



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 10

### Episode 86 – Shil Shanghavi, *How to crush your next public speaking gig*

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#### Katie 0:00

Hello, and welcome to the Internal Comms Podcast with me. Katie Macaulay. If you are listening to this show because you work in internal communication, then congratulations. Congratulations on your excellent choice of career. From everything I've seen over my 33 years in business. I am left in no doubt. Excellent organisational performance is rooted in excellent internal communication. What we do matters. And in today's business world, I think it matters now more than ever.

All that said there is a lot of pressure on internal comms folks right now. Often the demands and expectations placed on the clients I speak to are growing. While their resources, their budgets are shrinking. And often there is no team at all. You may be a team of one inside a busy organisation, looking after the entirety of internal communication.

Whatever your challenge is, as an IC practitioner, this is the show for you. Every fortnight I sit down with a leading light from the world of communication, business, and academia to tease out smart thinking, fresh ideas, a new tactic for improving the way we communicate at work.

My guest today is Shil Shanghavi. It was a mutual friend who introduced me to Shil and Zora I am very grateful for you making that introduction. As soon as I began reading Shil's bio, I was hooked. Let me explain why. Shil is a public speaking specialist, storyteller, and a highly regarded speaker coach. Indeed, he is head of speaker coaching for TEDx, Perth. He's gained a worldwide reputation for his captivating keynote speeches, and for the way he coaches others to speak, helping all kinds of individuals from business leaders and other executives to students, face their fears, control their emotions, and form a genuine bond with our audiences.

But here's the thing. Growing up, this is the very last profession anyone would have expected Shil to pursue. I am delighted that when Shil recently flew into the UK, from his home in Australia, he made the time for this in person interview, because it was easily one of the most moving, inspiring, thought-provoking conversations I've had for some time.

This is a conversation about many, many things: about resilience, vulnerability, emotional connection, honing your craft and how to do that. And about turning what the world might see as your biggest weakness into by far your most sought-after strength. I loved everything about this conversation, and I hope you do too.

Shil, welcome to the Internal Comms Podcast. It's a privilege to have you here in person.

#### Shil 4:30

It's a privilege to be here in person. We met four months ago through Zora, a mutual friend



and connection. We've had a few online conversations so to be here in flesh in person feels surreal.

#### **Katie 4:41**

I'm super excited about this conversation. I really am. We have recorded I think it's 85 episodes of this show. I'm looking at my producer John here and he's putting the thumbs up. You are the first guest in 85 episodes – when I've said I'll send you a discussion guide, just to give you an idea of the kinds of questions that I'm going to ask you to put you at ease. You're the very first guest that said to me, do you know what you can prepare your discussion guide? Don't send it to me. Why did you say that?

#### **Shil 5:17**

Three reasons. One, I'd like my responses to be genuine and on the spot. I feel if I have time to think about them, they're scripted answers. And scripted answers aren't conversational, too. Having conversations where I'm unprepared for the questions, challenges me and further builds and develops interviewing conversational skill sets. And three, the segways can be organic and go off in different directions. And I'd like to do that. And I feel if it's scripted, then in my mind, there's a set way to take a conversation. And I'd like to avoid doing that.

#### **Katie 6:05**

And just going off on a segway there. We talk a lot; we hear a lot about authenticity. I was reading the other day, a coach saying we've got to tell leaders to drop the script – that sort of inherently implied in the answer you've just given me dropped the script.

#### **Shil 6:21**

Drop the script. The more time we have to think about a podcast interview or a conversation like we're having today... scripted answers mean we've pre planned it, and we may not get the golden information, which is lying there. It's deep and it's there. Whereas putting people on the spot, or so to speak, means there's a better chance of getting more emotion, more vulnerability, more fear, yes, more anxiety. Not that we want to make people feel anxious or under pressure. However, there is more chance of getting true emotion out, rather than scripted emotion, choreographed emotion.

#### **Katie 7:08**

We're going to talk I think, in this conversation quite a bit about fear and anxiety. But I want to take you back, not quite to the beginning. But I understand around the age of 10—if we'd have been at school together, the very last occupation that I would have thought you would be doing at any point is public speaking, coaching leaders and other people, businessmen and women in how to speak. Can you share with us why that was probably the least likely occupation for you.

#### **Shil 7:40**

The reason is, because ever since I was 10, I've had a crippling stutter. One of the earliest memories I have was, I was in my school playground, playing marbles. And I used to love

playing marbles for two reasons. One, I was good at it. And two, I didn't have to speak to play marbles. Playing a game of marbles in the playground with my friends and one of our schoolmates asked if he could join the game. I got excited because he wanted to join the game. So, in my excitement, I tried explaining how the game works. And I stuttered uncontrollably. And in front of me was a big kid and he gets up. And in Swahili, I'll translate, he asks me, What's the matter with you? You're a stupid boy. And he punches me. And I remember seeing black and stars because of how hard he punches me and then he tells me to go and sit by myself in a corner. And all the other kids were laughing at me. That's one story out of hundreds that stuttering has done to me. So, the reasons speaking is an unusual career—the one career that nobody believed I could do is because I stutter. And it's been with me since I was 10 years old.

