to understand and to take onboard, transmitting it via a conversation is going to be the best way, you can then get direct feedback to understand exactly how they've understood the information, you can ask them to back brief, just let me know that you understood, recap to me what what I've just kind of been through with you. It just gives some people the opportunity to you can see on their faces, exactly how they've received the information, you get the body language, you know, you see the shuffling of the feet out the door, and, you know, as to whether they've liked what they heard or not. It's very immediate feedback. And that's where I think the role of the line manager is key. And actually empowering line managers and enabling them to accurately share and discuss and create that dialogue is a really valuable exercise for any organisation. And I think it's so, you know, creating methods and channels where line managers can sit and work with their teams on some of the key messaging. I think, also, within our organisation, in particular, the HR business partners have a really great role to play in. Because we have, within each of our various areas, we have an HR person who's specifically responsible for that area, bringing them into our communications mix as well, and enabling them to become part of the way that we communicate with the rest of the organisation. They sit in meetings of team leaders in operational meetings, and can bring in messaging around some of the key initiatives that are we're running within the company. And again, feedback to us, well, yeah, that didn't go down so well, or they, they've got more questions, and we can then build our communications accordingly.

**Katie 27:05**



I love the idea of a feedback loop as well, and learning and being able to sort of course-correct based on what you're seeing is, is being understood, not being understood, where the questions are, and so on. Yep. Did I hear right, from what you said that it also sounded to me like some of those team leaders, team managers are helping to create the messaging as well? Is that what you said that actually quite involved in the process of what's communicated rather than being told, you know, this is it, off you go, communicate that?

**Nicole 27:39**

It works both ways I think. So when we have got sort of key situations where there's large change programmes, where as an internal comms team, we're working with those line managers, yes, those team leaders on how are we going to best communicate this piece of information to your team. So that's where I think again, internal comms becomes a business partner, we will sit down with the project teams, or we'll sit down with the the line managers of the areas that have got something that they need to connect with, and understand with them how we can support them to communicate that in a way that will be most effective for their teams. Yes. And so you know, for us to be actually out in the in the various areas as an internal comms team, kind of providing some guidance and advice on how we think this would work best, and collaborating with the line managers to actually make that the most efficient way for them as well. I think it's really important.

**Katie 28:37**

That is so helpful, Because we see it time and time again, don't we in Gallagher's State of the Sector survey line managers being this such an important, both audience and channel, but been also an obstacle sometimes or a hurdle, if only we can get our line managers to be better communicators. But everything you've said, I think really shows that where you work with them, understand them, listen to them. They are then absolute partners in the communication process, basically. Yeah, absolutely.

**Nicole 29:09**

You don't just get the feedback then from the people, you know, the audiences you're communicating with. You're getting the feedback before that from their line managers. Heads of departments that you're working with had to say yeah, how do we explain this a bit better? Or how do we ensure people are going to take this on board in a positive way. So working with them really, really closely I think he's really important where we can. So it's a business partnering approach. Yeah.

**Katie 29:35**

I know listeners will be very keen to understand the ingredients of a high performance culture. As you said, you are a high performance engineering organisation at the end of the day. Can you start by talking about the significance of employee voice in creating a high performance culture?

**Nicole 29:55**

One of the things I've done over the last couple of years is dig around in the research a bit when I was doing my masters in particular, and looked at some of the papers on high performance teams. And when you do that, you start to see common characteristics coming

through. When you talk about high performance teams, often sports teams come to mind. And those are great examples of some of these, these characteristics, you know, you look up at Manchester United, or the All Blacks rugby team, or, you know, these kind of like, famously successful teams, which do, you know, I think we're one of them as well.

### **Nicole 30:27**

So, for that fact, one of the main things is how we communicate and what we communicate. And I think the first one really is having that really clearly expressed goal or intent for the organisation. And that's then backed up by having really clearly defined values, which then drive behaviour throughout the organisation. And then following that, you need to have really empowered team members who are placed firmly at the heart of the organisation, and they have a voice and shared responsibility for the outcome of the organisation. That doesn't happen unless you've got open and honest two way communication, right, which is powered by employee voice, and employee voice doesn't happen unless you have high levels of trust and safety within your organisation. And so there's a whole piece around creating that psychological safety within the organisation which enables people to speak openly and candidly sharing their voice. So for me, actually, voice is probably the most important thing, voice and psychological safety become the most important things in actually creating high performance culture. You have to listen to people as much as you speak to them. We need to create an open and honest dialogue. I think, as human beings when we feel that our voice is heard and we understand that somebody is genuinely interested in what we have to say, it takes our connection to that individual or to that organisation to a different level. And it becomes a level where we can trust and we can respect one another, and that's what builds a really cohesive team.

