



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 10

Episode 88 – Anne Morriss, *It's fixable: How to tackle hard problems*

Katie 00:04

Hello, and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This is a show about improving the way we communicate with each other at work. Every fortnight I sit down with a leading light from the world of business, communication or academia to explore ways we can make workplace communication more meaningful and effective. My guest today is Anne Morriss. Now Anne first came to my attention because of her recent brilliant TED Talk, 'five steps to fix any problem at work'. Now, this came out in April 2023. And here we are just a few months later, and nearly 1.5 million people have viewed it. It was pretty clear to me after watching this short, just 12 minute talk that Anne would make a great guest on the show. She clearly had a lot of wisdom and a lot of experience to share about communication, leadership, inclusion, culture and organisational change. So I reached out to her and I'm delighted to say she immediately said yes! Just a quick one on her bio. Anne says she is driven by an infectious commitment to help people realise their full potential as leaders and as changemakers. She is an entrepreneur, leadership coach and founder of TLC, The Leadership Consortium, which works to build inclusive executive teams, and prepare emerging leaders for senior leadership. Anne is also the co author of three books. The latest one Move Fast and Fix Things is just out. And it really does reinvent the playbook on managing change. Like her TED Talk, the book sets out a one week plan for fixing any workplace problem. And Anne also hosts her own podcast, Fixable, with her partner in life and work Frances Frei. In each episode Anne and Frances demonstrate their consultative abilities by fixing a caller's workplace problem in just 30 minutes, I highly recommend it. Towards the end of Anne's TED talk, she says, "I spend my time helping leaders to change and evolve. And no one has ever said to me. I wish I had taken longer and done less." This is a conversation about many things. But I think at the heart of it, it's a conversation about how we, as individuals, teams and organisations, can do more. How we can operate at the frontier of speed and trust, to borrow a phrase from Anne. I absolutely loved this conversation. And I hope you do too. Anne welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. I am delighted to have you here.

Anne 03:21

Oh, it's such a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the invitation.

Katie 03:24

Your TED Talk, which came out in April this year, I checked this morning, 1.4 million people, just over, have watched that talk so far, in that short amount of time. I can see the size of the audience you spoke to let alone having all the cameras on you. It must be an incredibly



nerve wracking experience to give a TED talk. I was just wondering, what was your motivation, your inspiration, if you like for taking to the stage?

Anne 03:56

Well, I have to say it is a wild experience. I was just laughing about this the other day, that even when I'm having a bad day, you know, another 10,000 people are watching me on a good day. So it's really fun. It's been a really fun ride. I was so flattered by the invitation. And TED has an incredible team that is inviting people to the stage and setting them up for success. And what you can't see when you click on the video, as well as how supportive the audience is, so the TED audience in the room, the norms around being there include being wildly supportive of the speakers and you really feel that when you're up there, you really feel the gratitude for the audience and they understand how much work has gone into getting to that moment, and they're really rooting for you and really want you to be successful. It really is co-created between you and the audience. My motivation was impact. I am at a point in my career where I am starting to think about, and my wife and collaborator and co conspirator is about a decade older, so she's thinking even more about legacy and impact, and really how to democratise access to these ideas. We've talked a lot about our ideas in relatively rarefied air at the Harvard Business School and various boardrooms. And I think we're at a point where we're super motivated to open the doors and windows and invite more people into the conversation.

Katie 05:44

There is so much about my research that I've done for this show in terms of reading your books, and listening to Fixable, your podcasts, and so on. It seems to me there is a golden thread of a certain type of communication that runs through a lot of your work. And at the beginning of your TED talk, you say that your wife, Frances, and you have spent a decade helping companies clean up the wreckage, you say, from leaders who have followed that old maxim 'move fast and break things.' And I was wondering whether a way into this conversation could be for you to talk about what that wreckage actually looks like, when you rock up inside an organisation and things haven't been going the way they should have done? What does the wreckage look like?

Anne 06:30

Yeah, that's a wonderful question. And I think a really interesting way into this conversation. I'll go very meta on you. And it's a word that has lots of meaning in this context, because it was really at Facebook, now Meta, where this phrase 'move fast and break things' wasn't originated, but I think Mark, as I said, in the talk might have made the mistake of saying it out loud, and putting it on company posters. At a very high level, I think our message is about bringing humanity into the workplace, our own humanity, acknowledging the humanity of our colleagues, and our customers, our suppliers, the whole value chain of a



product and service, there's human beings at every step of the way. And I think we get in trouble as organisations, it often shows up as collateral damage, when we under see under value under recognise that humanity. So I think the wreckage, that's really the flavour of the wreckage, and then I'll go micro with this. Some of the symptoms we see are companies that haven't fully thought through the impact of their products and services on certain segments of their consumers, or to this conversation, haven't fully invested in the right HR systems and people and teams to support the size of their employee base or the diversity of their employee base. I think it can show up as people promoted into roles that they don't yet know how to do, particularly managerial roles, and companies underinvesting in the kind of systematic upskilling, and more systematic mentorship that's needed for those people to thrive. When good people leave organisations, if you look at the data, it's typically because what they would describe as a bad manager, and there's so many things companies can do to interrupt that cycle. And when they're in hyper growth mode, which many of the teams we work with are really growing at an extraordinary pace, this is the kind of wreckage, to your original question, that we see is they're moving too fast for the human beings in the system.