### **Katie 9:21**

Do you have any idea why it suddenly came upon you? Because I think that was what surprised me about your story was that I'd assumed you'd always had a stutter. Can you think of any reason.

### **Shil 9:34**

My parents and I – and I will stutter on this show. There are times I'll forget to do things and I'll stutter. My parents and I have looked into it. We don't know why it started. It could be several reasons. Why? We don't know. Yeah. I've looked into why people stopped her and what drives it in there has no answers. However, from the research I've done, I learned that there's a vessel in our brain which pumps blood, and it has such stature as a brain. It pumps excess blood, oh causes an imbalance in the brain. This is my understanding of it. And when that happens, that imbalance affects the part of our brain which is responsible for speech. And that results in stuttering.

### **Katie 10:29**

Just to educate people a little bit further on this because I think it's worth finding out a little bit more, even if we don't have a stutter... or we have friends. I have a son that has a stutter. You have, I believe both blocked and prolonged stutter. Is that right? There are three types of stuttering.

### **Shil 10:47**

Yeah, I have a block... block, I have a prolonged stutter. And then I have the elongated where it's, I get hit with all three. I'm comfortable with it. I laugh about it. This is how I feel about it. However, millions of people don't feel as comfortable with stuttering, and we manage it. There is no cure for it. We manage it.

### **Katie 11:23**

Let's talk about the management of it. Because when we spoke previously, you started to describe to me what you have to do to control your stutter. And I was just blown away. It's hard enough to come up with a coherent sentence when you don't have all that going on in your mind. Can you share with us some of the techniques that you use?

**Shil 11:44**

Sure. Let's start with the most accessible technique. So, I've learned systematic breathing, and I breathe consciously and systematically. I take a breath before any sentence, and I always speak as I exhale. And that slows me down. Slowing down has taught me how to mind map. I can see the words and the sentences I'm approaching. Imagine a runway: I can see what I'm approaching, and I can sense the stutters in my sentences. And what slowing down teaches me to do or enables me to do is swap words and sentences and change the construction.

**Shil 12:30**

So, imagine Tetris. There's Tetris in my brain with the sentences I'm approaching. Because if I feel there's a horrible stutter with combination, I swap it with something else. To further manage that, I've learned to speak to house music. I'm a progressive house music fan. House music plays out what's known as a 'four on the floor' beat. I programmed 160 house music tracks in my head, and I memorise the time signatures of all those tracks. So, depending on the tempo of conversation, if we're in a slow conversation, I would speak to Rūfūs Du Sol, to 'Surrender', which is a slower beat. If we're having a mid-tempo conversation, I would speak to kind of Catania, who's an Argentinian DJ. Or if we're going fast, then I'd go to Plump DJs, which isn't progressive house that's breaks.

However, I can still apply the beat to breaks. So, speaking to signatures gives me a beat. However, that doesn't solve everything. So, to solve the unavoidable stutters, I create a neurological distraction in my brain. And to do that, I tap my fingers. So, as I'm seeing the Tetris map, and I'm programmed the music, and I'm speaking to signatures. If it gets bad, I tap my fingers, which distracts my brain, and I tie my finger tap to the signature on playing. That gives me fluency.

**Katie 12:30**

OK. Can I just say at this point to anyone who is frightened of getting up on stage and speaking. Having heard that, what are you worried about? That said, public speaking is still probably if you ask people one of their biggest fears, I imagine. You've gone on to coach people in all of this. Is there a common obstacle thought that goes through people's minds that's unhelpful? A common blocker or barrier in your experience. Or is it every individual is unique?

**Shil 14:49**

Everybody feels the same blocker in different versions in different ways. For example, if I'm working with somebody delivering a TED Talk, their blocker is, 'I'm an expert in my field, people aren't going to respect me for the message I'm delivering in my TED Talk.' If I'm doing work with a university student who's going to pitch an idea, their challenge is, people aren't going to like the idea, they're not going to respect me. So, within that band of 'People will like my message', 'People will respect me', 'I'll embarrass myself' – the severity of that fluctuates, depending on the experience, the seniority of the person I'm dealing with, and



then the size of the crowd affects a lot of people. I personally am more conscious of a smaller group but where there's 500 people in the room: bring it on. Yeah, I'm still nervous. However, smaller groups mean I can see everybody's eyes. I can feel more emotion than I can with 500 people.

So, as we grow, and we become more mature, and we become adults, ego kicks in. We're more aware and more conscious of ourselves and others in that ego. And that consciousness is what impacts us when we're speaking in public. Because when we're kids, we have no problem standing up. And dribbling, excusing, yeah, generalisation. We can try to ride a bike, we fall over, we don't care, we start again. Whereas when we're adults, if we do that, we're more conscious that people are judging us, and it could be embarrassing for us. And then the higher we climb in our careers, there's more responsibility and pressure on us and when we make mistakes in speaking and everybody does - the more we grow in our career, the more we feel that and put pressure on ourselves. And then if we're a type A person – dominant personality, high performance – we feel it even more because we don't want to embarrass ourselves, do we?