### **Katie 32:18**

It's so interesting, that phrase you use, shared responsibility, and I suppose I'm thinking there will be listeners in other organisations where safety is very important, that will resonate with— that idea that you must take responsibility, you must speak up, that is the heart of your role. Am I barking up the right tree?

### **Nicole 32:42**

No, absolutely. You're completely right. And then we have a real culture around that, we've spent many years now cultivating that culture, and it is it when you're in a safety critical environment, it is so important that anybody who sees something that could cause a problem feels empowered to speak up. Within our ethos, our company ethos, we actually have the line, "we each have a voice and we have a duty to use it." We are obliged. Because it is a safety critical situation, you know, if we have a mechanic at the very circuit, building the car, and he spots something that he thinks may not be quite right with the suspension, but hey, that's not his part of the car. So the people dealing with that part of the car must know what they're doing, and he doesn't speak up, or she doesn't speak up. And that part fails. Yeah. Then eventually, at the end of the day, they could have prevented an issue from happening. Even if it was just a case of saying, I know this isn't my part of the car, but is that right? And that would have prevented an accident, that creating that sort of successful communication really is around I think, enabling people to feel safe to speak up without fear

of repercussion or ridicule or being made to look stupid. And that's something we've been doing a lot of work on within our organisation for a long time now.

### **Nicole 34:13**

I've spoken to some brilliant people from NASA. And I had the huge honour of meeting their flight director Holly Ridings, they have a huge campaign within NASA that came as a direct result of the shuttle disasters where the the Challenger shuttle and Columbia shuttle blew up on on takeoff. They have a huge culture now of speaking up if you see something that's wrong, and we have a little mantra that we just have everywhere that says "see it, say it or fix it." If we see it. We need to say it and then it can be fixed. I was on the London Underground yesterday. If anybody has been on the London Underground will have heard "see it say it sorted." Yes. and a high risk environment where people safety is on the line. If something is suspicious, if something doesn't look quite right, being able to speak up to somebody and say this isn't right. And that goes to also for creating a sense of belonging and a sense of inclusion as well, we can't call out harassment and we can't call out discrimination unless we are able to speak about it, able to actually raise those sort of inconvenient truths as it were.

### **Katie 35:24**

Let's dig in a little bit to psychological safety. Because I don't want, I'm sure listeners won't, but I don't want anyone to think it's simply about everyone being terribly nice to each other. There is a side of psychological safety, where, actually, as you say, you're really encouraging a culture of great candour and openness and honesty, which I'm guessing sometimes might be, as you say, a bit uncomfortable.

### **Nicole 35:48**

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Our CEO, Toto Wolff calls it tough love. It doesn't always feel comfortable. You know, if you've worked on a piece of engineering for the car, if you create a design and somebody comes back to you, so to speak, that's not going to work. You've got to be able to kind of go, oh, okay, right. Great mindset, learn from the mistakes and move on. it's about not being afraid to point those inconvenient truths up to people and to fear and to know that if you do raise a situation, or if you do raise something that you see that you don't think is right, having the confidence to do that without somebody without that sense of, of potentially having negative repercussions, performance review meetings, for example, you know, you might have a difficult piece of feedback, it's learning as an individual how to take that feedback and build your personality or your work or whatever from it. So that we can we can constantly improve.

### **Katie 36:54**

I mean, there's lots of these quotes, isn't there, but these taking feedback as a gift, knowing that we learn probably more, and we'll talk about failure, but we probably learn maybe we know more from failure than we do from success, but we can talk about that. I'm gonna pay devil's advocate slightly here. Because you started off by saying, having a clear goal is really, really important. And I was thinking, is it potentially much easier for an organisation like yours, any F1 team, or even any sports team, because the goal is really clear, there's only potentially it looks like one goal, it's very tangible, obvious, transparent, whether you've hit

that goal or not hit that goal. Can that idea of having what sometimes gets called, doesn't it, the commander's intent, but that kind of single one line of success? Can that work in other organisations where there might be multiple services or multiple products or seven different divisions? Do you believe it could work in that kind of environment as well?

**Nicole 38:01**

Absolutely, yeah, I think it can, I think we are starting to see that as well. We're seeing more and more, I think, purpose driven organisations, which have a common goal. And everyone's clear, you know, that they are working to achieve it. A massive organisation like Google, which has so many different elements to its work and to its organisation, but actually, it has a really simple purpose, which is, I think, something along the lines of, you know, organising the world's information to make it more accessible. Really simple. But so then everybody knows exactly what they're at work to do that day. Yes, ours is really simple as well. It's to build together the greatest team in F1. History. And we do that for our fans, our stakeholders and for each other.