Katie 09:03

I've often seen that also show up as a certain amount of cynicism, I think on the front line as well, because "we've seen change in the past and it hasn't worked." And we feel that baggage, and we bring that into the room. So I think from my point of view, that's certainly some of the wreckage that I think I've seen.

Anne 09:22

Oh, yeah. And this whole category is sentiment, I think, cynicism, anxiety. I think a question we often ask leaders, is, what are the emotions you're seeing around you? And at what frequency? Because that's often a really good clue as to what's happening and the companies that are moving too recklessly one of the symptoms is that there's a lot of anxiety. There's a lot of frustration, it's starting to turn cynical. Yes, because people they don't need to see immediate solutions, although if our message is of course to go as faster than you think you need to go to solve problems, but they do need to see an organisation in action. And that's, that's willing to be self reflective, and take responsibility for the mistakes it's making.

Katie 10:13

Let's stay at that meta level. Because I think if we then start to talk about leadership, that's very aligned to what you've just said. Your book *Unleashed* really makes a great argument for a totally different kind of leadership than maybe we've seen in the past. Can you sum up that approach for us, and also explain why it is so needed today?



Anne 10:35

Yeah, so the working definition of leadership that we use and introduce in Unleash is this idea that leadership is about creating the conditions for other people to thrive, ideally, to be successful in their work, doing it in your presence. So for the people who are right in front of you, and that typically means your direct reports and your teams and your immediate colleagues, but also leading in a way that impact endures into your absence. So we talk about the tools of presence and absence leadership. Presence leadership is about primarily, the issues that we would describe as diversity and inclusion, performance management, trust, the work we do, we believe it all starts from a foundation of trust, you know, creating high standards, revealing your devotion to your team. But then absence leadership is about the tools of influencing people whom you may never even meet. And as an organisation grows and gets bigger, these things are really critical. So the systems that you're putting into place, the strategy the organisation, has the culture that you're creating, not just on your own team, but but really beyond that. And so that's what we invite leaders to think about is not only how they're impacting the humans that they are interacting with every day, but also all of these people who you don't have the privilege of setting up for success in these more intuitive ways. And yet, your job is to influence their behaviour in your absence. It all boils down to what we would call not about you leadership. And so it really is shifting your orientation from a fundamentally self distracted place, which is hard to do, particularly as you advance in your career, more and more people are looking to you for answers. And it's very human, to really become aware of those stakes and not want to get it wrong. But the most effective leaders, particularly in a dynamic change leadership situation, are the leaders that are really other oriented and focused on the success of other people. And so the metaphor we'll often use is pull your gaze away from the mirror and look out the window. Again, that requires a lot of intention. Because our biology, our wiring, is, in general, is to be thinking about ourselves and what other people think of us, but also as the stakes go up, to double down on that instinct. And so it requires some intention to stay focused on other people. And so we really push leaders to think about okay, your fundamental job is to set other people up to succeed. Okay, when that's your starting place. Now, what's it gonna take?

Katie 13:37

You said, before we started recording that I should follow my curiosity, I'm going to follow my curiosity here around trust, just slightly divert us just for a moment. We hear so much about that word, particularly the decline in trust across all institutions, not just business. What's your definition of trust? Because I hear so many people say it's all about authenticity. It's all about doing what you say, when you hear that word. Do you have a definition in your mind? Does it all boil down to one thing?

Anne 14:09



Yeah, we would argue it boils down to three things.

Katie 14:12

Oh, great.

Anne 14:12

And there's actually quite a stable architecture of trust. It is talked about and defined often in this kind of fuzzy esoteric, you know it when you see it way. But one of the things that we have been convinced of in our work is that trust has quite a stable architecture. It is made up of authenticity, plus empathy plus logic. Most of us are trusted most of the time, but in those moments when we lose trust or fail to build as much trust as might be possible, it tends to be one of these three things and we each tend to have a pattern tends to be the same one that gets a little wobbly. So when we work with leaders and even teams and organisations, because this architecture stay stable even as the unit of analysis becomes more complex, we invite people to really look at what we call in our work your 'wobble'. So which of these three things is getting a little shaky? So you'll hear us say a lot, "okay this is what we think your wobble is as an organisation" or what's your wobble? And we like that word. It's a silly word. I don't know how it's gonna play for your UK listeners. But what we like about it is that it is a little silly. It is a little low stakes, and it reinforces this idea that you can fix it. Trust is sometimes talked about as this Faberge egg that is so sensitive, and once you lose it, it can't be rebuilt, when in fact, we are constantly losing and building trust between each other as individuals, between teams, and other teams, between organisations and their customers and employees. And so a lot of our work begins with, alright, figuring out why that trust is breaking down, and then move fast to fix it, move fast to steady your wobble.

