



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 12

Episode 108 – *Seth Godin rewrites the rules of internal communication*

Katie 00:03

Hello and welcome to a very special episode of the internal comms podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This is a show devoted to improving the way we communicate at work. Every fortnight, I sit down with a communications practitioner, consultant, academic or author, and together, we explore ways to create more meaningful, productive, inspiring connections and conversations inside our organisations.

Katie 00:37

Five years ago, when I started this podcast journey, there was one person I dreamed one day I would interview: Seth Godin. Seth is the author of 22 international bestsellers that have changed the way I and millions of other people think about marketing, creativity and work. His books include Tribes, Purple Cow, Linchpin, The Dip, This is Marketing and The Song of Significance. Seth writes one of the most popular blogs, possibly the most popular blog in the world, and just one of his many TED talks, How to get Your Ideas to Spread, has been viewed seven and a half million times. His latest book is entitled, This is Strategy: Make Better Plans Now.

Katie 01:33

Seth didn't want to see any questions or topic areas in advance for the show. So what you're about to hear is a very natural, spontaneous conversation. We talk about the importance of understanding organisations and communications at a systemic level, because any failures aren't accidents, they are often the result of an underlying system which, all too often, is optimised for the wrong outcome. We talk about agency, that we have more agency than we realise, or maybe more agency than we want to admit. We talk about the fact that our work is filled with false proxies, those easy to measure results that are ultimately worthless and distracting. We talk about subscription-based internal comms, the myth of writer's block, and Seth gives us his view on corporate vision missions and values. And listen out for two stories Seth shares about his mentor, the author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar. The first is about how we see but do not observe, as Sherlock Holmes would say. The second is about what we can choose to become.

Katie 02:59

Seth is a truly original thinker with a gift, I think, of seeing through all the noise, all the nonsense, to what really matters, to the heart of an issue. Throughout this conversation, he is elevating our role, our cause, as internal comms professionals. I hope you find this



conversation as inspirational as I did. So without further ado, I bring you the wonderful Seth. Godin.

Katie 03:30

First of all, Seth, wow, I can't quite believe I'm welcoming you to The Internal Comms Podcast. When I started podcasting five years ago, someone asked me the question, who would you most like to interview? It was you. You've been such an inspiration for so many years. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you for agreeing to appear on my show. This is wonderful.

Seth 03:52

Thanks for having me. I know it's not easy to show up and show up the way you do, and I think people appreciate it, but don't often tell you. So I'm here to tell you.

Katie 04:01

Thank you so much. I was going to leave my big, gnarly question to the end, but then I thought, you've done more podcasts than I've had hot dinners. So let's just jump straight in, if you don't mind, at the deep end, because in preparation for this recording, I reread the Song of Significance, and I think that is immensely valuable and relevant to the work that my listeners do, which is they help organisations communicate with their people. And this is my big, gnarly question. Over the 30 odd years that I've been helping organisations do this, the individuals that I've met, the C suite people, the line managers, the team leaders, the majority of them have been decent, lovely, well intentioned people. But when I look at the communication that goes out at an organisational level, it's jargon laden, broadcaster messages at people. So my big question is, what goes wrong?

Katie 05:04

Is this purely a problem to do with scale, or is it something more systemic, do you think?

Seth 05:11

Systemic is a great word, and I'm happy to spend as much time dissecting this as you want, because it's at the core of our challenge. The new book, This is Strategy, is all about this particular problem, and you have highlighted it. The thing is, you asked, what goes wrong, but the people who are doing it are getting exactly what the system is designed to get. So it's not wrong for them. It's just ineffective, a waste of time, disrespectful and beneath us, and yet, the system is optimised to produce this. So we'll begin by trying to understand what a system even is, yes. So let's start with this. How much should a wedding cost?