**Nicole 38:55**

So within that everybody knows, that's what we had to do. If we don't win a race today, that's fine, because we will still be building towards the ultimate goal. And it seems like a rather grand statement, but actually, at the end of each season, we can take a step back and go, okay, well, how have we achieved our mission and eventually to get to this vision of building this greatest Formula One team of all time, having that very clear vision that will inspire people to bring best of themselves to work. And the way that we do that within our organisation is we take that vision, and we create an intent each year. So this is what you were mentioning, I think the sort of Commander's Intent, which is a really clear statement of purpose for that year, that links directly back into that vision and mission says, okay, so what do we need to do this year to create our— to achieve our mission or our vision? The vision is, what is it that we're looking to do? The entire so how are we going to do that? Right? That's where I think every organisation can benefit from having a really clear strategy of how are we going to do this? Yes. And that's usually for, within our organisation that's that set at an off site to a couple of couple of days where our senior leaderships or the heads of departments from across all of the organisation, get together with our senior leadership team over a couple of days. And they work out what the strategic intent is for the year. It's then distilled into a really simple statement, which everybody can read and understand well, from there, that then that statement of intent is then taken by each of those departments. And they will create their own departmental intent, which is, what does my department need to do in order to achieve our strategic intent for this year? What are we going to actually do on a, you know, across this year, what do we actually have to change, what we improve? How do we get there? And then from that, as individuals, we can then look at our department intent and our overall company intent and say, okay, what do I need and have to do in order to fulfil that objective? Those would be my objectives for the year.

**Katie 38:55**

Nice.

**Nicole 41:11**

By doing that you create a really clear line of sight for each individual to show what they personally and they've developed it for themselves, yes, they invested in it. Yes, This is, I've told you, this is what I'm going to do, to win, to achieve our department's intent, and ultimately to achieve the intent of the organisation, which will then lead us towards that vision of the future. And I think having that clarity throughout the various different layers is so valuable to just really draw that clear line of sight so that everybody within our organisation knows that this is what I'm doing in order to achieve the vision of the future. Yes. And that when I come in every day, I can look at myself and I can say, Okay, well, where am I on that journey? Yeah, how much? How far have I got along there? What more do I need to be doing to make sure that I can hit what I've said I'm going to do?

**Katie 42:06**

Thank you. I mean, that is a masterclass right there in, in alignment, in creating unity in also creating what I think is so often missed, is the 'so what for me?' What's in it for me? What do I need to do? Yes, I've bought into a grand overarching mission. That sounds very exciting. But Monday morning, what am I doing? And so yeah, that's really brilliant.

**Nicole 42:31**

And for anybody that's looking for the masterclass, in that there's a really good book and the chap called Steven Bungay, who he wrote a book called The Art of Action. So a lot of that philosophy is distilled into that book. So I very much recommend that if people are looking at that particular way of aligning and leading through intent.

**Katie 42:51**

Brilliant, thank you for that. And also, of course, as ever, listeners, the link in the show notes will be available. Let's curve back slightly, let's go back a little bit to, you mentioned earlier, doing some work with the leaders around fallibility, their sort of personal fallibility, and you talked about candour. I raised the question of whether failure is in a weird thing is weirdly useful, and, and I suppose, again, I've said this more than once in this podcast, but seeing failure, not necessarily as the opposite of success, potentially even one step forward towards success in a way, I'd be interested in know a little bit more about what that work was you did around personal fallibility with leaders, because others might be interested in borrowing some of those ideas, and how the organisation views failure in general.

**Nicole 43:42**

We all have a reluctance to admit that we failed. And I think that the higher achiever you are, and the more of a perfectionist you are, which is a large chunk of our organisation, the harder it can be to admit that you don't know something, where you failed in something. So it takes quite a shift in mindset to be able to admit failure, especially when you're a perfectionist, as so many of us are. So it doesn't come naturally. But it's something that I think we've, within the organisation, we've tried to normalise, right? When I say normalising failure, I don't mean accepting it or embracing it in any way. No, not encouraging it. Because obviously we would rather not fail or then then fail. it's more about learning when we don't know something, being comfortable with saying that we don't know, right? Being comfortable with asking questions, having a kind of cultivating that sort of curiosity, which

will enable us to learn the things that we don't know, but then also just have the strength of character and This sort of sense of personal safety to be able to put your hand up and say actually, I messed up. And that is often, as we've talked about, briefly I think before, is where we learn, it's those moments of actually I didn't do very well on that situation. I didn't handle that very well. How can I actually improve that for next time? This part that I've been designing failed on the car, what do I need to do to go back and make sure it doesn't fail again? And those moments of failure are really important. And then something that our late Chairman, the Formula One World Champion, Niki Lauder, always used to say was that the days we fail, are the days that our competitors live to regret. And I think that goes for any organisation, or if a company that's manufacturing a product puts that product out, and it doesn't sell, they learn from that, and they go and improve the product, or they change the product. And it's the same within our organisation as well, you can't continue to do things that are not working. And by improving your sales, you actually improve your product or you improve your organisation. And that then makes it harder for your competitors to, to, you know, shift you out of the market or whatever. Yes, exactly.