Katie 16:05

I love the idea of a wobble because as you're saying it, I've got this image in my mind the three legged stool. Yeah, this idea that if one leg is slightly shorter than another, the whole thing's gonna tip. We will have a transcript for listeners, but just in case they didn't catch that the three legs of that stool, authenticity...

Anne 16:25

Logic and empathy. And it actually goes back to Aristotle's logos, pathos ethos.

Katie 16:31

Yes, brilliant. Thank you. A quick word from our sponsor. AB is the world's most experienced internal comms agency. For 60 years, our brilliant consultants and fearless creatives have been helping organisations around the world inform, inspire and enthuse their employees, building great organisations from the inside out. There is a lot of pressure on internal



comms folks just now. To help you plan, prioritise and deliver astonishingly effective communications arrange a friendly, informal chat with us today. Simply email hello@abcomm.co.uk. And if you do, I look forward to meeting you. You kindly sent me the manuscript of your brand new book, which you can preorder on Amazon, I checked that, Move Fast and Fix Things and like your toolkit sets out this one week action plan to fix the business problem, one step per day. Thursday's chapter we really need to dig into because it's called 'tell a good story.' But before we get to Thursday, it's important that people have done a number of things, obviously, Monday through to Wednesday that have led up to Thursday. Can you talk a little bit about what's led up to tell a good story before we dive into how you do that?

Anne 18:18

Yeah, so we are big believers in figuring out the plan before you tell people about it. So that's really your agenda for Monday through Wednesday. And we're being both playful about this idea of a week as a metaphor for change leadership, but there's a component of that we're deadly serious about. If you were to count up the hours in a workweek and you think about applying all of that time to your hardest problems, there's a tremendous amount of progress you can make in a single week's time. But mainly what we're saying is don't take months or years to solve your hardest problems, which tends to be our default timeline for pursuing complex challenges in our organisation. Monday, to your question. On Monday, we really push you to identify your real problem, which may not be the problem that you think you have on Monday morning. We tend to be overconfident as human beings in the quality of our thoughts, particularly when it comes to diagnosing our own problems. And to where you and I started this conversation, we really invite people to get in touch with their own curiosity, which is going to be your superpower in this diagnostic journey. Assume you either have it wrong or don't have all the information, and then build the team of problem solvers. This is not a solo sport. You build a team of problem solvers to help you uncover your real issue. So Monday you figure out your problem. Tuesday, you really start to run some smart experiments in how to solve it. And then Wednesday, we call it make new friends day or think a different day. You are really bringing new people into that plan and inviting them to make it better. So you're feeling really good about your plan by the time you get to Thursday or step four. And we would argue that's an important part of the foundation is that you really have a plan that you feel good about, like you're telling a story that you have conviction in. And then when you get to the story part, which I know is particularly interesting to your listeners, we really push people to think about the past, present, future. And the past is about honouring the past, both the good stuff because you're going to need buy in from people who are still invested, and there's there's going to be a significant part of your population, particularly your employee base, that isn't so sure about all your big plans, right? And that really needs to be seen, and the good work they have done acknowledged, in order to be willing to be guided by you. So we say start by

honouring the past. There's another segment of your employee base who may have not been happy with the past that we want you to honour. Early in our work in change leadership, my wife was very involved with a campaign at Harvard Business School to make it a more inclusive place for women. And the dean at that time, Nathan Noria did an exceptional job of really naming where the school had let its female students and female faculty down. And that was a really essential starting point, yes, in that particular change journey, before moving on to, "Okay, let me tell you what's going to happen next." There were segments of that community that really needed to be seen and heard before that journey could begin in earnest. So start with the past, whatever the past means in the context of your organisation. Provide a clear and compelling change mandate, a strong 'why'. As human beings, we need a why to journey into this uncertain and uncomfortable sea of change, we don't know what's going to happen. So we need to know if we're going to do this hard work, what the payoff is going to be. And so describe the future, a rigorous and optimistic way forward. And that that's all three steps, honour the past, provide a clear and compelling mandate for change and describe a rigorous and optimistic way forward.

Katie 22:42

There's one thing that you said there about curiosity, and you came up with a very in your talk, a very simple way of doing this. And I thought, Oh, my goodness, that's so simple. But how often do we do it? You said, Turn your statement, the thing that you believe, into a question. And I thought, Oh, we don't do that enough, do we? I've got a problem with my manufacturing unit, I've got a problem with the latest newest generation to enter the workforce. I've got a problem with X or Y. Turning that into a question. Do you ask people to do that?