#### **Katie 17:12**

It's interesting that you start in a psychological place with coaching, which is the smartest place to start. I think many years ago, and we are going back decades, when I first started in this profession, it was all about rules: move your arms less move them, shorten the bullet points on your slide, don't have slides, blah, blah, blah. Whereas now the smart advice is to think about what's actually going through your mind about yourself by the sounds of it.

#### **Shil 17:39**

All of that is applicable as that impacts our delivery. However, we can't deliver if there's a psychological blocker. And you mentioned how we position our hands and how we gesture. We can't over-coach gestures. Because then it's robotic. And if we gesture is even a quarter of a second off, it feels as though there's a lag. Imagine when watching a movie and the subtitles are off with the lips. We can see it. That's how gestures can be if they're over coached. So, I encourage people to gesture the way you would when you're talking to your friends. Because it's a natural way to do it.

I remember there was a TED talk with a chef – I coached a chef around his talk. He picked up a vegetable and he caressed it. And then he turned the vegetable. Now, that we coached, because there was a specific action to do. However, the rest of it, what I encouraged him is when you're in the kitchen, and you're delivering a masterclass, how would you do it? Do that? Because over-coaching gestures means there's something else to think about, which adds more pressure. So, let's eliminate that and get people feeling more comfortable.

#### **Katie 19:02**

It's interesting, you talk about slowing down. When I listened back to some of the early episodes of this show, the thing I've changed the most is slowing down. And one of the pieces



of coaching advice I was given around public speaking was one thought one breath, which sounds a little bit like what you're talking about.

**Shil 19:25**

Do you know why we speak fast? Do you know how fast the human brain thinks in words per minute?

**Katie 19:36**

It's got to be low hundreds, I would think. So, I'm going to say 200.

**Shil 19:43**

On average, we think at a rate of five to 800 words per minute. Wow. Let's keep that thought. How fast do we speak in words per minute?

On average, about 120 to 180, 180 being faster. So, our thoughts are so much faster so we're trying to keep up with them. And when we try to keep up with our thoughts, we speak faster. Breathing and slowing down, enables us to control our thought process, so that we have more time to catch up with them. And pausing is a fabulous way of doing it. When we feel under pressure, when we feel stressed, what happens: we panic, our mind starts to race. And a lot of us are uncomfortable with silence. It's a difficult thing to stop and be at peace with not saying anything. However, it builds anticipation, doesn't it?

**Katie 20:47**

I also think it's the sign of confidence as well.

**Shil 20:50**

It is. Taking ownership of the moment. I was presenting at a conference in Adelaide, and I had a stutter 15 minutes into my presentation where I lost control of everything. And so, I stopped, got myself a drink, took a breath, paused, and it felt like an eternity. It was horrible. Now watch the video back and it was 52 seconds. That's almost a minute. And it felt awful because I thought 'I have to say something, I should say something.' However, the room said to me afterwards, the anticipation you built in that moment was fabulous. And they came along the journey with me. Gave them time to think and digest about everything I'd said. It gave them time to think of their own ideas, because I was incorporating story sharing into my presentation. Gave them time to think about their thoughts. Which means when we started, we incorporated more story sharing, they had time to think and get more comfortable with themselves in the room. So, it was fabulous. However, we had to go through that I had to go through that awkwardness of almost 60 seconds of silence.

**Katie 22:21**

Let's talk about story sharing. When we spoke before you made a distinction between story sharing, and storytelling, we hear a lot about storytelling. Can you explain what you mean by that distinct?

**Shil 22:34**

Yeah. Most of us are familiar with storytelling. And storytelling is a TED Talk. Person on stage, delivers a talk. And it's a one-way conversation. It's a one-way talk. Unless that talk has been built with the modalities right or left brain thinking, broad spectrum thinking – there's a number of factors which go into that, people can switch off if the storyteller isn't an engaging teller, because it's a one-way conversation. It doesn't encourage conversation from the audience either. So, it's a one-way keynote. Story sharing is where we encourage a two-way conversation. And the shift is that in story sharing, we build comfort. We build trust through our language. And we give people permission to share parts of themselves and their own stories. So, an example of it is what the two of us had in our first conversation if you recall. That was a conversational form of story sharing. Where I shared three things about me. You shared three things about you. That was a conversational shift in story sharing. I hope that makes sense.

**Katie 23:54**

It totally makes sense. But for listeners, I want to just dive into that a little bit more. So obviously, like, everyone, I guess I'm invited to meetings a lot. You're in and out of Zoom or Teams calls or whatever. And there is that moment when you don't know someone very well or you're meeting them for the first time, where you might say, 'Hi, how are you?' And it's just a rote answer. 'I'm fine', or whatever. And I think what you did, which was so clever, you told me three things about yourself. And these had nothing at all to do with work, your job, your career. And then after those three things you asked me, and of course you'd set me up brilliantly. There was no way I was going to start to talk to you about boring old work. I ended up telling you about all kinds of things. I'm sure. It was so smart. It worked on so many different levels. It created an immediate bond, I think between us. The other thing, which I love, is that your skill and what you do every day in terms of a job, you beautifully illustrated with your actions rather than telling me. You showed me how it works. Isn't that the smartest?