Seth 06:03



The answer is, exactly as much as your best friend, plus a little extra. And that's why weddings in New York City now cost over \$100,000 Oh, my God, not because the weddings are better at being weddings, but because the system is optimised to produce expensive weddings. In the United States, the healthcare system does not produce health. It produces treatments because the system is optimized to produce treatments. So the system of corporate and nonprofit organisation is not designed to produce what people think it's designed to produce. It's designed to produce sinecure, freedom from fear, a chance for status. It is maintained with affiliation. It builds a culture of stability and measures how much wealth or power it creates for the people at the top. That is what it is designed for, and that is what it does. So when people like you, Katie, show up and say, communications could be better... Better at what? Better for who? We need a strategy that sees the system, gets to what the system actually wants, and helps the system get what it wants by doing things like internal comms better. You've put your finger right on it right from the start. But tactics aren't our solution. Our solution is to understand the strategy.

Katie 07:39

And one of the common criticisms labeled at our profession is that we do not think or act strategically enough. We are order takers. We are tacticians. You talk in your book about the four strands of strategy. You talk about time, games, empathy and, of course, systems. I'm wondering, what's a good starting point for someone who thinks 'I just want to stop being that order taker. I want to be a strategic advisor.' My brain goes to empathy first. But maybe that's the wrong place. Is there a starting point?

Seth 08:16

Well, you've insightfully put your finger on the starting point, which is you have to say that to yourself first, right? That most people do this job because this is a job that feels safe, that there's a lot of misogyny in the world. And one reason that so many internal comms people are women is because this has been viewed as an advanced secretarial job, not as an important strategic job. That can change, and at many institutions it has, but it will not change unless you, the person who has the job, acknowledges your agency and decides to lean into something that feels risky but is actually the safest thing you can do. The reason it's the safest thing you can do is because right now, on my desk, I have an AI that can do mediocre corporate comms for free instantly. So all you're going to do is be an order taker. I don't need you. I got one right here for free. So the safe thing to do is to give yourself a promotion and put AI to work for you, not become a cog in a system that disrespects you. So that's where I begin the conversation that makes sense?

Katie 09:33

Yes, absolutely. Yeah.



Seth 09:35

Do you see the system, right? What is it the CEO wants from internal comms, and what has led them to choose this method of double talk, deniability and bullshit as a way to go back to work, right?

Seth 09:55

So let's start with time. When you started your podcast five years ago, how many people listen to it the first week?

Katie 10:03

Very few, probably my mom and my sister and anyone else I could control.

Seth 10:08

Maybe 10, yes. But since then, hundreds of 1000s and millions of people have heard your podcast. So over time, the seed you planted in episode one grows, right, yes, and that's part of internal comms, that if you hustle to get people to open the urgent email of today, that's the seed you've planted, and you have to just keep doing that. If you are doing pro forma boilerplate internal comms, hoping that no one will read it, that is the seed you are planting. We have a chance to build a rhythm with our internal comms, to grow over time in what people expect from us, in the voice that we develop, to actually make them useful. But you can't expect it's going to work the first day. You have to say, this is the scaffolding that we're going to put in place to get to where we seek to get. That make sense?

Katie 11:07

Yeah, absolutely.

Seth 11:09

And then, what are games? Well, I'm a game designer. I like games, but most people don't, not board games and things like that. But in fact, we play games all the time. Games are any situation where there's limited resources, there are players, there are moves and there are outcomes, that's a game. So deciding which queue to get into at Marks and Sparks when you're checking out is a game, because if you get in the wrong line, you're going to spend more time in the store. So we're playing a game with attention when we try to do internal comms. We're playing a game with our bosses. We're playing a game because we have to say the same thing to everybody, but they're all going to read it differently.

Seth 11:53

Which moves are we going to make if you make a wrong move, doesn't mean you're a bad person, it just means you made a bad move. Those are different things. The only way to make better moves is to explore which moves get you where you seek to go. But if you are



just following quote best practices and then going back to your meeting, you're not going to learn anything, right? And the last one is empathy, not the kindness of empathy, which I'm in favor of, but the empathy of you don't know what I know. You don't see what I see. In fact, the only reason I have to do comms is because I know something you don't know, so I can't talk to you like you know it because you don't so I have to imagine, assert, what is it like to be a single parent, living from paycheck to paycheck, and getting this note about downsizing is coming? Well, I know you sent the note because there's a legal requirement you do so, but have you thought about the fact that you just turned my life upside down, right? We need the empathy to realise people don't see what we see or want what we want, and that's okay. And the brilliant internal comms person weaves all four of these things together. They may make it look easy, but what they're actually doing is creating a connection and changing everyone who touches the information, because that's what information is, data that changes us.

