



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 12

Christmas Special: *nine gifts from the archive*

Katie 00:04

Hello and welcome to this special compilation episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. I'm Katie Macaulay, and as host of this show, it's been my privilege, my pleasure, to interview some of the most fascinating, insightful voices from the world of internal communication and beyond. Today, we are marking a milestone: six incredible years of conversations, insights and inspiration. To celebrate, I have dived into our archives to share with you some of my most favorite moments from the last six years. It actually proved incredibly difficult, listeners, to choose just nine moments from the last six years. So do let me know if you like this format, because there could be a few more 'Best of the Best' Compilation episode to come. But for now, here are snippets from nine remarkable guests, some standout moments that have stayed with me long after we finished the conversation. Whether you have been with us from the very beginning, lovely listener, or are tuning in for the very first time, think of this as my holiday gift to you. So grab a beverage of your choice. Sit back and relax, and join me as we revisit some standout moments from the last six years of the show.

Katie 01:39

Let's start with a hugely influential figure in the world of employee comms and engagement, Professor William Kahn. In 1990 this organisational psychologist was studying for his doctorate at Yale University. He published a paper entitled 'Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work,' and completely unexpectedly, not least to him, actually, the concept of engagement at work took hold around the world. I was blown away when this very distinguished, award winning academic agreed to sit in my podcast hot seat, and oh my goodness me, Bill, as he insisted I call him, was an absolute joy to interview. As well as being incredibly smart, which I expected, he was also amazingly charming and funny. Here's a clip from Episode 49 one of my all time favourite conversations from the last six years.

Katie 02:54

I heard you say on another podcast that one of the reasons that leaders might deep down, shy away from true engagement as you defined it. Is that real engagements messy? I don't know if you remember saying that. Can you explain what you mean behind that? But what does it look like true engagement inside an organisation?

William Kahn 03:14



So true engagement means we are licensing people to use their voice, right, their own voice, which means we cannot control what they're going to say or how they're going to say it, or how loudly they say it, or how quietly they say it, or with what kind of emotion they say it. All of that is messy, right? It cannot be easily controlled. Organisations are steeped in the illusion that people can disconnect from their emotions when they walk into the building, like taking their hat off and putting it on a hat rack, and they walk in and do their work, and then leave and put their hats back on, and those hats, for me, represent emotions and relationships and messiness and 'The real stuff' of who we are as people, right? None of that is easily digestible in normal organisational discourse.

William Kahn 04:09

For me to be in a meeting and find myself frustrated with my boss, and say it, that frustration is a really important piece of data, right? For me to be really present engaged means I slam my hand down. I say, I can't believe we're doing this again. Isn't anyone else frustrated? That's a piece of data. That's engagement. We don't want that in organisations, because it's messy. It might trigger emotions and it might trigger real relationships and people talking what's really going on inside that relationship, that's messy, and people don't want it.

Katie 04:40

We can imagine, then the leader that is open to engagement is someone who does a lot of listening, is quite comfortable with tension, with disagreement, almost looks for the outlier that's not speaking. It's an interesting set of leadership behaviours?

William Kahn 04:58

Yes, in terms of competence. And what the only thing you left off that list was, the most mature leaders are the ones who are comfortable with their own emotional messiness. They're able to, right, if I'm gonna acknowledge my frustration or my pain or my sadness or my loss or my joy, I need leaders who understand those experiences and are able to contain their own reactions, as opposed to push them, and therefore push me away.

Katie 05:26

Right? Okay, fascinating. Fascinating.

William Kahn 05:29

See, I told you I was a psychologist, yeah, yes.

Katie 05:34

I'm also curious about activism men in the workplace, I It would appear that we're seeing more walk outs, or certainly, more employees putting their hands up and saying, you know,



not in our name, are you doing this, we don't agree. And I'm struggling to stop myself from using this phrase, bring your whole self to work, because that's how organisations... that's what they say they want. Do you think the drive for activism is part of this? Do you see it as a connected whole?