**Shil 25:12**

You mentioned the word bond? When we share stories, people are 22 times more likely to remember us. And the depth of conversation increases by 35%. What happened to our first conversation? It was a memorable conversation and ended up with me being a guest on your show. And I would encourage anybody who listens to this – don't be afraid to share personal stories.

So, for example, when I'm in conversation with somebody I meet for the first time, and they'll ask me, 'Tell me about yourself.' Our brains default to what we do professionally. However, three examples of things I say are: I'm a Manchester United supporter, I collect sneakers, I'm a wildlife enthusiast. They don't have anything to do with work. And I'll pick three other things for the next person I speak to. Most of the time it works. I have had conversations where I've had nothing in return. And I've learned to hold that space, because it's up to us, if we invite it, we have to hold that space in return if the other person is not comfortable. And I'll let them go with their conversation, which most times ends up into a work conversation.

However, even in the work conversation, I look for ways to share a personal touch to it because creates bond, yes. However, with some people, it doesn't work. And that's okay.

### **Katie 26:51**

Talk to me a little bit about how your sessions work where you're doing that kind of short story sharing in the round with a group of people. Because I'm imagining a group of fairly senior leaders, for example, might immediately think, 'Oh, this feels a bit uncomfortable. This feels not something I'm particularly used to.' How do you make it work? What are the benefits of it. Just bring it to life for us.

### **Shil 27:17**

I never start any of my sessions with what my professional credentials are. Ever. If I'm introduced in that way, great. Every workshop or keynote, or MC event that I deliver, I use the primacy effect. Every introduction is confronting, it's shocking. It's a way to get people's attention. And through that I build three things into my language. I build guiding language. I build empathetic language. And I build a clarifying language. By doing that, I make the room feel more comfortable. So, an example is: I switch the language from I in me to we and us as quickly as I can because that builds empathy. I then use my body language and I walk into the room, I'll sit on people's tables, rather than standing on stage, I'll sit and I'll have conversations. And I'll always share bits about myself, to encourage others to do the same thing. It always starts uncomfortable, particularly for the senior groups, because it's not something they're used to.

By the end of every session every single time, people are more comfortable with sharing themselves a challenge or a thought or an experience, personally. What happens is the room get to know each other, even though they work together, on a deeper and more personal level. And they leave the room feeling more connected as a team. But to do that is a combination of language, story, nonverbal communication, even the way I dress. I think carefully about the way I dress. I have tattoos. Some they don't like tattoos, so I'll cover up. However, I've learned to keep them open because there are stories behind each one. And if we story share, I may start with stories around what's in my tattoos. These aren't ink which I've had for fun. Well, it was painful and fun. However, there are stories built into everything.

So, I consider everything and then we consider, what's the rooms 'umwelt' – umwelt is a concept which means environment. It's through a book I read called An Immense World. In that room, is anybody colourblind? Is anybody hard of hearing? Is anybody neurodiverse or non-binary? How am I adjusting my language and my slides and my demeanour to accommodate for every person in the room? And these are the things I look at to foster story sharing.

### **Katie 30:10**

You're reminded me of another conversation that we had where we were talking about one of your keynotes. And I'm sure you said, for a good minute, maybe longer, sometimes, you get up on stage, and you don't say anything. How does that work?



**Shil 30:27**

I don't say a word. My signature talk is called 'Storyteller'. That's the name I've given it, it changes for the audience I'm presenting to. I get on stage and through nonverbal communication, firstly, I asked the room to shut their laptops and turn their phones over. And I do that through gestures, which the listeners can't see now. I'll stand there and look around the room and I'll do this... And I'll wait. Stand there quietly until everybody's done it. And then I'll do this... And then everybody stands up. By then we've gotten to 25 or 30 seconds, I'll then play a video, which goes for 42 seconds, and it's a confronting video. As you can see, now time is adding up past a minute. Once the video ends, I'll put the clicker down, and I'll put it down so people can see, walk back into the middle, and pause for 10 seconds before I start speaking. So, there's a minute to a minute and 20 seconds where I don't say a word.

**Katie 31:38**

But you've completely captured your audience.

**Shil 31:40**

I have. And I've watched the video of me going through this many times to dissect how long I pause for, why I pause, how I put my clicker down, how I move. Because all of that shapes Umwelt – all of that shapes, how are we delivering my message. For example, excuse me for doing this nonverbal communication, we do this, we all know what it means.

**Katie 32:09**

This is a rude sign we're seeing now!

**Shil 32:13**

We do this we know what it means – thumbs up. We don't have to say things for people to interpret our message. We put our hands behind our backs, in our pockets or cross, they all give a message. And because our audience feels and sees and thinks in different ways, me crossing my arms as an example could be interpreted in a number of ways by different people. So, we have to be conscious.

**Katie 32:41**

You're also reminding me as well that the audience has the body language. So, I don't know if you've noticed this. And I've been on several stages over the years, as you say, big and small audiences. There's a moment when you come on, I think, where the audience is nervous for you. They want to be entertained. They want it to go well. Most audiences are with you. They're on your side. And when you start in a very confident, calm way, you can almost feel the audience relax and the shoulders drop, because they think 'Oh, I'm in safe hands.' DO you get that sense?