#### **Nicole 46:00**

So, as I said, sort of, in order to make sure people can be comfortable with failure, we do have to have this sort of sense of trust and safety within the organisation. And that starts from the top, that starts with I think, with leaders placing their trust in their team members. For example, after each of the race weekends, we provide briefings with all of our team members, where our Technical Director or Chief Engineering Director from the track will talk about how the weekend went, and they will include very sensitive information about what might have failed on the car, what didn't work, what we can, what change for next time, what upgrades we might be bringing for the following race. If that information was to leave our organisation and find its way to a rival team, it can be quite difficult. Yes, you know, so we trust when we're giving that information, that our team members are not going to share it externally. We place that trust in them that that information will be treated confidentially. And I think that goes right, the way down through everything that we do we empower people to do their jobs, we trust that they will go and do the jobs to the best of their ability. And then we need to be able as leaders as well to admit ourselves when we don't know the answer, when we get it wrong. And to use the kind of language that doesn't prevent people from speaking up.

#### **Nicole 47:34**

There's a great book by David Marquet, called Leadership is Language. And it's about how we can actually frame questions, for example, in ways that, you know, don't prevent people from speaking up. So you know, asking a question and then saying, am I right at the end of it, for example, immediately everybody's on the backfoot thinking, oh, come on. I don't want to tell everyone, I can't say he's wrong. Yeah, exactly. So thinking as leaders about purposefully the language we're using when we when we interact with people around fallibility. And then also just not being afraid to share that information, you know, themselves.

#### **Nicole 48:08**

We did a series of articles, which we published in our internal newsletter over a couple of years, with our senior leadership team, right the way from sort of Toto Wolff, through all of our top leaders, Technical Director, everybody talking about failure, we called it Failing to Succeed. And, and it was an article interview, asking them to recount their most painful failure of their lives and talk about how they felt, what the outcome was, and actually what they learned from it. And that was a brilliant little piece and just around you know, that openness, we had Toto Wolff talking about his, you know, failed racing driver career. And the moment where he realised he was never going to make it as a racing driver, how he moved on from that and how he learned from it. We had another story about in one of our senior managers talking about how he failed to lower a sofa out of a window when he was trying to move house and it nearly landed on his wife's head, you know, it was just all these different stories, but all of these moments where these very intelligent, very successful people messed up royally and, and then kind of were strong enough to be able to say, actually, yeah, I didn't do this so well. And this is what I learned. And that just opened the opportunity for people to have those discussions internally. I think.

**Katie 49:32**

You've mentioned there the race debrief, so that would happen after every race, would there be a deep, deep dive into what's going on?

**Nicole 49:40**

Yep. So we do it. We have a sort of a really sort of a regular drumbeat of communication around each of our race events. We start on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening after each race. Our Technical Director writes an email to the whole organisation at the end of each day explaining how the day's running went, where the challenges were, what we hope to achieve, what we're going to do overnight, what changes might be coming to the car... that goes through Friday, Saturday, Sunday. And then on the Monday, after the race, we all gather in the race base, which is the big area where we actually assemble the cars themselves. And our Chief Race Engineer, Andrew Shufflin, will then do a download of everything that's gone on over the race weekend, answer all the questions that come in. So we have people in the room asking questions, we have, for those who aren't able physically to be in the room, will transmit transmitted via Teams live event, with people typing questions in via Teams. Andrew will answer as many as he possibly can during the time that we have for the briefing, and then any that we don't have time for, will provide written answers to as well. So everybody has the opportunity to raise questions, challenge their thinking, and they can do it directly with one of the most senior members of the team. And then later that night, Because we're very aware that we have a night shift, our Technical Director will come back into the factory at about 8:30 in the evening, meet up with the night shift and do the same briefing for them in person. And again, it's that direct face to face interaction, and that two way conversation, which we can have. He knows what they're thinking, because they're gonna say it to him. And he can, you know, and they know what he's thinking. And they can ask those questions. So again, it's all about creating this bond as a team, where anybody can talk to the directors, anybody can talk to the Technical Director, anybody can stop Toto in the corridor corridor and ask him a question. Yeah, that accessibility is really important.

**Katie 51:53**

It's also incredibly inclusive, you're not missing someone out just because they don't happen to be working in the right place at the right time. And that briefing might be happening or thinking about all your audiences. I also like the power of, I suppose I've just been really influenced by this focus group yesterday where people really felt, you know, that they'd become a bit lost in terms of what the vision was for organisation, but just in general information and couldn't understand why things were happening. But I love the way that you're just saying, you're putting it all out there for people to consider, to digest, to ask questions about, you're not deciding what they might be interested in. You're saying this is the information, come and take part. It's here if you want it. That's, I think, quite a powerful idea.