Anne 23:14

We do. And in part, because it seems so obvious. But it really is part of that shift. And an example we use is what you just what you just suggested. So a diagnosis that we hear all the time. My Gen Z employees are entitled, and we're so confident in this observation of Gen X, of Gen X and above, we're so confident that what we're seeing is accurate. And so we'll gently push okay. Instead of that statement, turn that statement into a question. What's going on with my Gen Z employees? And even that shift invites a different part of us to show up for this part of the process, when you're trying to discover okay, what's really going on? It's super powerful. We're so rewarded for our judgement, as leaders and organisation we feel like that's what we're paid for my thoughts, my perspectives, my opinions, and we're so used to dealing in the currency of those opinions all day long. I think, in our experience, it takes a deliberate act to pivot to another mindset and asking questions, or reframing those thoughts as questions, both invites that curiosity but also the suggestion that we're open to surprise, there may be things we don't know. It changes our posture in not just our relationship with each other, but in our relationship with the problem itself.

Katie 24:50

Our clients tend to be very large organisations with 10s of 1000s of frontline employees. They are often closest to the problem but least likely to have smart, interesting questions posed of them. I'm wondering how important is not just the questions you ask but who you ask them of?

Anne 25:14

Oh, it's essential back to our wiring as human beings, we tend to really like people who are really like us. Yes. And so left to our own devices, I'm going to talk to my friend Katie, who I know shares my worldview, and it's going to feel good, and we're going to affirm each other, but I'm going to learn nothing from that exchange. And so it is another place where we have to be quite deliberate in getting out of our comfort zone. The obvious places to look in terms of payoff is, okay, who was missing from the table? Who's not here, whose voice would be important and useful inside? One obvious example is people who are affected by the problem. Back to academia, which is fun to beat up as an industry, but I want to say, I'm quite grateful has employed my wife for decades, and she has thrived there. But the number of senior faculty meetings where the topic of conversation is how to be helpful to junior faculty, and there's not a single member of the junior faculty in the room is astonishing, right? And you can use that as a metaphor for any group of Xs, thinking about the Ys in their lives. So that's an obvious place: are the people who are going to be impacted by this decision, somehow represented in the conversation? But we also push people to get a little playful here. And if you're trying to solve a problem, and by Tuesday, you have a good enough plan, one way to make it better is to talk to people whose life experience has been materially different from yours. So if you've been at the company for a decade, as I say, I might talk to someone who started last week, you know, talk to someone in a different function. Talk to someone who isn't even in your industry. And it can be a glowsticks conversation, it can be a brainstorm, you can just share the plan and get a reaction. The chance that you're going to learn something, as opposed to me talking to my friend Katie, who thinks exactly about the world the way I do, is materially higher. And anyone listening to this conversation has heard this before, and the people they're trying to influence have heard this message before. But again, we don't really put it into practice. Our goal in this book is that there's a point in the future where the advice is so obvious that it's not even worth reading. But we pause on this issue of inclusion, even though you have all heard this before in some form, because it's another place where it's really rare for people to be investing in the payoff of inclusion, you with the level of enthusiasm that is backed up by the data in terms of payoff, which is an unnecessarily complicated way to say inclusion helps you win. Yeah, it helps you win big when you get it right. It helps you win bigger than almost any other organisational asset you're investing in. It's really astonishing. This is a point in the conversation about inclusion that is quite fraught, at least in America. And we think that

one of the things that's getting confused and muddled is what an extraordinary competitive asset it is, when you really get it right. Because what you're really saying is, I want all of the unique information and perspective and experience that my employees are bringing to the table. I'm going to create the conditions where they are going to bring everything they've got to the table to help us win, to help us achieve our mission, to help us make progress, to help us advance the ball, whatever metaphor you want to use. And the companies and the leaders that assume that is a core part of their leadership mandate, not like a side hustle that they're doing to make people feel good, are the ones that really get it right, and the ones that really reap the benefits here which are extraordinary.

Katie 29:27

I love that so much. One of my favourite quotes has always been the smartest person in the room is the room. But if you haven't got groupthink, and we do have groupthink because you can look around the room and think there is absolutely never going to be a divergence of opinion here because everyone's pretty much you know, cardboard cutouts of each other, providing you haven't got that, then the total sum of the thoughts in the room should be much greater than any individual in it, I think, ideally,

Anne 29:53

I love that quote. I'm going to borrow it and attribute it to you. We put some of this research in the book. One of my favourite experiments is they just compared the decision making process, I don't even know how this was measured, of a single person, and then compared it to one plus one. So one other person, and then added to the team, someone who was older by at least 20 years, and then someone added another person on the team who was bringing a different experience in terms of ethnicity to the table. And as you layered in the difference, and compared the decision making quality, it just got better and better. And I think we're at a point still, where we have not fully gotten in touch with just the basics of the advantages that come with human difference. But you have to manage for that difference, and that's where we get to the word inclusion, because if you don't manage for that difference, this goes back to biology, again, we tend to converge around the things we have in common. And on diverse teams, we don't have a tonne in common. But when we add in that variable of inclusion, and really do the work, create environments where it's not just safe to be different, it's also welcome, it's also valued, it's also championed. We talked about the inclusion dial where you get progressively good as an organisation at accounting for that difference, and valuing it and leveraging it in your actions as an organisation. That's when we really win, and that's absolutely part of our message.