Katie 13:29

And I think there's a lot of co creation we can do with the audience. I was wondering to myself, there's a blurring of the line between internal and external. Now, because the walls of all organisations are made of glass bricks – everyone can see in your basement. Don't think you're hiding anything in your basement. This is a bit of a naughty question. Do you see employees as being a discrete audience? Do you think they are a special audience compared to, say, investors or your customers or your clients or your suppliers?

Seth 14:03

Yes, they're special. I'm not sure I want to call them discrete, because everything is leaky now.

Katie 14:09

Yes.

Katie 14:09

Yeah, I wonder sometimes whether we hold the institutions that employ us to a slightly higher standard than those we buy from. That's always been the thought that goes through my mind.

Seth 14:09

The reason they're special is a, you can fire them and b, they equate, at some emotional level, their work with you, with being alive, because if you fire them, they might not get another job, and if they don't get another job, they won't get food, and if they don't get food, they're going to die. Yeah? And that's part of where the empathy kicks in, right? Yeah. Might not be serious to you, but it's very easy for the recipient to imagine it's serious to



them. At the same time, because of the long history of bad bosses, we've indoctrinated people to be cynical, to be distant, to be sure that we are lying and there are other constituents that don't feel that way. So Google has customers who love Google, and Google has plenty of employees who are just there for the stock option.

Seth 15:23

Yeah, so Tom Peters, who said so many brilliant things, this was 40 years ago. 'You should regularly have seminars where you have your team update their resume.' Bosses said, Why would I do that? My best people will leave. And Tom said, here's the question, do you want people to stay at your company because they have no other option? Or do you want them to stay because they want to stay?

Katie 15:48

There's a line, isn't there? We don't train people here because they might leave. What if we don't train them and they stay?

Seth 15:53

Exactly.

Katie 15:58

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my brand new Internal Communication Masterclass. This is the ultimate on-demand learning experience designed exclusively for internal comms professionals. Simply visit ICmasterclass.com, you can choose from eight work streams, each packed with actionable insights and real world strategies to boost your capability, your confidence and your credibility. That website address, again, ICmasterclass.com. And if you'd like to know what inspired me to create this program, then join me for a very special LinkedIn live event on Wednesday, October the 30th. I'll reveal what inspired me to create the masterclass, who it's built for, and I'll also share some of my favorite personal stories and career lessons from the program. We will wrap with an Ask Me Anything session. This is your chance to connect with me directly, and no question is too big or too small. To find out more about the event and to secure your spot, head over to my LinkedIn profile. That's Katie Macaulay, Macaulay. You can find out everything you need to know about the event, and it's very easy to sign up, and if you do decide to come along, I very much look forward to seeing you. But for now on with the show.

Katie 17:53

Let's talk a little bit about outcomes or measurement, because I think this is so key to all of this. Over the years, one of the measures is employee engagement. I'm not massively in favor of that. I once spoke to the academic who, 30 years ago, came up with that term, and he's not massively in favor of trying to measure it either, which I thought was very

interesting. What are the best measures? What are the best outcome measures of our work, do you think?