**Shil 33:24**

I do. I do. My most daunting speaking engagement by far, was in February this year. It was in front of an audience of 300. And it was seven minutes of stand-up comedy. I'm going to add more to this. Can I?

**Katie 33:45**

Yes, please do.

**Shil 33:46**

We've heard of TED Talks? Yes. This is called Todd Talks. Todd is part of Fringe. It's one of the most popular comedy shows at the Fringe Festival. I've been applying for two years. And they only accept professional stand-up comedians. I got accepted. And they said to me, The events in a week. And I think shit! So, the way it works is: It's a Saturday evening, people are boozed, they've had a fee, they've paid 15 pounds a ticket, they're expecting comedy. Seven performers. You stand on the red dot and the MC asks the audience for a word. In my case, the word was 'tofu'. And the MC says, 'Here to tell us about how to build a global empire with tofu, please welcome Shil.'

**Katie 34:45**

Oh, my goodness.

**Shil 34:46**

You've got 10 seconds. You get on the red dot. And while you're improvising and presenting and doing stand-up comedy, slides appear behind you, which you have to incorporate.

It was terrifying. However, the audience are there because they want you to succeed. People want you to do well, right. And they know that this is hot. This is difficult. I have seen people fumble and crash and burn, deliver terrible performances. However, that's not the feeling we give. The feeling is even if it's terrible, we're here for you.

**Katie 35:33**

That is taking public speaking to an extreme sport level. The thing about all of this is, it builds confidence presumably? When you've done something like that, you've got it in your back pocket. I have done it like that. I have done it in that way. You still must get very nervous I'm guessing when you get up on stage.

**Shil 35:56**

I'm nervous about this. When you invited me on this, I was hit with nerves. Nerves are normal. Yeah, I've learned to manage them. And I embrace them. Every conversation, every meeting, every presentation, no matter the size, I feel nervous and uncomfortable with it.

**Katie 36:18**

I think that's an important message to get across. I get very, very nervous before speaking and people are always very surprised because they can't see the nerves. But I'm feeling it. And the advice I was given was, don't try to fight them. You're using that nervous energy on

stage in a good way. So just as you say embrace it. Although I think there's a few helpful tips I was given along the way. So, one of them was and you do this very well and you've kind of touched on it already – your presentation starts long before you get on the stage. Wyes the probably on you as soon as people know who you are. The way you're sitting, smiling, how you get up how you get on the stage. I'm guessing that's all part of it.

### **Shil 37:04**

I'm presenting in Thailand in October. My presentations already started. My plan is already underway. I was booked for Thailand in June. The moment the booking was approved, my presentation started, and part of that strategy is a LinkedIn content, so people can see my style and my messages. I also have an AV sheet which goes out to all organisers. It's got a drawing of the stage, and how I request the setup to be. It's got my MC intro with specifically the words to use so that it's easy for the organiser to introduce me. I look at everything so that when I'm in the room I'm as in control of my umwelt as I can be. Because the more control we have, the more comfortable we are, the more comfortable we are, the more comfortable our audience feels. That starts long before stage time.

### **Katie 38:09**

Such good advice. The other thing you said a few moments ago, you said, 'I watched myself back.' I've trained myself to listen back to the shows, even though I find it really uncomfortable. And most of the time I'm spotting the questions I didn't ask, all of the missed opportunities. How important is it to do that homework as well.

### **Shil 38:31**

Crucial. It is cringe worthy. The voicemail on my phone is my wife's voice because she has a lovely British accent. I have an Australian accent or so I'm told actually, I don't know what I like. And I don't like the sound of my own voice. Whereas my wife has a British accent and I love how she sounds. So, she does my voicemail for me. I've watched 1000s of hours of myself and I'm now more comfortable with it. However, when we watch ourselves, then we have to be critical, especially if you want to get to a level of speaking where we're paid to do it. So, I encourage anybody who's looking to get paid as a speaker, as a facilitator, watch yourself. And one thing I do is I'll watch the video with no volume. Just play the talk in my head and then I'll watch for my body language. And I'll ask myself, why my hands doing that when I'm saying this. And I'll sync the two together because how important is the nonverbal communication. So, I'll watch it back for no volume. And that sucks. It's difficult to watch.

### **Katie 39:55**

Super smart thing to do. One of the questions I wanted to ask was about networking. Because we met through a mutual friend, as you said, I've heard you talk a lot about the importance of asking for a recommendation, for example. So, using your network... but when you talk to people about networking, certainly when I think about it, my heart sinks. I think about that long walk across the room to introduce myself to somebody, and it's just an awful thought. In the digital world I guess it's more than that. Can you give us I think you've got three 'C's to networking, if I've done my research, right. But talk to us about how to network.

**Shil 40:36**

I created a concept called 'story book'. Story book combines storytelling into networking. So we make the process less daunting, more conversational, and more enjoyable. The three 'C's are: comfort, capital, and curiosity. Comfort is about avoiding comfort questions and comfort responses. For example, a comfort question is, 'What do you do?' That says, standard icebreaking question or 'What brings you here today?' Instead, think of non-comfort questions which prompt story. For example, I was at a networking event, and I was in standing in a group and the gentleman in this group I was standing with was wearing a blue ring.