William Kahn 06:03

It's funny. No one's asked me that before. It's a great question. I would say that when people are not invited and able to use their voice in open, healthy ways, they will use them in other ways. When leaders are able to invite everyone into the right conversations and ask for their voices, pay attention to them, honor them as valuable and meaningful and important, and create conditions of safety where those voices are true and so they show up, then activism will not be necessary. Activism is like the development of unions. Unions developed because workers did not have access to real conversations in which they were honored as true partners of the organisation. Therefore unions had to swing up, and therefore voices became adversarial, and it just became unhealthy in many ways. The same thing is true for activism when we invite people into a messy, lively conversation, which can be noisy and chaotic, and then we're able to sort of synthesise and work with that and honor all these different voices and create something together. Activism won't be necessary, and it certainly won't be destructive.

Katie 07:20

Embracing the wonderful messiness of humans at work was also the focus of Episode 61, by far our most listened to show to date, with more than 21,000 downloads around the world. My guest is the brilliant Victoria Dew. We recorded this conversation about a year into the global pandemic, a time when workplaces everywhere were grappling with unprecedented challenges and changes. Victoria's insights, her thoughtfulness and her wonderful turn of phrase made this conversation a complete joy to be part of.

Katie 08:06

It was pretty clear to me, very early on in researching you and your work that there's a golden thread I think, that runs through your approach to communication, and it's possibly best summed up by phrase you've used, which is 'human centric businesses do better.' And I just wonder if you can elaborate on this thought, and particularly, what's driving the trend towards organisations becoming more human centric.

Victoria Dew 08:36

And I would say that part of my mission is proving that human centric businesses do better. Obviously pre pandemic that was quite radical. Yes, it was a much bolder statement than it is today. I think the pandemic has really accelerated this trend that we would call looking at human centric workplaces. I believe that if you are relying on actual human beings to run

your business, you have a business that is not 100% run by machines or robots or AI or non human things, right? If you have actual human beings, messy human beings with lives and feelings and dreams and goals, if you're counting on those creatures to run your business, then it behooves you to enable and to be able to access all of their humanness, right, what we call whole human, all that messy human. Because the best and smartest people, and what I hear a lot of is companies that want to hire the best and smartest people. So let's assume that is the kind of human one is looking to have run their organisation. The best and smartest people don't just innovate, create, collaborate, lead nine to five and then go back into their little boxes like a robot until you go get them the next day.

Victoria Dew 10:01

So creating a world of work where people can be their authentic and air quotes selves, because that word is overused, but not inaccurate, creating a world where people can be those selves, bring and bring up the best in people, and that is simply better for business than having a company full of people who are trying to behave themselves and look good all the time. So you know how when you're staying at someone's house, you're paranoid about breaking something, right? Like you're gonna break a glass or something, and you're gonna be a bad house guest, and because you're nervous, of course, you drop a glass, spill nail polish remover on the dresser, or break a chair or something happens, right? And I think about that a lot, because, haven't we essentially been living in a world of work that was like that, where we're always uncomfortable, and in this country, you can get fired on a Tuesday, right? That precariousness. I think a lot about women teetering around offices in high heels, literally, very precarious. What a stupid idea, what a bad way to get the best out of people. And then suddenly we ended in this world where we got comfortable in our yoga pants and we could finally breathe, and we discovered we could do really good work and actually breathe and not have our feet hurt all the time and not constantly feel like we were about to spill nail polish remover on the dresser. AI, machine learning and robots are getting very sophisticated, but at the moment the roles we really need people to do, humans, involve some of these traits and attributes that we associate being very human, which is not to say that robots and AI will get very good at these at some point, but for the time being, things like creativity, synthesis, empathy, imagination, intuition, strategy, communication, critical thinking. The jobs of the future are very likely to be about how humans enable technology and how we work alongside it, at least for sort of the next 10 to 15 years. And I don't know about you, I really don't dare think longer than 10 to 15 years. Seems very long time away.

Katie 12:11

Next up we have Shane Hatton, author, international speaker trainer, leadership coach, and a podcast host himself. In this clip from Episode 77, I ask Shane to talk about Lead the



Room, his book to help leaders at all levels step up and lead, as Shane explains, in the conference room, meeting room and lunch room.