Seth 18:20

Okay, so I like to talk about false proxies. False proxies are easy to measure and worthless or distracting, so the number of people who see your TikTok video is a false proxy, because it is not connected in any way to any of your stated goals. It is a false proxy that this person went to a college or university that you are familiar with. It is a false proxy that this person has the same skin color or background that you do. These are things that are easy to measure and worthless. How fast your programmers can type does not say anything about their coding skill. Your work is filled with false proxies. If you do job interviews in the traditional way, you have started with a false proxy. There's no reason, unless you are hiring someone to be a talk show host, to do a job interview with them. It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Seth 19:23

So you're asking, well, what are the good proxies? And I'm saying, can we begin by throwing out the false proxies? I want to share something from the Greyston Bakery, because your audience, in particular, I think, will benefit from it, and will appreciate it. Have you ever had Ben and Jerry's brownie ice cream? It is the best selling flavor of ice cream in the United States. And if you're in Europe, all the brownies are made in the Netherlands. And if you're in the United States, all the brownies are made in Yonkers, New York, five miles from my house. And it began in Yonkers. A guy named Bernie Glassman started a Zen monastery there. And many Zen monasteries have a practice where they make something for the community so they can, a) make a little bit of money, and b) have something to do all day. And they started a bakery, the Greyston Bakery. And pretty quickly, they realised that they could help the community a great deal, and they shifted their focus. They still had the bakery, but they shifted their focus to childcare and education. And then when jobs opened up in the bakery, they pioneered the idea of open hiring. If you walk into their headquarters, there's a clipboard at the front desk, and you can write your name and phone number on the clipboard. And if a job opens up, the next person on the list is hired instantly. And then you have two weeks to prove yourself, two weeks to be trained, two weeks to show you can show up. But as a result, it is a life changer for people who have had addiction issues, who have been incarcerated, who are not easy to hire. Once people join Greyston, which is now quite busy thanks to baking millions of pounds of brownies, they almost never leave. The turnover rate is vanishingly low. And the Body Shop in the UK, after Covid, adopted open hiring and found that turnover went down 60% and customer satisfaction with employees went way up. So why isn't it everywhere? It's not everywhere because managers want a feeling of control, yeah? Like the feeling of power. Even though the interview isn't teaching them anything whatsoever, they can't imagine saying next one in gets the job.

Seth 21:52

This is all long way of saying if you don't know what a useful measure of employee, whatever is, you're going to keep relying on these false proxies. The question in this strategy is, what is the change you're trying to make? This institution you're building, are you here to make a change happen? If you're not, why are you wasting my time? Yeah. And if you are, that we can measure, right? Like I measure, what do the people I teach things to teach other people, I find that's a resilient, useful, difficult to acquire measurement. That's the arc of my career when it's at its best. But when I was, you know, inventing email marketing, the measure was 'what's our open rate and what's our response rate?' Because if people aren't opening our email and writing back, we're not doing a good job. That was an easy measure to obtain, not an easy measure to make go up over time. So we should be really clear about what we're measuring, and from an internal comms point of view, one thing I invented a long time ago that never launched was the system for internal comms that would do the following: because this is when I was at Yahoo. Anyone can email all 3000 people at a time, just like, I have two tickets for the San Jose Sharks game tonight. Who wants them? They would send that note to 3000 people. So for each employee, particularly in the comms group, measure the open rate of their email and give all the recipients a chance to rank it from one to five on how useful it was. That's a very scary number, right? But the fact is, if you're an employee who gets a reputation for sending emails that waste people's time, you'll hear about it, and it will start to create a dynamic where you're not going to waste people's time. If you call a meeting – you know the way it works – the meetings at Amazon work, is, if anyone calls a meeting, they have to write a three to five page memo. The rules for the structure of the memo are very clear, and the memo has to have an ask in it. It has to say, and I want permission to do this. Call the meeting, and people sit there and read the memo while you're in the room with them. That's the beginning of the meeting. If they agree with you, and the answer is yes, they leave, done. And if they don't, now a question and answer happens until something occurs. If you run a bad Amazon meeting, you're not given many more chances to run Amazon meetings, because to put five or seven people in the room and waste their time for an hour when you could have sent them a memo instead? Not okay. So I think changing meeting culture needs to be a key part of what anyone on this podcast does for a living. You will make a bigger difference in your organisation doing that in the short run than almost anything I can think of.