So, when I sensed a break in conversation, my non-comfort question was, 'I like your ring. What's the story behind that?' He has a blue ring because he's a Chelsea supporter. Where do you think our conversation went? Or comfort responses when somebody asks you, 'What do you do?' 'Or are you busy at the moment?' We respond with a flat out, 'I'm so busy, I'm inundated'. Let's think strategically about how we respond to are you busy? Or what do you do? So that's the comfort element.

The curiosity element is around how we introduce ourselves in our 62nd elevator pitch. Most of us do the same thing. We start with our name, talk through our credentials. And then we end with, 'I've got 10 years of experience. If you'd like to have a chat, please come and see me.' Let's flip the narrative. Let's start with a story and end with our name. Because we want people to remember our name and who we are, and story builds that connection.

And capital is an expansion on the saying 'It's not what you know, it's who you know'. We've heard of that. I believe it's not what you know, or who you know, it's who knows you. We may have 1,000 people in our network, if they don't know us, it's difficult to get into places. Whereas when we get known for who we are in what we do, we're building capital. And one way to do that is through our social media, through asking our network for introductions, however, that can only happen once our network know us and like us and trust us. Otherwise, they're not going to recommend us to people. So those are the three 'C's. Comfort, curiosity, and capital.

**Katie 43:26**

You've got a really captivating, engaging feed on LinkedIn, lots of walking and talking videos. I just wonder what the strategy is behind that. Is it really thought out and planned? Do you do it almost organically without thinking about it? I'm asking for a friend – and I'm not I'm asking for me because I think so much about what content I'm putting out by the time I've thought it all through. I've lost the impetus in the moment, what would be your advice.

**Shil 43:53**

Now it's more organic because I still get nervous doing it. I did it this morning. In my bag I've always got my selfie stick and my microphone. Always, wherever I go, because I may feel or



experience or hear something that I want to talk about. And I'm now comfortable enough to pull out my selfie stick, plug my microphone in and say something on camera for 60 seconds. Once we've done it 100 times, we build lines in our head, and we can recycle the lines in our head and adjust them to the moment we're in. For example, after our podcast chat today, I'll be taking a selfie video of us three in this room, and it's something I don't want to overthink. It will be an organic 60 seconds where I'll ask you both a question and we leave it there. The reason I do it is because few people do that.

Few people walk the street with a microphone. As a speaker, I want clear sound, hence the mic. I turn the camera so that I don't see myself on the side of the camera, because there are four cameras on the back end. Whereas on the front, I can see myself, which is distracting and there's only one camera. If we flip it over, we can then upgrade the video to 4k. It's sharp picture, clear audio. And as we're walking and talking, it gives our audience a 360 perspective of where we are. What it also does is it continually trains our speaking ability because we're public speaking. So, we're continually sharpening that skill of being comfortable with people around us.

#### **Katie 45:50**

We at AB used a couple of your videos to demonstrate to a client how they start doing videos. They're getting very intelligent, smart people in front of a screen looking face on and delivering a scripted few lines. And we showed them your videos. The reason we loved it is that you can't actually really deliver something terribly scripted. That way you don't have your notes in front of you, you've got to look for a car that might be coming or someone who might be crossing. I really don't want to use the word authenticity because I think it just gets overused. But there is a degree to which you come across as a much more real, genuine, believable person that way as well.

#### **Shil 46:34**

Thank you. My intention is to always be that way. But we spoke about this authenticity costs. To be truly authentic... for example, walking, talking selfie videos, is nerve wracking. People watch you, people are wondering what you do, you're walking with a selfie stick in your hand, it's an uncomfortable thing to do. So, to be truly authentic there's a cost which comes with that. And I always ask myself, 'How much are you prepared to do for this, because I'm uncomfortable.' I will start her people will look at me, people will judge me. However, I'm prepared to take that because I'd like to represent me the way I am not the way others expect me to be.

#### **Katie 47:26**

I just really want to repeat that authenticity costs. And for me, I've just had a massive light bulb go off in my head. I think that's why I've hated that word up till now, because no one has really explained that it costs. So, there is a vulnerability attached to authenticity,

#### **Shil 47:46**

When somebody stands on stage, whatever the size of the audience, and wants to be authentic about their message, and stands up for what they believe in, they'll upset people,

there's a cost with that. The business you run has a set of values. You may be approached by a client who's offering a substantial fee. However, if the values don't align, you walk away and authenticity costs. So, there are a number of ways to look at this. However, I believe to be truly authentic there's a cost which comes with that. Are we prepared to wear that cost and stick to what we believe in and do what we believe in?

**Katie 48:29**

Is there also part of this work, which is changing the face of leadership? And that might seem like a very grand question, I guess. But we've got a notion of leaders that are in control that know the answer to everything that get it right first time. And yet are we moving to an era where the absolute opposite is true? And that we want our leaders to be themselves, we want them to be vulnerable. We want them to be human, we want them to admit to mistakes. We don't even mind if they fail occasionally. Would that be fair?