Shane Hatton 12:40

One of the things I say to people is, as you move through different layers of leadership, especially when you've got bigger organisations, you can't see everybody. One thing that's great, when you first start, you have two or three people on your team, you can meet with them weekly. You can meet with them daily, almost. But then you start to oversee a department, and now you see three to four people of a team of 20 or 30 people, and then you start seeing an organisation. And now I can see, again, 10 to 12 people out of an organisation of 100, 1000 people. So you can't see everybody, but you can be seen by everybody. Yes, and people are watching. They're always watching.

Katie 13:14

The focus of that book, I think, is really smart, and it can be best summed up by "intent before content." I think when I picked that book up, honestly, I thought this might be another one of those books about how to have shorter bullet points on your slides, or how to wave your arms around less or more or make contact with the audience. It's much, much smarter than that, and you include a really fabulous quote from Dolly Parton.

Shane Hatton 13:42

Source of truthdom!

Katie 13:44

Figure out who you are, then do it on purpose. What a great line. Can you explain this whole idea of intent before content?

Shane Hatton 13:55

Most people I talk to when it comes to preparing a presentation or even writing a book or preparing messaging for an organisation. They always sit down and they gather all the information and all the content, and then they go, how do I now distill this down? And they try to add to the equation. I remember an experience we had a few years back. We were traveling through Italy. We went to Florence. We went on a tour through the museum there, and saw the statue of David. The tour guide that was with us told us the story. Now, whether it's true or not, I don't know, but I like the story. He said, Michelangelo believed that the sculpture was always within the stone, and it was his job to remove all the superfluous material, to reveal the statue that was already there. Most of the time when we're thinking about communication, we think about it as a process of addition: get more information, get more and get more... and what I try to encourage people to do is strip it back, to find that intention. What do you really want to achieve? What does success look like? And then



remove everything which is unnecessary that gets in the way of that intention being achieved.

Katie 14:51

And the other thing about that is you are then asking questions like, do we want our audience to feel excited, involved, concerned? You start with that intention and work backwards from it, but always keep in mind your central focus of what you're trying to achieve..

Shane Hatton 15:07

I think you may have read Chip and Dan Heath's book *Made to Stick*. Yes, that was one of the concepts where I learned about commander's intent. And I'll unpack that for people who haven't read it yet. I reached out to my friend in Australia. I said, Please tell me this is not just an American thing. Please tell me this is much bigger. And he said, No, no, we use it absolutely. Since then, I've worked with a lot of emergency services and police organisations, and they use it as well. Commander's Intent is ultimately a one line statement of success for an organisation like the military conducting an operation, they always want to define what success of that mission looks like before they start. Once that's been defined by the commander, it gets handed down through the ranks and the operational plan, the tactical plan, gets attached to that intention. Wow. But at any given moment, any single person in the chain of command can go back to the top of the document and see the commander's intent, so everybody knows what success looks like. Whenever I talk about intention, I always ask people, What do you want people to think, know, feel or do by the end of this messaging presentation, because that defines success. When people hear that, I coach presenters. I'll see a keynote speaker, they get off the stage, they go, how did I perform? Was I entertaining? Was I funny? Was I engaging? And the question I asked them is, what was your intention? Yes. When they tell me, the next question is, did you achieve that? That's success. Yes, you can improve your skills. Yes, you can be more entertaining. Yes, you could be more engaging. But did you achieve your intention? But I think that's success.

Katie 16:33

I have been lucky enough to have met some amazing leaders over my career, but very few have had the wisdom, the warmth and the extraordinary experience of Sally Susman. Sally is the Executive Vice President and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Pfizer. She sat on Pfizer's vaccine development task force and was actually in the room when in August 2021 the Food and Drug Administration approved Pfizer's vaccine for emergency use. In this clip from Episode 55, Sally talks about what was going through her mind a year earlier, when Pfizer was racing against time to develop a life saving drug to tackle the ravages of the global pandemic.



Katie 17:26

I've heard you say that you set yourself a kind of secret goal as guiding intention during this period of development. What was that intention? What were you hoping to achieve?