Katie 25:00

Yeah, yeah. I couldn't agree more. When I read Permission Marketing, I realised it's anticipated, personal, relevant, and I was looking at what we're sending out, you know, as a profession is often an interruption. It's irrelevant. It's not terribly personal. There are organisations sending out 'Dear colleague...' letters to people who've been working in their organisation for 30 years. And then I thought, what would happen if we turned all of that



into subscription-based communication, which is kind of what you're saying about rating the email. I love that idea. Really smart.

Katie 25:35

A lot of what you're suggesting, I think, is that we have more agency than we think we do. We don't have to play by these old traditional industrial rules. Often we just have to try something out. Would that be fair? And if I'm feeling like I want to give it a go, how do I start? Is there a way of starting small in a safe way, or should I not even worry about being safe? I don't know.

Seth 26:04

Well, the first thing I say is you have more agency than you want. You have more agency than you want to admit. That life is easier if you can whine about the fact that you have no agency. There are so many things you can do before you get fired, and you're not even getting close to the line. How do you begin? You begin with the smallest unit of change you can imagine. Okay, so, for example, I'm a huge fan of starting a book group. You only need four people to join the book group. No one else will know what's happening. And if no one joins, no one will know that no one joined, right? What happens in that book group? You can try out so many ways of talking and engaging with people with four people.

Seth 26:52

My career changed Christmas Day 1983. I was working for the company that helped invent educational computer games. No internet, of course, no voicemail. I have nothing to do on Christmas, so I go into the office to answer customer service calls from all these people who had gotten all these pieces of software that day and didn't know what to do. So for seven hours, it was just me. I answered all these calls. For the next three months, any time I was in any marketing meeting, I knew more than anyone in the room, because I had just spent, I talked to 400 customers. If I had had a bad call with a customer, no one would have known, right? So we find these small things. Don't hit the send button for 10,000 emails trying some crazy plan. What happens if I interact with just a couple people? What do I learn by looking folks in the eye? What happens if I start an internal podcast and have a daily five minute conversation with one employee after another and then broadcast it to anyone who wants to listen? Right? What would happen to your career, if you were the organiser of The Internal Comms Podcast, talking to people in the company about who they are and what they do. It's hard for me to imagine that that wouldn't make everything better.

Katie 28:12

There is an organisation, I'm not sure which one it is. The podcast is called Talk Nerdy to Me, and they just find an expert, it doesn't matter. It could be a finance expert, a product expert, an R&D, and they just talk nerdy to me, because, isn't it true, the closer we get to



something, the more interesting it becomes. When you peel away the layers... on a very large level, it's boring, but then if I tell you the intricacies, it's fascinating. I absolutely love that idea.

Katie 28:40

Where do we go from here, Seth? I've got so many questions for you. I guess, on behalf of my listeners, I've got to ask you your reflection on corporate values, mission statements, vision statements. Those are the things we're often hooking our content to. The purpose statement. Unfortunately, they've often been written by committee, and so they have that slightly camel shaped bed bug, and that's... probably I'm being unfair to camels. What's your reflection on what we do with those?

Seth 29:12

I think you should throw them out. If your statement could be substituted with another company's, it's worthless. So like Johnson and Johnson, go look up theirs. You could put that on any pharmaceutical company. Number two is, are you using it to actually make difficult decisions or not? Most corporate statements, if they were true, would say the following, our mission is to make as much money as possible. When in doubt, compare this to our second mission, which is to feel safe. That's most companies corporate mission, if we're going to be honest. That's different than your strategy.

Seth 30:00

So Microsoft's strategy, when it is doing its best work, is 'we are the IBM of software.' Because IBM strategy was, no one ever got fired for buying IBM. They just had to be safe. That's what Microsoft did in software. So if we're going to make a hard decision at Microsoft, let's think about whether this makes it more or less likely that a big company will trust doing business with Microsoft, right? When they succeed, they have a strategy that one person came up with that is very clear and helps you make decisions. If it doesn't do that, then don't do it.