Katie 31:32

You gave a brilliant, practical example of how we can all do this in our work on a podcast I was listening to. It wasn't your own podcast, I think you were being interviewed by

somebody else. And you said in a virtual call. And so many of us in our in these little square boxes in virtual calls, somebody asked the question, and the first person to speak gives the standard thought you were going to say that answer, the second person to speak gives the standard thought you're going to say the answer, there is no way that the person who doesn't think like the group is going to be the third person to say something after the second person has just given the usual trite answer. So there are ways in our own behaviour, presumably, that we can encourage this.

Anne 32:17

We'd love to talk about meetings in our work, because they're a beautiful metaphor for leadership. But also because we're spending so much freakin' time there right now. Much more time than we need to that's another sign that there might be a problem you need to solve in your organisation. What does an inclusive meeting look like? There's a lot of work that the facilitator can do to create the conditions where people who are thinking differently in that room can show up and contribute their perspective. And one of the ways that you can start is override this influence to reward people for thinking what you think and for saying what you were gonna say. And it's really human, it's really common. Katie makes a comment and I'm like, oh, Katie, great job. Like, that's what I was thinking. And that's what I was gonna say. But if we deliberately switch that up, and reward people, verbally, non verbally, for bringing something new to the table, that can make an extraordinary difference. The other thing that can really help is to really start using each other's names in meetings. MBA students learn this in the classroom, the power of building on each other's ideas by name, but it has a lot of beautiful inclusion byproducts. And again, we're not using this in this politicised way. Although you can bring a historical and political perspective, that can be quite powerful. But if you even just think about inclusion as the act of surfacing, valuing and leveraging difference in your organisation, it can move you a significant way down this path. So in a meeting, you're trying to get to the best idea, not converge on the idea that most people have. And so if that is your mandate, you're gonna behave really differently in that meeting, than if you're trying to get to consensus. You're trying to get to the best idea, which means you're gonna have to do a little work to create the conditions where different ideas will be contributed. We're very intuitive as human beings. So if we get the message that the goal here is not to get to the best idea, we're going to hang back because the the stakes of contributing what the group has already decided on a course of action, even if I disagree with that course or have a different idea, are going to be too high. How many 1000s of years of evolution have passed? We're all walking around because we're very good at reading each other, our ancestors were very good at reading each other, were very good at adapting to group norms, were very good at reading each other's cues and getting the message, even if it's not explicit that new ideas are not welcome here, or a new idea in this moment in this meeting, is not going to be welcomed or valued. And so I'm going to do a quick, intuitive calculus around alright, is it worth it to me sitting here in this room to

offer a new idea at this point in the conversation? In most cases, in most meetings, the answer is no. Which is why the facilitator has to work pretty hard to shake up that calculus.

Katie 35:43

Yeah, I always have this fear when I walk into a room and everyone is vehemently agreeing with each other, that we're all missing something.

Anne 35:52

You are! You are. With 100% certainty, you are, yet there's someone in the room that has the information you're missing. And that's the assumption you need to make, whether or not you're facilitating because you can do a tremendous amount if you're sitting around the table. And you have a mandate. Even if you're not high up in that hierarchy of status. You can say, Katie's been quiet, and I bet she's thinking something interesting, Katie, is there anything that's on your mind that you want to contribute? I'm really interested in what Katie's thinking, I worked on this project with Katie, and she had a really interesting idea, I wonder if that might be relevant here. All of those things, which all of us have the power to do can make a huge difference on these dimensions.

Katie 36:40

It's particularly relevant to listeners, because so often, we spend a lot of our time on the frontline of our organisations really getting to know different pockets of the organisation. And often we are, I think, sometimes the conscience of the other organisations. We'll go into the room and we'll say: Look, I know that group pretty well, and they're not in the room. But let me just tell you, now they're thinking or feeling this, or they don't use that language, or that's not the issue that matters most to them. So I think that's really very relevant.

Anne 37:09

Your listeners are on the front lines of building the future of work, and more humane organisations and organisations where complex human beings can thrive. So I have so much respect for how hard this job is in this moment, but also the extraordinary impact that you can have when you get it right. I just want to applaud everyone who's tuning in to this conversation, and encourage them to keep going, I promise, you are on the right track, even when this job gets really hard.

Katie 37:44

Thank you very much for saying that. I know listeners will appreciate that immensely. There is more and more being piled on their shoulders at the moment, often with less and less budget and resources. Well, you talked earlier about a good enough plan. And I'm thinking about that balance between when to go and when to hold back. Over the years, I think what I've seen is leaders hesitate too much. We must dot every I must cross every T but at

the same time, there must be a risk in holding back. There must be unseen costs of hesitating. I'm just wondering if you can talk us through how you might advise a leader to go, it's ready. It might not be perfect. Versus holding back, you still haven't quite got the plan that you need.