Sally Susman 17:41

Thank you. My driving intention, and I do believe intentionality is an important and under discussed element within communications, but my guiding intentionality was to transform the reputation of the company alongside the development of the vaccine. Came to me early in this sort of April, May period when (this is 2020) when I was producing the regular kinds of plans that people like us produce, you know, the key messages, the reactive statements... I'd had this feeling that something was missing. What was missing was an opportunity to make the most of the moment, not only create a vaccine with such impact, but to also get that rare chance to have people rethink who you are and what you're doing. And for an industry like the biopharmaceutical industry, that's hard. People think they know us, and their thoughts and feelings are set deep. The kinds of things we did to achieve that intention, which we have achieved, because we've gone from being a laggard on the reputation front to a top 10 brand, were things like documenting the journey, working across the industry in belief that the only enemy was the virus, not one another, our chief rallying cry, science will win, not Pfizer will win. Science will win. And doing all these things differently. Posting our clinical trials on our website, radical transparency. These were the elements that really went to the deeper intentionality to change the reputation alongside developing the vaccine.

Katie 19:34

You've used that word intentionality a few times now, and I'm hearing it a lot in other conversations I'm having. I'm just curious what that looks like, in a practical sense, on the ground, day to day. Does it look like pausing for a moment to reflect on a higher overarching objective or goal, to question, why is that what it actually looks like? I'm just, I'm just curious to unpick that slightly.

Sally Susman 19:58

That is exactly what it looks like. It's the pausing and preparation that we often don't have in our roles, because we often are so reactive and incoming takes the lead in terms of what we have to deal with. Each person has to find the pause in their own way. For me, during this period, it's often come during long walks that I like to take. It's usually, try to start the morning with a long walk and reflect and really give yourself a chance to think ahead. So right now, you and I are talking in early November, I'm starting to think about, what are the big opportunities for Pfizer next year?

Sally Susman 20:46



How do you build on this success to the next success? Taking a moment, six weeks out to the new year, to really think about that. It's asking the questions, what do I want to be remembered for? What mark do I want to make on this company? How do I want to leave my team? These are the questions. This is intentionality in action, to interrogate yourself in this way.

Katie 21:14

No 'Best of the Best' of this show would be complete without the witty, straight talking and charismatic, Steve Crescenzo. I just laughed constantly throughout this whole conversation. But as well as being very funny, Steve's practical no nonsense advice really did strike a chord with the listeners. This is by far, I think our most talked about episode throughout this conversation, Steve shares countless pearls of wisdom. He tells us our job, as IC professionals, is to make the important interesting and to remind executives to use their weekend words. Here is Steve explaining why all too often, as IC pros, we are fighting the wrong battles.

Steve Crescenzo 22:05

I'm not sure if it was Westjet or another major airline, but I remember very clearly being in the CEO's office, and I said, doing an executive interview as part of one of our audits. And I said, "What do you want from a communication department? What do you want from them?" And I'll never forget this. He says, Steve, I'm tired of them coming in here and saying, What do you want me to do? I want them to come in here and say, I understand what you're trying to do from a strategic point of view, to make this company succeed. Here's how communication can help you make that happen. I understand the goals. I understand the quarterly goals, the yearly goals, whatever they are, I understand what we're trying to do. Here's how employee communications can make that happen, by getting employees invested in it. There's a whole list of things we could do. Here's how we're going to help make that happen for you. He said, That's what I want, but I want someone to come in and say, What do you want? Okay, I want a PowerPoint. I'll give it to you. You want a press release, I'll give it to you. You want a story for the internet. Okay, we'll do it. I want people sitting back and saying, what are we trying to accomplish as an organisation? Here's from what communications can do to make it happen. Once you develop that mindset, then you are a counselor, you're not a private publisher, and then it's easier to say no to people. It's easier to push back. One of the biggest mistakes in employee communications is we write for the approver and not the reader. We get so beaten down by the approval process that we end up just saying, Okay, I know she's gonna want this. She's gonna want to talk about blah, blah, blah, blah, so I'll put that at the top, and then down here I'll make it compelling for the reader. Well, once you're a counselor and what we have that confidence and leadership has the confidence in you, it's a whole different ball game. At that point, it's easier to say no to people because you're creating content with the end user in mind and not