Seth 30:40

So another one, I think it's the Ritz Carlton, some fancy hotel chain. Their strategy is 'ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.' And so what that means is give every house cleaner, person who cleans the rooms, \$250 gift card that they can give to any customer any time they want, right? So if a customer is upset about somebody, say, 'oh, we can fix that for you right now, the room's on me.' And if you treat the people who are cleaning the rooms that way, they're going to treat the customers differently. It helps them make decisions. If someone shows up and they're a jerk as a customer, the front desk person can say, Please don't come back, because, you're not ladies and gentlemen, you're not what we seek to serve.' If it's helping you make a decision is worth repeating,

Katie 31:31

Yeah, yeah, love that so much. I'm very tempted to spend the next few minutes we have together asking a few questions about you.

Katie 31:39

This is one of my favourite questions that I don't know how you're gonna react to it. What trait or characteristic do you think has most led to your success? And we can define success however you like, but I like to think of it as knowing what you're doing and doing it well, which is clearly what you do, very well, yeah, what traits do you think or personal characteristic?

Seth 32:13

I don't think I do what I do well. I think that the thing that I am is curious and restless, and I try to be generous, but if I wanted to sell more books or make more money or do more speeches or have more impact, I could be better at all of those things. That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to help people who are on the journey that I'm on become practical and useful with their curiosity as the world changes. But I'm not optimising any of the traditional things that most people would call 'better.'

Katie 33:00

Yes, yes. And that's interesting, because researching for this show, there's a big word at the top of my discussion guide here, which is kindness, and it seems to me the golden thread that runs through and maybe you wouldn't use that word, maybe you'd use generosity, I'm not sure, but I was hearing you talk about Zig Ziglar, and then that sent me down a rabbit hole of Zig which was quite interesting. Just out of curiosity, have you seen that? I think it's in black and white. He does this trick on an audience where he says, 'Before you look at your watch, I want you to cover your hand with your watch. Now tell me whether the numbers...'

Seth 33:39

I was in the room.

Katie 33:40

Do you want to just quickly tell listeners about that? Because I think that just blew my mind.

Seth 33:45

Okay, so it's a little dated, because most people don't have this kind of watch anymore. But here we go. And there's a second riff that I will share from Zig that I think will be life changing. Ladies and gentlemen, if you're wearing a watch, do me a favor. Take your hand, cover your watch. Now, this watch that's under your hand, it is something you have looked

at 5, 10, 50, 200, times a day, every day for years and years. So I have a question for you, right? Is it using Roman numerals or Arabic numerals, right? What's it the three, the six and the nine? Is it that or is it a number? Okay, but here's what I want you do. Take your hand off your watch and stare at your watch. Stare at it like you've never stared at it before. Really get to know your watch. You got that? Okay, put your hand back over the watch, and now I'm going to ask you one more question. And the audience pauses, and he says, What time is it? And no one knows. No one knows, because we notice what we want to notice. He was a character. We didn't agree on everything. I published one of his books, and I was on stage with him just one time. I would not be able to do what I do for a living if I had not encountered his work and sure it's dated, but I still listen to it now and then. But here's the Zig riff that I have stolen and used on stage that's totally relevant to this audience. This is before LinkedIn, way before LinkedIn. He says, Okay, imagine that there's a supercomputer network around the world where everyone is connected. And imagine that it knows not just everyone's resume, but their attributes. Okay, great. Let's make a list of what you're looking for in an employee, a co worker or a boss, or maybe even a spouse. What would be the attributes you're looking for? And so together, he starts writing on the wall. So I'll give you a few, and then Katie, you can give me some more. Honest, hardworking, diligent, persistent, kind... you got some more?

Katie 35:49

Generous, thoughtful, empathetic, funny?

Seth 35:56

Perfect. So he comes up with a list of like 50 of these. Everyone's shouting about says, Great. So he says, Can we agree as a group that if you could find someone who had all of these attributes, right, they would be a catch.

Seth 36:11

They would be someone you'd want to work with, or be married to or work for for years to come. Everyone agrees. All right, now we're going to go down and sort them into groups. How many of these things are a gift that you're born with? How many of them are an attitude? And how many of them are skill? And so people start calling them out right? Gift, attitude, skill, gift attitude skill, gift attitude skill.