Anne 38:34

That's a really important question. So what we'll say about going fast is it's really the payoff of all the work you've done to build and rebuild trust, to tell a good story, to create a plan that you have real conviction in, that you've road tested a little bit. And so the advice we typically give when people ask about the right time to start is to simply begin, it is the right time, now is the right time. Particularly if you've done all that work. What we see more often than not, even though this move fast and break things mantra has gotten a lot of attention, is that organisations are actually moving too slow. So organisations have built that foundation of trust and they're not taking it for a test drive. And there is such a thing as being too late. That window of opportunity can and will close. And so what's really on the line with moving too slow is your ability to have any impact at all. Most of what we do is help organisations speed up, to speed up without undermining trust, because you really want to be at that frontier of speed and trust. And when you can get there you can move faster than you ever dreamed possible and get farther than you ever dreamed possible. But you got to do both at the same time. In fact, we would say build trust first, and then speed. And then once you start moving, just keep your eye on both.

Katie 40:13

It's interesting because you didn't use the word momentum. But there is a sense, I think that all organisations need that sense of momentum. So a small, early win, I've seen it in the past be quite powerful, even though it is just a small, early win, because it gives that sense of, we can move forward, we can do something and momentum has his own force, if you like. Does that make sense?

Anne 40:41

It does go back to basic organisational physics, an object in motion stays in motion, but it's also a really powerful antidote to where we started this conversation around a motion to anxiety and frustration and cynicism. Yeah, again, people don't need to have their problems solved immediately. We do have some patience. But we have to believe that the organisation is willing to take action is willing to move is agreeing with us that there's a problem here that needs to be solved. So there's all these incredible byproducts of motion, that in our experience, organisations tend to undervalue.

Katie 41:23



That makes perfect sense. You have seen, you must have seen many cultures. I know you've worked with Uber and many other organisations. I'm curious about what I would call champagne moments. So champagne moments, are those moments when...

Anne 41:40

You have my attention.

Katie 41:41

Yeah, I like this analogy. I didn't make this up. Again, it's completely borrowed. Someone described it as you have knocked the ball out of the park, whatever it is, you were trying to do around the culture change, you have achieved it. You're sitting in the south of France, overlooking St Tropez with all your colleagues... I'm putting you there now. And you're drinking champagne, you're chinking your glasses, and someone says, You know what, I think we really knew we were going to make it we really knew we were onto something when that happened. There was something that happened, it might have been in the beginning, it might be in the middle, or whatever it was, we thought: Ah! It's a sign. And that shifted things. You almost see it in retrospect, not at the time. Is there something when you see an organisation do it you think, wow, yes, they mean it, this could really happen.

Anne 42:31

It's a wonderful question. I'm still in St Tropez in this moment, I think it's that moment in a change process where kind of momentum turns.

Katie 42:43

Yes.

Anne 42:44

At Uber, one of the indicators that we had some fun with was how willing the employees were to identify to the outside world that they worked at Uber. So when we got there, even when people took Ubers, when Uber employees took Ubers, they would not tell the driver they worked at headquarters, they wouldn't wear company t-shirts, or be seen with company swag. And so one of the things that Frances did was committed to wear an Uber t-shirt every day. Every day, even on weekends, and holidays, we went to a black tie event, she and I at one point, and it got awkward. There were words exchanged. And one of the indicators, and it seems silly, but one of indicators that she was really proud of is that by the time she left, there were more and more Uber t-shirts showing up on the streets of San Francisco.

Katie 43:50

Wow.



Anne 43:52

Where the company was headquartered. So I think this is one of those things that you know it when you feel it, but I would push you back to our conversation about emotion, to really focus on the emotions of your fellow human beings. And when that anxiety starts to flip to optimism, when that cynicism starts to turn to engagement, you really feel it, you can really feel it. These emotions are quite infectious. It's one of the aspects of leadership that we tend to, under value under invest in how much our own emotions impact the emotions of other people. But that's where I would start. I love your champagne moment, because I just want to underscore the value of celebrating wins and progress. And taking a moment to acknowledge, because this change journey, we want the pace to be fast but it can take a minute to get to the place you want to go. And so when you do get there when you get part of the way there, pausing to honour the hard work that went into it, I think can also be really powerful. It has to be authentic, we find that people want fewer cupcakes on their birthday, this is a very American thing for your organisation to throw you an awkward, a sad, awkward party on your birthday. People tend to want less of that in 2023, but more genuine acknowledgement for the progress that's being made.