**Nicole 52:38**

I think that's that transparency. It's creating that sense that we're not hiding things from people, you know, if there is, if there is a specific technical development on the car, that we may be work in progress, and we're not quite ready to share it with everyone yet, then that's one thing. And that will be kept quiet within departments until we're at a stage. But once it's out into the manufacturing areas, and people can see it coming through, it will be discussed, and we've got particular developments that we need people to be aware of, then it's all out there on the table.

**Katie 53:13**

Can I ask you a quick question about confidentiality? Because obviously, it's an incredibly competitive world. The Press, I mean, I see it, my other half is an F1 fan, has been for years, and it seems to be broadcast 24/7 on race weekends, you know, the pre qual the qual, the-oh, my goodness, no. So in a way, there must be a hunger for the media to be after every single story they can get their hands on. Do you have when you go through the recruitment stage in your induction processes, really hammer home, the importance of you are going to know things other people are gonna, please don't share things outside the walls? Do you have to hammer that home? Or do you find that actually, the whole culture is very natural that people pick up the importance of what we talk about stays inside the walls of the organisation? I'm just curious how you handle that.

**Nicole 54:05**

Yeah, I mean, it's a learning process and learning journey with it as much as any other organisation I think, you know, and I think as, as the interest in the sport has grown, as you say, the media has become so much more available. I mean, it's just everywhere. Yeah, they've got more column inches that they need to fill, they've got more airtime that they need to fill, so the more stories they can get, the better. And also, we're finding you know, that there's a lot more like we're doing today, there's more podcasts, there's more opportunities for people to engage with the public in that way. It's about taking steps, you know, across each of these new developments to understand how people might be compromised, right, they might be approached, you know, something that might seem quite innocent to somebody. We had an instance you know, somebody's doing, got a podcast, and they were invited on and they said a couple of things and you thought, you know, a great idea to tell the whole world that, you know? Yeah. So it's really just what



again, as internal comms people, we do we do a bit of coaching with people, Okay. So we don't want to prevent them from doing podcasts if they want to, or talking on, you know, or talking at their university or to talk in schools events and things like that. We want them to be able to do that. We want them to be able to have that interaction and to be great ambassadors for our team. But it's a little bit of an education piece, really around, let's talk about this in the world, but let's not talk about the technical side of what we do, because that's where we get our advantage, you know, that we can talk about how we got into the team, we can talk about what we do on a day to day basis, but let's keep the technical stuff quiet.

**Nicole 55:55**

That can even come down to something really innocent, like somebody's taking a photograph of them, a selfie of themselves in their workshop, and, you know, putting it on their social media feed, and then all of a sudden you spot that there's a new car part sitting on the workbench behind them. So it's just so there is a certain amount of coaching we do, there's a certain amount of guidelines that are in place, right? You know, around where people can take photographs, when they can take photographs, what they can tell the world what, what stays within the team, I think everybody realises that it's our competitive advantage that they could be giving away. And that's where it's really important. And that's the message we give people, as you're saying in that onboarding moment is, the more you tell people, the more that they can erode our competitive advantage. We want to win as a team, we need a competitive advantage. So that's where that trust of you don't go and tell people what, what what they don't need to hear comes from.

**Katie 56:58**

Yes, because they are fully invested in the success, they understand what it looks like, they understand their part in it. That makes so much sense. Wow, that is a really powerful culture. At Honda, you were executive assistant to the team principal, Ross Brawn, a legend in the sport. I know, listeners will know that name. I'm guessing I can't imagine a more demanding job at times. With someone like team principal, how do you go about forging a strong trusting relationship with someone who's got so much under the media glare, but also has so much on their shoulders?

**Nicole 57:36**

I would start by saying actually Ross was an utter joy to work with for the whole six years that I was his executive assistant. So he is probably one of the calmest most measured people I could ever meet. He's a deep thinker, and would think deeply and, you know, resolve problems in a very quiet, understated way. And yeah, just a lovely, lovely person to work with. But I think as an executive assistant, you do sort of develop certain skills. It's a skill set that you can take into anything then later in what you do. And I have huge respect for anybody in any executive assistant role, because they are utter champions of everything that the organisation does normally. But for me, I would say that there are some that don't, there are key qualities, I guess there's, you know, being honest and dependable, always saying what you're going to do, because then they know where they stand, right. So that's one of the things obviously, attention to detail of getting things right the first time, so that they don't have to come back to you and say, hang on a minute is this a mistake. And then

just thinking about how you can take as much off of their shoulders as you can. So it's kind of managing their workload for them. And that helps if you know their business inside out. So it's about almost knowing the business as well as they do. So that you can actually take that from them and relieve them of some of the kind of day to day stuff that they just don't need to get involved in. And that helps if you can also, I think, build really great relationships with their teams, so that you become the go to person, people then trying to go to them. So you will, most become they will say EAs are kind of a bit like the gatekeepers, and gatekeepers can do two things, they can either block people from coming in or they can let the right people in at the right time. And I was very much of the mindset that my role was to make sure that my boss was doing the right things, you know, and seeing the right people at the right time. And so you're kind of managing the business a little bit around them. Also just slightly tongue in cheek, but actually being telepathic doesn't hurt really. I think having that little bit of telepathy to kind of get to know what they want before they actually realise that they want it is always a useful skill. That helps, you know, within any business really in any role.