Seth 36:35

And it turns out that almost all of them are attitudes.

Katie 36:40

Wow.



Seth 36:42

And he says, and here's the good news, attitudes are skills. You can learn to be more honest, you can learn to be funnier, you can learn to be more empathic. And he says, so what we've got here is this moment in time where we are shifting from being based on your genetics, based on who your parents were, to based on what have you chosen to become? And as soon as that light goes on, I hope it becomes clear that internal comes and actual internal training, not compliance, but actual training, unlocks this spectacular opportunity. And so I have no employees now, zero, but at the biggest I ever got was 90. I am really proud of how much I was able either to directly teach or to create the conditions for people to change their attitude. And if you can change someone's attitude, the value you have added is priceless, and this is the most direct way to fill an organisation with the kind of people you want.

Katie 37:59

It's interesting because the light bulb moment's just happened for me, in that we often use internal communications to direct people, to tell them what to do, to move from A to B, to stop doing X, but start doing Y. If we use communications to unlock the true collective power, the curiosity, the inventiveness, the potential of those 100 people or 150,000 people, in some cases of my clients, wow, wouldn't that be amazing? We can start small, and that's your point about the smallest viable audience. No one's going to tell us off if we start really small. Yeah, and things scale, quickly.

Katie 38:44

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.

Katie 40:18

You don't have to write any more books, I know you don't. At this point, you've written over 20, and you could hang up your pen. I don't know what writers do, but they have to...

Seth 40:28



They hang up their quill.

Katie 40:31

Yes, what sparked you to write this book? What was bubbling away that made you think, I've really got to write this book? Because I've only written one, and it was a painful experience.

Seth 40:42

You know, when I talk to people, friends like Katie, when I talk to colleagues, when I talk to folks, I don't do any consulting, but when I talk to nonprofits and they think they have a marketing problem, or they think they have an internal comms problem, or they think they have a whatever problem, they actually have a strategy problem, right? And, writing every day is something I do for me. Publishing is something I do for other people. After writing every day, a month into it, I realised I had written a book about strategy, and at that point I was like, Well, what should I do with this? Is this important enough that I want to go on the digital road and talk about it, talk about it, talk about it, so that other people will talk about it, because that's why it's worth making it a book. And I decided it was. So you give up months and months of your life for the chance to cause a conversation, and that's why I'm here.

Katie 41:36

Yeah. Is there something that's tickling your fancy, that's a very English word, now? Is there something you're, that's piqued your curiosity?

Seth 41:47

That's what the blog is for, because it lets me get it off my chest without having to spend another year writing a book.

Katie 41:54

Yeah, I've heard you say that plumbers aren't allowed to get plumbers block, you know, brick layers... Can you talk to us a little bit about writing?

Seth 42:03

Katie, why was your book hard for you?

Katie 42:08

I needed to get something off my chest. It's a manifesto. It was written 10 years ago. It's called From Cascade to Conversation. Because I was just sick of it. I was I can't believe I'm saying this out loud. I was just seeing all these organisations broadcasting ridiculous messages at people not using real language, and the power and the value was in

conversation, but somehow we couldn't unlock that for whatever reason. So it was painful, because I wanted to get it right. I wanted to write it in a way that people are going to pick it up and go, I want some of this. So it had to be both factually accurate, but it has to be also a bit inspirational and motivational as well.

Seth 42:48

Pages?

Katie 42:49

Oh, it's 300 and...

Seth 42:52

Right, so I let's say 400. How long would it take you to type that book?

Katie 42:59

Well, I know it took over a year to research.

Seth 43:02

But it would probably take you about a day to type it.

Katie 43:05

Yes.

Seth 43:07

So it wasn't hard because your fingers were sore. It wasn't hard because typing is hard. It was hard because you were trying to live in the present and the future. You're trying to imagine the reader judging you. Imagine the reader not liking it. Imagine the reader taking action. And all that imagination created tension because you wanted to live up to it, and stress because you didn't want it to go wrong, and you tried to will your way through it by writing something perfect. And that's where writer's block comes from. Right? Writer's block is not running out of words. It's being afraid of bad writing. And the solution to writer's block is to keep writing until it stops being bad, because writing isn't the hard part, it's getting the good stuff that's the hard part.