the approver. It's a game changer. We fight the wrong two battles, Katie, we fight the battle to make a deadline, and we're always on deadline, so we rush things, and we fight the battle to create something that makes it through the approval process. And we win those battles most of the time. Who cares if you win the first two battles if nobody read it? And that's I always try to get people to fight the only battle that matters, and that's for people's attention. And that's what I think we need to get to next. What being a counselor is all about. A lot of it is speaking truth to power. As a consultant, half my job is telling people that their baby's ugly. You know, their corporate mission, vision, values stink. They're generic. They don't mean anything. Nobody's paying attention to them. Or your CEO column, or your CEO videos, your 15 minute CEO video is awful. It looks like a hostage video. Looks like you're talking into a camera and reading a script, and somebody's standing behind you with a machete. I got to go in there and tell them that as a consultant, I wish more employee communicators would have that confidence to view themselves as consultants. I gotta go tell the VP of Finance that his last 24 minute video on the quarterly earnings is a really, really ugly baby, and nobody's gonna listen to it, and nobody's gonna watch it any. It's not easy. I'm not saying any of this is easy, but once you accomplish it. It's so rewarding. It's so right, when you can actually speak truth to power and make a difference.

Katie 25:07

One of the joys of hosting this show is discovering new stars in the world of internal communication and bringing their brilliance to a wider audience. Before interviewing Sean Langston, Jr, I knew very little about him, just that he is Head of Internal Communications at Reddit, the platform where a staggering 267 million people gather every week to discuss everything from the niche to the mainstream. What I quickly discovered within minutes of interviewing Sean is that he is an incredibly articulate, warm and insightful communications leader. Here's one of many of my favorite moments from that conversation. This is from Episode 103.

Sean Langston, Jr. 25:58

At Reddit, we refer to our managers as people leaders, and I think that's already a mind shift in itself, because people leaders or managers need to feel like owners. When you set them up to feel like owners, like shareholders of business decision making, you are able to call them to action more distinctly. You're able to entrust them with more information. You're able to give them the context, but also the autonomy to take that context, to take that clarity and execute. How do you build an enablement ecosystem, toolkit and playbook for the people who lead your people? One thing we've learned over the past few years with all that's happened in the world is that organisations are nuanced. Teams are nuanced. What may be a key message for your team might be a different key message for someone in the product development function. Although we're marching towards the same goal,

translating that message and business strategy into action looks different for those different teams. As we look out on the horizon towards that five to 10 year vision, how do you equip managers with just the right toolkit to take that message, own it, and say, we're not making this change because this Vice President said we're making this change, and it's the best thing to do. I believe in it, and here's how I believe in it, and here's how that translates to future success for our team, for our users and customers, for your careers. If you can give a manager the toolkit to own that story instead of saying here's line number one, recite your script. Here's a list of FAQs. Maturing the organisation to say you own this. This is your team. Here are the key pieces you have to get right, and it's an autonomous exercise. I think entrusting your people leaders at your company, with that level of autonomy to bring the mission, the work, the execution to life, and to translate that to their teams is the way forward, and we've seen great success with that at Reddit.

Katie 28:23

That phrase shareholders in the business decision making process. I love that so much. That's the holy grail for so many organisations, isn't it? Because once you get to that place, people feel invested, then they're more collaborative. They use their ingenuity more. They're more inventive, innovative. I love that so much. Just out of curiosity in terms of that enablement system or that playbook, what are some of the pieces of that? What are some of the elements? What does it look like?

Sean Langston, Jr. 28:54

At its core, it is the key message you need to communicate to your organisation at any one time. So in action, let's just say you are working for a company that is all about space travel, exploring the universe. This company is currently stationed here on planet Earth, and there was a big decision made recently, the company is relocating to Mars. They found the ability, the tools, the infrastructure, to operate the business on Mars with better cost outcomes, better access to interstellar customers. And you need to find a way to not just communicate to the organization that the business is going this direction, but that the expectation is that 80% of roles need to relocate to Mars within the next six months. When you put all that together, you gotta figure out what is the key message here. The one sentence message is, business will be great on Mars. We'd like you to come with us. Would love to hear back from you within the next three months to prepare for a six month journey. When you have that you've distilled what the key message is, you then have to figure out how to give people leaders the tools to take that simple message and to take some additional augmentive resources, and bring that message to the organisation. That might look like a quick one pager or one slide that literally asks the questions, what's happening? When? Why are we doing this? Why now? Who's impacted? What decisions are needed and by when do they need to be made? Where can I find additional resources to answer questions? And if I have a customised question, who might I speak to? Yeah, if you can list all those questions and have