**Katie 59:55**

You get to the point where you can read them. Yeah, yeah.

**Nicole 59:59**

When you work with somebody for a while, you get to know the days where they just need a bit of quiet. And the days where, you know, they want to come out and have a chat. And then you know what— well whatever's going on in their world. So yeah, but it's a brilliant opportunity from my career development. Personally, the two stints that I did as an EA to the team principal has really given me that brilliant insight into those technical and leadership operations within an organisation like ours, Because I think within the comms world, you can become quite focused on comms. But actually having a deep understanding of how your organisation works, and how the leadership operate, is really valuable for an internal comms function. And, you know, being an EA has definitely given me that.

**Katie 1:00:56**

Having been around so many leaders over so many years, this is probably a very unfair question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Nicole, is there one trait, one personal characteristic that you think great leaders tend to have above all others? Or is it simply not that easy to say that?

**Nicole 1:01:15**

I would say if I had to pick one trait, it would be curiosity.

**Katie 1:01:20**

Interesting.

**Nicole 1:01:21**

I think that's the thing that I've seen across all of our senior leaders and people who, you know, I've worked with who have been utter legends in the sport, Michael Schumacher was a classic one, Niki Lauda as well. They were utterly curious and well, around them. They asked

questions all the time. They wanted to know about you, they wanted to know about your, you know, what was going on in your life. And Toto's very similar, you know, he's very curious, he will walk past someone's desk. And what's that, you know, and Ross is the same, you know, would always come in in the morning, how are you doing? How's how's your son, getting to know, people, understanding the people around them asking loads of questions. So I think curiosity met for me probably is one of the key leadership traits that I think is has been kind of common through all of those, those brilliant people.

**Katie 1:02:14**

There's a book that keeps coming into my mind, Nicole, and it's come into my mind more than once when you've been answering questions. And I'm gonna guess you know, this book called *Humble Enquiry* by Edgar Shein.

**Nicole 1:02:26**

I've heard of it. Yes. I haven't actually read it. But I've read a lot of other Edgar Shein stuff. And he is a golden guru in the world of corporate culture. So but yes, it's on my reading list. Definitely. So I'm going to definitely tackle that one at some point.

**Katie 1:02:28**

But he's got exactly what you're saying. He's got a whole sort of thesis in that book about you. You ask before you tell. Yeah. And he exactly, what you said about Colombia, the NASA Colombia disaster, the Gulf BP oil spill, as well. He said, you know, there is now it's fine, lower ranking employees had information that would have lessened those accidents, maybe even prevented them, but for whatever reason, in those organisations at that time, they weren't heard or they didn't speak up. So this *Humble Enquiry*, these asking questions is curiosity. Yes. Oh, so powerful.

**Nicole 1:03:20**

Yeah, absolutely. And that comes through in the book that I mentioned, as well, the David Marquet book around, you know, how you ask questions in a way that doesn't prevent people from answering truthfully, or giving, them giving you the whole picture. So yes, it's very similar that that that train of thought, I think, is really important.

**Katie 1:03:40**

There's no doubt I think motorsport as you mentioned, this is currently, we can see it in general, a male dominated profession. Although you did say that in more support functions, you have a balance the other way. I've heard you say, though, that you have often been the only woman in a room full of 40 men. I just wondered what that feels like, how you handle that on a personal level, has it ever been a problem? And then what's happening I guess, how positive do you feel about the future and greater gender equality going forward, I guess?

**Nicole 1:04:16**

It's slowly slowly inching in in the direction of having a more diverse culture or a more diverse workforce sort of makeup, you know, it has traditionally been a predominantly male environment. For many, many years, you know, there were there were very few female faces

visible. When I, especially when I was, when I started watching Formula One back in the 80s and 90s, you very rarely saw on the TV, a female face. The presenters were all male, drivers are all male, the garage technicians and mechanics and everybody sitting on the pit wall, would all be male, and predominantly white male as well. Yeah. So it wasn't really until you know, sort of mid 90s, that you start to see any female faces on the television. I mean, who weren't press officers. That was the one thing and that's where I think possibly I've always connected Formula One with comms in a female role is so yes, that you see that the PR managers and the press officers at the track and a lot of them were women. That was where you saw them. Otherwise, you never saw them in a technical capacity, that went on for a very, very long time. And certainly when I started, and when I was EA to Ross Brawn, I would be with him in technical meetings and quite often, I'd be the only woman in a room of 40 men. That's not to say that I was feeling discriminated against, no way, I always had a brilliant relationship with all of them. And they were up to lovely people to work with.