Katie 45:29

Such good advice. I want to talk to you briefly in the time that we have left about Fixable. I've become completely addicted to it. Just for anyone who hasn't yet tuned in, but links will be in the show notes. In about half an hour, you solve somebody's business workplace problem. One example, I think there was a reasonably senior leader who was trying to adapt to hybrid work, I think she was running a professional services organisation. And one of the brilliant ideas you came up with was anchor days, these special days, these anchor days when we'd come together. I haven't talked about anything but anchor days and how we need them at AB since listening to that show. It's a brave thing to do to diagnose and fix the problem in literally half an hour. I was wondering whether you have in your mind mapped out before you start a series of questions you'd like to ask or sort of flow diagram? Or is it a mental state that you get into in order to be able to fix a problem that quickly?

Anne 46:33

I love the question. Thank you for the endorsement, it's been such a surprising pleasure to make that show and put it out in the world and have people respond to it. We've heard the listeners' call and voicemail before we start the conversation. So we do get a little bit of advanced notice on just directionally, what's the problem? And I do spend a little bit of time thinking about okay, so what are my questions, the questions tend to be the same, though, to your point, the arc we're really trying to take the caller on is typically from their starting place, which is this is a problem I can't solve. This is a problem they don't have enough information to solve, or I don't have enough power to solve. And we want to take them on a ride that lands them into a more open place – what Carol Dweck called the growth mindset,

just a more productive problem solving mindset. And what people tend to discover is, Oh, I do have both the agency and the information to make progress here. It might not get me all the way there. But what we're trying to get to is for someone to walk away from the conversation, in touch with their ability to make progress. I think the biggest variable is getting into my own coaching mindset, which is a different emotional frequency of being deeply curious: who is this human being? What are the basic assumptions they're making about the world? And are those assumptions accurate? Listen, myself included, they're never accurate. Those assumptions are never accurate. So my job as a thought partner in that conversation is to identify the holes, but also to build trust so that they're willing to open themselves up to an alternative reality. And that alternate reality is often a revelation and quite exciting. They're more powerful than they think they are, they have the tools they need to solve this problem. And what's really fun for us, back to emotion, is that they're in a really different emotional place, often at the end of the call than when they started. And we really want to show that to the world. We're very social creatures, we learn from watching other people solve problems and do things. And so every time we have a conversation, we're trying to be helpful to that caller, but we're also trying to show the people listening to the show that it is within their own power to make that pivot.

Katie 49:20

Yes. And that's what you see play out. You can actually physically it's weird in a way because you can't physically see it, but they're stuck and they become less stuck. They realise that there's avenues, there's an alternative, there's another way of looking at it. And there always has been, but as you say you're giving them agency. It's just lovely to listen to.

Anne 49:42

And radio is such an intimate medium. You can hear the difference in their voice, which is very cool, I think for people who tune into the show.

Katie 49:55

I think it was Alastair Cook one of the oldest broadcasters for the BBC Radio for years and years. Who one said "I love radio because the pictures are better on the radio."

Anne 50:08

Ah, so good. I get that now in a way that I didn't before we started making the show,

Katie 50:17

I'm going to ask you a really pedestrian mainstream question. But I can't not ask you this, because you must have seen so many leaders stand up on podiums on stages, or just give an unplugged little session to their employees. A lot of listeners will be responsible for trying to make their leaders show up looking and sounding their best. Is there a piece of advice? A



difficult question, I know, is there a piece of advice you think our listeners should be thinking about giving senior leaders having seen so many of them in operation over the years?

Anne 50:57

That's a great question. Do you watch The Morning Show? Are you familiar with The Morning Show? Just got my Apple subscription. So we're just starting it this week. So in season two, there's an episode I don't know when this will air but there's an episode where a senior leader goes on to do an interview with an anchor. And this, I'm trying not to spoil it. But there's an email that the senior leader has written has been revealed, it affects the anchor, specifically, and she goes on to have a conversation about it. So you actually see, I think this scenario you're describing in its most extreme high stakes form, the senior leader's job is on the line. The anchor's job is also, and reputation and career is also on the line. So it is the highest stakes HR moment you can imagine, and people advising both of these people in the lead up to this interview. I'm not going to tell you how it goes. It goes well for one of them, I'll tell you that. The place where I would encourage any advisor to begin, to the conversation we just had about Fixable, is from a place of curiosity. So often as advisors, we show up feeling a lot of pressure to give the right counsel. And I think the orientation that in my life, you know, career as an advisor that has been most productive to me is to actually start from a place of curiosity, not from a place of self distraction, a feeling like I have to have the right answer in this moment. And because the information you need to be able to be a good thought partner you don't yet have and when I show up with that kind of curiosity and humility and commitment to connection to this person I'm trying to be helpful to, rather than this kind of sentimental fantasy that I'm supposed to be the wise person in the room, it has, it tends to be a much more productive conversation. Did that answer your question?

Katie 53:13

Oh, my goodness me, Yes. I love the term thought partner. I thought that's beautiful. And also the idea. It's the information we need we haven't yet garnered, we haven't yet got. And that, knowing that going into a conversation, going into an exchange with a senior leader, thinking to yourself, what do I need to know that I don't yet know? Just is such a great mindset to be in, I think.