the answers, you've done 80% of the work for your people leader. And then alongside that, there's a people leader asset that says, here's how you can take this story and make it your own. Here's how you can get your team excited about our intergalactic relocation, and here's what it means for you as a leader. And so we'd love for you to be bought in. We'd love to support you however you need us to. And having all this on paper alongside those resources is really all a people leader needs. They've got everything they need to not just distill and communicate the key message, but to make it their own and to feel like they're bought into the intergalactic relocation. And so it's that toolkit and that repetition, alongside what we as internal communicators help bring to life and all these other communications channels to communicate that change is happening alongside the people leaders that brings it to life in a really magical way.

Katie 31:56

Just out of curiosity, because I love that approach. Do you also have some sort of community forum or place, for want of a better word, where these people managers can share their experience and come together and share best practice? Because I think that's often a bit that companies often miss, I think.

Sean Langston, Jr. 32:14

Absolutely one of the most beautiful things about Reddit as a platform is that it can be used for many different use cases, and we use it as our internal internet. And so we have a private people leaders only space, a private people leaders subreddit in which we communicate those changes, we foster community and conversation as real people do on reddit.com and on our platforms across devices. We also have a Slack channel that serves a bit of a different purpose. We try to go above and beyond, to give people leaders the sanctuary, not just to receive information, but to exchange information and to contribute and not necessarily to debate, debate truth and understanding, but to call out potential shortcomings or opportunities in information that's been given to them. It creates this healthy and bustling ecosystem where a people leader in a small town here in the United States could say, hey, in reference to this line of the intergalactic relocation plan the company's embarking on, I think teams like mine are going to struggle with this piece, because we previously told them we are Earth First. And so it creates an opportunity to build out that toolkit with more answers, more clarity, or a response to that question and why we've changed our minds. Or in those unique moments, an opportunity to rethink how we're going about the actual execution of this plan.

Sean Langston, Jr. 33:55

Our people leaders are where I look for signal in our organisation. They're closest to the teams. Your most senior leaders and executives have clarity into what success for the business looks like. They don't have the clarity into what the workforce is thinking and

feeling and experiencing the way a frontline manager does. So it's important. When you are cascading new information to a people leader, you should do it early. They should not get that information at the same time as the rest of the organisation. No, that foresight, that ability to hash out discrepancies or disagreements or where information is unclear, is critical, because not only do they help you sharpen your message and your delivery when it's time to bring it to the rest of the organisation, but they help you get ahead of all the pushback moments that the organisation is going to bring to you when you push it live. So trust your people leaders is one thing that we always have at the top of our list. Enable them, empower them, inform them early and make sure that they are set up for success when it comes to driving this transformation and change throughout the organisation, and it all maps up to them feeling like owners.

Katie 35:11

Anne Morriss first came to my attention because of her brilliant TED Talk, 'five steps to fix any problem at work,' which has been watched by over 1.5 million people. Anne works to build inclusive executive teams and prepare emerging leaders for senior leadership. She is the co author of three books, including Move Fast and Fix Things. Anne shared so much great advice throughout this conversation on how to become a thought partner to senior leaders and stakeholders. Here's a clip from Episode 88. 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 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 you think our listeners should be thinking about giving senior leaders, having seen so many of them in operation over the years,

Katie 36:07

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 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 you think our listeners should be thinking about giving senior leaders, having seen so many of them in operation over the years?

Anne Morriss 36:30

That's a great question. 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 in my 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, of 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 fantasy that I'm supposed to be the wise person in the room, it tends to be a much more productive conversation.

Katie 37:39

My penultimate moment comes at the end of this interview with Shel Holtz, another legend in the world of internal communication. Here's Shel answering two of my regular quick fire questions and giving me one of many, many laugh out loud moments on the show.