Seth 44:06

So plumbers, or I, like locksmiths as a better example. The locksmith comes to your house and the first key doesn't work, she doesn't give up and go home. She tries the next key and then the next key and the next key. So that's writing, right? Writing is, write like you talk, talk a lot and then highlight the parts that are good. The end! And the drama around writer's block is just mythology. It's not useful.

Katie 44:36

Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. I suppose my final question should be about culture in the last few minutes. In *The Song of Significance* this line made me laugh. The fallacy of the MBA is that a brilliant memo presented via PowerPoint – Oh, my Goodness me. How many decks do we see? – Is enough to make change happen, but culture beats strategy every time. In resilient organisations culture drives transformation, in rigid ones, it inhibits it. We're often asked as internal comms people to help transform a culture. A big question again, is the argument starts small, or is there another piece of advice you might give us?

Seth 45:19

Well, changing a culture is not easy, because culture was invented by systems to defend themselves, and part of what you need to push back on the boss is you want to change the culture, but you don't want to change... I'm hearing you don't want to change how you do your job. You don't want to change how you talk to other people. You don't want to change how you reward people. You don't want to change how you hire people. You're not going to change those elements of the system. The culture is not going to change, because the culture is the byproduct of this.

Seth 45:55

So a simple example of culture change, I had a guy who worked for me. He was one of my three top people, and he was a yeller. And as the company was growing, if something wasn't going well, he would yell at people. And I took Jerry aside, and I said, and he doesn't mind that I'm mentioning his name. And I said, 'Jerry, if you yell at someone ever again in this office, you're fired.' in front of everyone, 'instantly.' And he never did it again, and his work life was transformed. But more important, you can't have a culture where some people are allowed to yell and some people aren't, because that's a different culture. What you do when things are hard is what people are noticing about the culture. Who gets the Employee of the Month parking space helps a little, but it helps even more to say, I'm not going to listen to the big bully at the table who talks a lot. I'm going to have that person be quiet, and I'm going to ask the other person, the diminutive person, the person who's wise but not gregarious, to chime in that's going to start changing the culture. You have to change what you do if you want the culture to change.

Katie 47:08

Yes, as you said, the culture is a byproduct of everything else that's that's gone before. Is there just this is, I honestly, this is the final question, I promise. Is there one piece of bad advice or unhelpful thinking in the marketing/comms world that you think still persist, that you wish wouldn't still persist?



Seth 47:33

I think it's believing that doing your job involves doing what your boss told you to do. That's not your job. Your job is to make a change happen, and that includes changing what your boss tells you to do.

Katie 47:50

I love that so much. Seth, thank you so much for your time. This is a dream come true for me.

Seth 47:57

Thank you, Katie. I appreciate it. I hope you keep making a ruckus.

Katie 48:02

Thank you. And that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. You can find all the links mentioned in today's show, including a full downloadable transcript, on our website. Head over to abcomm.co.uk/podcast. If you enjoy today's show, I do have a small favor to ask of you. Please could you like, rate, or maybe even review the show on your podcast platform? That just helps other internal comms folks around the world find our show. And if you did enjoy this episode, take a look at the show notes, because they have links to a few other episodes you may enjoy from our back catalog, including a brilliant conversation with Professor William Khan, the academic who coined the term employee engagement some 34 years ago.

Katie 49:07

A huge thank you to Seth for sharing his insights with me today, and a big shout out to the dream team behind the scenes. My producer, John, sound engineer, Stuart, Content Manager, Madi, designer Rob and the rest of the incredible crew at AB who keep this show on the road. And lastly, but definitely not least, thank you to you for choosing The Internal Comms Podcast. I love hearing your thoughts on the show, so please do feel free to reach out to me on LinkedIn. I do try to respond to every comment and message. So until next time, lovely listeners, stay safe and well and remember, it's what's inside that counts.