Anne 53:36

And one hack for that mindset is to show up with a question. And to start with a question, because it will, again, change your emotional frequency, change their emotional frequency, and start you both down the path of coproducing the right answer, which is really what you're there to do. You're not there to deliver the right answer, you're there to co produce it with this other person. And to do that effectively, you have to start from a place of curiosity and humility, and interest in this other person. And that's the only way any collaboration is going to work. You have to truly be interested in this other person. And it's easy in these

roles, and I've been in many variations of them, to get self distracted. In that moment, it feels like a high stakes pressure. You're in the room to do your job. You've been hired to do your job you've been hired to give advice on some level. They're often anxious about what's going to happen next. They may even ask you for the answer. But I would encourage people to experiment with and plan for okay, what's your starting question? Not your starting statement or answer.

Katie 54:50

Really fantastic advice. This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday Update. Would you like 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 communications? This might be the latest reports, books, podcasts, conferences, 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 uplifted as you end your week. Now, this is subscriber only content, which was initially intended just for AB 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, we just need your email address. And it's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a go, that sign up page again, abcomm.co.uk/Friday. And if you do choose to be a subscriber, I very much look forward to being in touch. We're going to flip to those quick fire questions if that's okay. These are quick fire because they're supposed to be quick for me to ask, not necessarily for you to answer.

Anne 56:39

We'll see if we get to fire. It might be just warm coffee? I don't know. We'll see where we get to/

Katie 56:48

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

Anne 56:58

Again, I'm already failing on the fire part by going slowly here. I'm gonna give you two. Curiosity, which we've talked quite a bit about. I would say what we haven't talked about is playfulness. So I take the job seriously, I take the stakes seriously. I do not take myself particularly seriously. And a willingness particularly as an adult to bring some humour, light, playfulness, particularly when in high pressure situations has been a huge advantage. That pressure more often than not, is not helping the human beings in the room perform and make their best decisions. Sometimes pressure does. And for some humans, it does. And then that orientation is not that helpful. But in most situations, bringing the pressure down,



is going to improve decision making and outcome, and I have found ways to do that. And Frances and I both use a lot of humour in our work quite deliberately to make that connection and dial down the perceived stakes of a situation.

Katie 58:11

But interestingly, our creative director talks about before a creative brainstorm making everyone laugh. It doesn't matter how you do it. But just introducing that element of fun, as you say playfulness. It's interesting that also, he thinks it creates a more creative environment where people are more likely to come up with ideas, etc, etc. It's interesting.

Anne 58:33

Oh, for sure. You just you have access to much more of your brain and body when you're invited to tap in to that playfulness yourself.

Katie 58:42

Great advice. This is a tricky one. How would you complete this statement? World class employee communication is...

Anne 58:49

...undervalued as a competitive advantage. And a truly essential variable in change leadership.

Katie 59:03

Fantastic. Thank you very much. If you had to make one book recommendation to our listeners, it doesn't have to be about communication, by the way. But and I know it's very difficult one book recommendation. But what would it be?

Anne 59:16

The Right Kind of Wrong by Amy Edmondson. It's her new book. It really is a rigorous engagement with the question of failure in the workplace. And I think it's quite thoughtful but also quite liberating. Because our wiring is to avoid failure at all costs. And it's again a huge competitive advantage when we can fail well and this book makes a really beautiful case for him.

Katie 59:19

And finally, we give you are a billboard, this is completely nicked from the Tim Ferriss show, going to be honest. It's a metaphorical billboard for millions to see and you can put on that billboard any message you like what would you like on your billboard, Anne?

Anne 1:00:02



Simply begin.

Katie 1:00:05

coming back to what you said before about the time is actually now?

Anne 1:00:11

Yeah, find out what happens when you simply begin.

Katie 1:00:15

I love it. Thank you so much. This has been a completely wonderful conversation.

Anne 1:00:20

Such a selfish pleasure for me. So thank thank you for the invitation.

Katie 1:00:25

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. For the show notes and the full transcript, head over to AB's website. That's abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. You'll find everything there, including our entire back catalogue of over 80 episodes. If you did enjoy the show, I would be immensely grateful if you could help your other comms colleagues out there find it. And the best way to do that is just to give the algorithms a little nudge by giving us a review or just a rating on Apple Podcasts. We still have some great guests lined up for the rest of this season, including some senior inhouse internal comms folks, so you might want to hit that subscribe button today. All that remains is to say thank you to the people that keep this show on the road. My producer John Phillips, sound engineers Stuart Rolls, and Madi, who does all the work on the transcript, show notes and everything else. Thank you so much for everything that you do. And finally, my thanks to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. Do please keep reaching out to me on social media. I do try to respond to every comment that I see. So finally, until we meet again, stay safe and well and remember, it's what's inside that counts.