**Nicole 1:06:00**

Now, it's nice to now start to see more considering Formula One as a potential career. And I think the biggest challenge is how do you make it more visible to women as a career, we're still not at the stage where we have a lot of senior female team members, we have up to a certain level of department head level, we've got good contingent of females, but the people who are the most visible, the chief C-suite type people, right, they're very, still very male dominated or male, predominantly male. So it's thinking about how we can create those talent pipelines for those really brilliant women to get into those positions. I think the biggest challenge we have is that it's the talent pipeline coming up through the organisation. You know, I think, as I mentioned, we currently I think we have 9% of our technical workforce are female. And that's in the context of the fact that of across the whole of the UK 16.5% of engineers are women.

**Katie 1:07:04**

Wow. So low.

**Nicole 1:07:06**

When when you've got that such a small cohort of women, yes, leaving university or going into engineering or STEM related professions, how do you then peel some of those and get them into Formula One as a profession? Yeah, as opposed to any of the other engineering professions that they might go to. So we've been doing some work on International Women in Engineering day to really highlight Formula One or motorsport as a potential as an engineering career. We work with an organisation called Girls on Track, which is a motorsport UK initiative that takes motorsport into schools and specifically targets in schools to try and encourage consider motorsport as a career and highlights to them all the various different opportunities that would exist within motorsport for, for female, future female engineers. And it's really about kind of building that grassroots talent pipeline and encouraging girls to sort of look at role models who are currently in the sport we have our head of race strategy is a brilliant, brilliant lady called Rosie. And she's the brains behind all of our strategy moves in the paddock. In every race. We're not alone. There are race strategists, female race strategists in other teams as well. We have senior heads of aerodynamics, who are creating the shape and the bodywork of the car and the

aerodynamic efficiency, who are again, brilliant women. And it's, I think about creating those role models and making them visible, so that the young girls coming through, can actually see, well I could be her. And it's the same I think for ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity, we really struggle, I think, as a sport particularly to appeal to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, right? Because our sport sits behind a sky firewall. So unless, you know, unless you pay for Sky TV, you can't watch it. So how do people connect with it if they can't actually see it in their day to day where it's football they can see on any channel, you know? So again, it's thinking about how we can actually have some targeted programmes that enable people who wouldn't ordinarily connect with Formula One to understand a little bit about sport and maybe be inspired to think about a career in it. Lewis Hamilton is brilliant for us in that respect, he has such dedication to raising the aspirations of young people working in from those sort of ethnically diverse or less socially and economically privileged which backgrounds to kind of, to consider Formula One as a potential option and to raise their sights to that level.

**Katie 1:10:06**

Before we head over to those quickfire questions, I guess we should talk a little bit about the season. At the moment, there's this little gap, I believe, before the next race, We've had, we've had a little bit of a break yet, but for fans of F1, who are listening, they're probably be aware that Mercedes are not currently stepping onto the podium, as often, as you have done in many, many previous years. I'm just wondering, is morale ever a problem when the team isn't winning?

**Nicole 1:10:34**

Yeah, it can be because we all want to win. And it's painful when we're not winning. And you have to, you only have to look at Toto's face off race to know that it's not fun. But it is I mean, you know, it's, it's good for the sport, in some respects, when there are multiple teams that could potentially win a race. Yeah, it makes it a little bit more exciting. There's more jeopardy. And it's great for it, you know, to see some of our teams that we collaborate with, such as Aston Martin, doing much better than they've been doing. So there are some positives that we can take away. But yeah, if we want to be winning, and we are going to continue to fight until we get back into that situation where we had our first podium, yes, this year with Lewis in at the last race in Australia. And we brought those trophies back to the factory, everybody now has the photos with the trophy. So, you know, that's how much it means to us when we get one. And actually, I think when we look back over the years, the the most memorable years in our sport, and in our team, are those ones where it's been hard, really, where we've actually had to fight for every single hoisting. I think we just need to keep our eyes on the goal. Yeah, we need to make sure we're doing everything that we can do to enable the team to succeed. I think the one year that always sticks in my mind was the year when Honda pulled out of Formula One. We were the Honda Racing F1 team, Honda pulled out the end of 2008. And over the winter, when they pulled out, we lost our engine, we lost our key sponsor. And we had to try and regroup and figure out what we were going to do next. And Ross Brawn, who was leading the team at the time, I remember he gathered, we gathered everybody in our race base for one of our classic briefings. And he told everybody that Honda had pulled out of the sport and told everybody that, you know, we weren't going to close the doors that we were going to keep going that we were going to



try and get that car to the first race of the following year. We didn't know how we were going to do it yet. And everybody's job was to go away and figure that out. And literally, at the end of that meeting, everybody went back to their desks and started figuring out how we were going to get back to the front again. We had to figure out how to get an engine, we need to know how to get sponsorship, everybody had their role to play to keep that team going. And, and we won both World Championships that year. So oh, there is it's never the end. There's always more we can do. And even in years when we're not actually doing as well as we want. There is always more we can be doing.