**Shil 49:05**

It's fair. My keynote in Thailand is on this subject. It's around how to build relationships through story... build conversations through story and my messaging is going to be around this: let's stop with the scripted financial updates. Whilst they're important, people connect through story, people connect through vulnerability which is another word that that is overused, is another word that... it's become a trend, being vulnerable, being authentic, being genuine, being compassionate. These are all words which have become a trend, certainly in Australia. They're on company websites, they're used a lot in conversations. However, I always ask 'Do you know what that means and are you prepared to be that in do that?' Another one is the word passion. Because if they're willing to suffer for it and experience sleepless nights, and dark moments in difficult days and still love it, you're passionate about it.

**Katie 50:18**

That's really interesting. And this whole conversation is making me think that what we think are our weaknesses, our nerves, our sleepless nights our questioning ourselves... actually, we need to see that as part of the solution that actually is helping to drive us and make us more than we are. It's not what we should be hiding and putting under the carpet.

**Shil 50:46**

No. Everybody has thoughts and experiences and challenges. And within all that everybody has their own elite, their own superpower call it. I use the word elite because I liked that word. Everybody's got something. I'm a stutterer, I've found ways to develop my elite. You may have your own anxieties and your challenges. However, when we understand those and develop those, we build our elite, our version of it. You have yours. People out there in the cafeteria may be neurodiverse, they may be hard of hearing, they may be introverts. Introverted people think, are considered. Just because you're shy and quiet it doesn't mean there's anything wrong, it means they're deep found thinkers. That's an elite. When we take time to embrace that and build that. It's empowering, don't you think?

**Katie 51:49**

I do. Absolutely. I'm wondering also, how you approach coaching a very senior leader. When you walk into the room for the first time, they've maybe got a big speech to prepare for, or they know that communication is a big part of leadership, maybe it's something they don't feel very natural about... you get lots of senior people who have risen up through the ranks because of a technical ability, not necessarily because of their ability to communicate an idea. What's your starting point? Do you have a default question or thought that goes through your mind?

**Shil 52:21**

One of the default questions is: 'How would you like our conversations to run?' 'Would you like me to be gentle? Would you like me to offer you suggestions? Or would you like me to be tough? What's your preference? And once you pick, we can't change your thought. And most asked for, is tough. And then I clarify, by tough, this is what tough looks like, this is what tough sounds like, are you comfortable with tough? Because if we start tough and the person is not prepared for it, it's difficult to reverse that. So, I always frame it. And I ask, 'What would you like, as the relationship develops? And if I feel we can go from a gentle approach to a tough approach, then scaffolding approach? I'll develop my conversations so it feels like a natural change.' That's one of the default questions I asked.

**Katie 53:26**

Talk to me a little bit about virtual reality. Because I'm curious if people are listening to this and like to work with you and they're thinking, I'm on the absolute opposite side of the world to you. Does virtual reality help in that scenario?

**Shil 53:40**

VR has been a game changer. There's a gentleman called George Jessel and he once said, 'The human brain starts to work the moment we're born and stops working, the moment we stand up to speak in public.' We've all been there. So, what happens to us is when we stand, we have a brain fart. We feel nervous, we feel anxious, we lose our message in our thoughts. To manage that, I wanted to bring an audience to people. And to do that we built a platform in VR, virtual reality, where I can put a headset on to my client and put them into an immersive environment where they're in a boardroom, a networking room on a conference stage. We've even got a pre-recorded 360 Camera live audience in their headset to sit to simulate the feeling of public speaking. And that's exposure therapy. The more we do that the more people feel accustomed to being in front of an audience and it makes it easier for the actual day in front of people. We only have it in Australia right now. No internationally.

**Katie 55:00**

Though presumably you do coach virtually though?

**Shil 55:04**

Yeah, plenty. I have clients all over the world. To do that we use AI.



**Katie 55:09**

So, explain to me how you use artificial intelligence in your work.

**Shil 55:13**

We've been for the last two years developing a platform where we use AI to analyse. So, for example, on your laptop, John, if you had access to the platform, you could present into your camera and the AI will analyse analytics, like eye contact, story flow, gestures, pace, tone, and it gives you all your metrics. And now we have data. If I'm coaching you, I would say can you please slow down to 130 words a minute to make this paragraph sound more conversational. Now we can measure that through the AI platform. And then it guides us on how to make our story more efficient, more concise, which means now we have a self-assessing way to measure. We have a library of content in there and speaking games. It's a cool platform.

**Katie 56:13**

That's really, really smart. You're also gamifying it a little bit as well.

**Shil 56:18**

We've gamified it because games make things fun. Fun removes fear.

**Katie 56:23**

There was one story on your website, where you talked about a presentation you had to give in 2020. To a particularly tough audience. You walked into the room, and you met someone who immediately told you they didn't want to be there. And you quickly got the sense that most of the audience didn't want to be there. I am familiar with that scenario where people are busy. Often happens in professional services organisations where people are paid for their time in front of a client. And when they're asked to do something, that's as they see it non-work related, they just want to get on with the job. They don't want to be dragged into a room to do something else. And it might be considered training or whatever it is. I was just wondering what went through your mind at that point.