**Katie 1:13:22**

But doesn't success tastes even sweeter to catch it from the jaws of almost defeat.

**Nicole 1:13:31**

Exactly, absolutely. I mean, that's why that year was so memorable for me because we were hand to mouth the whole year, we had no idea whether we could get the car to the next race most of the time. And then we actually succeed in that situation. It is so so so worth all the trouble that you've gone through together.

**Katie 1:13:49**

Yeah, that's amazing story. Thank you. Let's, if you've got time, quickly, head over to those quickfire questions?

**Nicole 1:13:58**

Yes, absolutely.

**Katie 1:13:59**

What trait, habits or quality do you possess that has most contributed to your career success, do you think?

**Nicole 1:14:10**

I think I would have to say it's the same quality that I saw on our team leaders that I was talking about earlier. It's that curiosity. I have an innate desire to learn stuff. I think I've reinvented my career a few times now and that's usually been because I've just been drawn to learning something new. And I absolutely love learning. So going back to university to do my Masters was you know, joy for me. I am constantly nose in a book or listening to podcasts or finding out more about what I can do. And again, I think that comes back to again, you know, my kind of curiosity about the world as well. Yeah, so um, so I'd say that's probably my main trait.

**Katie 1:14:55**

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

**Nicole 1:15:03**

...the bedrock for high performing teams.

**Katie 1:15:07**



Fantastic. We've mentioned a few books in this show, Nicole, but is there one that you think all comms professionals should read?

**Nicole 1:15:17**

There are a couple actually, I know, I know I've mentioned some already that one of the ones that I read when I was doing my internal comms diploma, which really stuck with me, it's a book called Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together by a chap called William Isaacs. I don't know if it's still in print, because I know I've got a secondhand copy of it, but hopefully it is, but it's a brilliant book about how to create open and honest, two way communication within organisations. So really creating dialogue that enables companies and people within those companies to think together, as opposed to thinking separately and then trying to communicate it. And then I think the second one, which really stands out for me is and has sort of influenced a lot of what I do is Amy Edmondson, so The Fearless Organisation. And that really, I mean, Amy is the leading voice in the concept of psychological safety, and how we can encourage that culture where people feel safe to speak up and raise those inconvenient truths without that fear of repercussions. So how we can do that as an organisation is encapsulated really neatly in that book.

**Katie 1:16:23**

Lovely, thank you. And finally, we give you a billboard, a bit of a metaphorical billboard, I guess, in a way for millions to see and you can put on that any message you like, Nicole, what are you going to put on your billboard?

**Nicole 1:16:37**

I have a postcard in my office, which has definitely been a resonating comment for me in my life. And that is "always choose the adventure." Because I think that there are so many things that I would not have done in my life if I hadn't chosen the adventure, you know, I'd never have gone to Russia to live there. I'd have never studied Russian in the first place from scratch at University. I'd have never met my husband, my ex husband, I'd never have gotten to Formula One. So there are there are a lot of things that I would not have done it if I hadn't just been a little bit adventurous.

**Katie 1:17:17**

I love it. Nicole, This has been a wonderful conversation. Thank you so much for your time.

**Nicole 1:17:23**

It's been brilliant. Thank you so much for inviting me, I've had such fun.

**Katie 1:17:31**

So that is a wrap for another episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, I would be incredibly grateful if you could give us a rating on Apple Podcasts. That way you are giving the algorithms a little nudge and helping your fellow IC folks find this show. Thank you very much. You might also want to subscribe, we have some great guests still coming up in this season.

**Katie 1:17:58**



For the books that Nicole and I mentioned, head over to AB's website [abcomm.co.uk/podcasts](http://abcomm.co.uk/podcasts). And you will find the transcript, the show notes, and indeed our entire back catalogue of 80 episodes there. My thanks to Nicole, our producer John Phillips, our sound engineer Stuart Rolls, and my lovely colleagues back at AB. Thank you for keeping this show on the road. And finally, my heartfelt thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. This show would be nothing without you. Until we meet again, lovely listeners do stay safe and well. And remember, it's what's inside that counts.

#### **Katie 1:18:47**

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 sign up 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.