**Shil 57:11**

Panic. Not a good feeling. Terrible feeling. Start strong. What went through my mind is 'I have one shot at this'. If I don't start strong, and get their attention in the first 30 seconds, I'm done. And that was my, one of my strategies was start strong. The other one was to go into the room. So, I'm not a stage speaker, I will always get offstage, I'll walk around the room, or sit on tables. I'll dance... high five. Not too flamboyant, not too boisterous, because it's a turn off. But enough to keep energy levels there. So, I got off the stage and I sat with people. Every time I turned my back to talk to a table I would acknowledge, acknowledge to the person behind me. Can you please excuse me, I'm going to turn my back to you. Don't look at my ass while I do that, though. Because that's the reaction I wanted. So, I had fun with it. And it worked beautifully. By the end of it... they booked me again.

**Katie 58:26**

What a turnaround.



**Shil 58:31**

It was. Tough. That articles called 'Handling a tough audience.'

**Katie 58:35**

I urge people to read it because it's fascinating. At the end of our podcast, we ask people quick-fire questions, and they're given them in advance, so you don't have these in advance. Are you still happy to answer our quick-fire questions? When I say quick fire, they're quick for me to ask. They don't need to be quick for you to answer. That's how it works. Okay. What careers advice would you give your younger self?

**Shil 59:05**

Pursue a football career. It's my one regret.

**Katie 59:08**

Yeah. I think I remember you telling me this.

**Shil 59:11**

I love what I do. I love what I do, however. I was a skilful footballer. I wish I tried. I wish I'd pursued. So, the advice I would give myself is back yourself as a footballer the same way I backed myself with this.

**Katie 59:33**

There was a question I wasn't sure whether to ask you or not. But you've made me ask it now through the answer to that question, because the \$64 million question - I had to look up that phrase, there was a game show apparently in the states that's called that anyway, that's why we say this - If you could go back in time, and not have a stutter, if you had the opportunity to stop that 10 year old developing a stutter, would you? Given how much it's acted as a catalyst, a spurn to everything you've done since.

**Shil 1:00:04**

In hindsight, no. I am who I am because of it. I have my career because of it. I've met my... everything in my world is because I stutter, and I love it. I'm not afraid of it. And I call him to anybody offended by the non-binary reference, please don't be because I do address mine as a him, right? So, he's my friend.

**Katie 1:00:36**

It's very moving advice for anyone who has got fear or shame attached to something about themselves for whatever reason,

**Shil 1:00:44**

Taking control, and making friends with him, has been empowering. People choose to make fun. They can. People choose to troll me. They can. I remind myself that 1% of the world's population stutters. And then I remind myself that if somebody lives in the 1% of any category, they are elite. Because they think differently in a wide and in a different way. And then within the 1%, how many stutterers have gone on to become professional public



speakers? So, it's an even smaller category within the 1%. And that is nothing to be ashamed about. That's what I say to myself.

**Katie 1:01:34**

How would you complete this statement? 'World class communication is...'

**Shil 1:01:41**

World class communication is deep, considered, and thoughtful story sharing.

**Katie 1:01:50**

Nice. I like it a lot. What would you do if you knew for certain you couldn't fail? So, we take failure off the table. What would you do?

**Shil 1:02:02**

In what context?

**Katie 1:02:05**

Any context at all. Is there something you would do if you knew for certain we could guarantee you are not going to fail?

**Shil 1:02:11**

Yes, he know where I'm going to get my this... I would ask Manchester United to give me a 500 million transfer budget. And I would shape the team because it's been dreadful. And I love Eric ten Hag. However, like any dedicated fan, I have my thoughts and how to shape that team. If I knew it wasn't going to fail. I would build my team.

**Katie 1:02:43**

I love that answer. That is the most specific answer we have ever had on this show. Thank you for that. There'll be some listeners around the world that doesn't mean much to! Finally, we give all our guests a billboard, a metaphorical billboard for millions to see. You can put on that billboard, any message you like, anything at all, or an image. What would you like to put on your billboard?

**Shil 1:03:16**

'Please take care of our planet.'

**Katie 1:03:19**

Shil, this has been an absolute delight.

**Shil 1:03:23**

I've loved our conversation. And I'm glad we didn't script it.

**Katie 1:03:26**

Yes, I am too thank you so much.



**Shil 1:03:29**

It's my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

**Katie 1:03:32**

So that is a wrap for this episode of the Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the full transcript, head over to our website. That's [ABcomm.co.uk/podcast](https://ABcomm.co.uk/podcast). You will also find our entire back catalogue of over 80 episodes there too. If you did enjoy this episode, I would be very grateful if you could give us a review on Apple podcasts, or even just a star rating that will give the algorithms a little nudge and help your fellow internal comms colleagues out there find this show.

We have a great line-up of guests for season 10, an interesting mix of in-house practitioners, comms advisors, and consultants and academics. So, you may want to hit that subscribe button today. All that remains is to say thank you to Shil, John Phillips, our producer and Stewart Rolls our sound engineer, plus my wonderful colleagues that AB who keep this show on the road.