Katie 38:00

What's the one piece of bad advice or unhelpful thinking that you think consistently as dog to the communication profession?

Shel Holtz 38:11

That our goal is to earn a seat at the table.

Katie 38:18

That's such a great way to end this season. Where did we start with that one? There's so many people that want a seat at the table. I don't know how big this table is. That's one of the problems I've had with that phrase.

Shel Holtz 38:34

From a communications perspective, there's only one. If there's one, it's going to be whoever's in the role of the Chief Communication Officer, or whatever equivalent that is. Does that mean everybody else who's communicating in that organisation is an abject failure? That's ridiculous. But for me, I want to get the call before everybody convenes at the table. I want to get called into the office saying we're going to the table, and I need an answer to this question, or I need a proposal for how to deal with this. I want to be the one they call, not the one who's expected to show up at the meeting.

Katie 39:10

I love that answer. Shel, thank you very much. And finally, before we let you go, last time you appeared on this show, and I think it was in the deepest, darkest days of COVID, actually, we asked about your billboard message. So what you would put on a billboard for millions to see? And you gave us a Grateful Dead lyric. You said, 'once in a while, you can get shown the light in the strangest of places, if you look at it right.' A great call, I think, to comms pros to look deeper and further into their organisation for that great story. Three years on, do you have a new message for your billboard?

Shel Holtz 39:50

It's not a Grateful Dead lyric, although I was considering finding a relevant one, but: 'Always be moving the needle. Always be adding value.' The work you should be doing should be meaningful to the organisation. What have you changed in the organisation? The one thing that makes me feel the proudest after six years at web core is people talking to me about how much better things are because the communication efforts since I got here. It was easy. There really wasn't an internal communication function to speak of before I got there, so the bar was pretty low, but it still makes me feel great that people think that it's a better place to work because of the the efforts that have been made through the communications function. So you know what needle needs to be moved? This means that you need to understand the business goals and challenges that the leadership people are losing sleep over and then, but being strategic means is the outcome that you want to produce with your communication is going to help them sleep better. You're going to be able to measure that, that you're going to be influencing those things that matter to those people, not just reporting on whatever right? I have a colleague who thinks internal communications is just corporate journalism, reporting on what's going on in the organisation. And I think that's wrong on a number of levels. First of all, it's all reactive. There's nothing proactive about that at all. But second, we could be reporting on things that may be interesting but don't matter.

Katie 41:27

Yes, exactly right, exactly right. And we've moved forward so much. When I started in this profession, 1990 it was full of ex-journalists, and then there's nothing wrong with that. I'm an ex-journalist, so we're not, I'm not complaining. We know we're particularly good around storytelling, a nose for a story, how to interview people, all of that stuff. But as you say, so much of it is not just about creating great content. It's the right kind of content in the right places, at the right time, aligned to the right objectives. So couldn't agree more.

Katie 42:01

Let's end this smorgasbord of podcast treats with a very personal highlight. When I started this podcasting journey six years ago, there was one person I dreamed that one day I might interview, Seth Godin. He is the author of more than 20 international bestsellers, books that have changed the way I and millions of others think about marketing, creativity and work. Well, that dream came true very recently in Episode 108. Here's a clip from that show where Seth is talking about his mentor, the author and motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar.

Katie 42:50

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 other than 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 cover your hand with your watch, you know, tell me what numbers...

Seth Godin 43:22

I was in the room. Yes.

Katie 43:25

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

Seth Godin 43:30

OK, 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. Okay, ladies and gentlemen, if you're wearing a watch, do me a favour. 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? My question for you is, is it using Roman numerals or Arabic numerals? I got another question for you, right? What's it the three, the six and the nine? Is it a dot or is it a number? Okay, so here's what I want you to 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 gonna 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. Yeah, 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 super computer 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, hard, working, diligent, persistent, kind, you got some more?

Katie 45:38

Generous, thoughtful, empathetic, funny...



Seth Godin 45:43

Perfect. So he comes up with a list of like 50 of these. Everyone's shouting him out. So he says, Can we agree as a group that if you could find someone who had all of these attributes, they would be a catch? 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 a skill? And so people start calling them out, right? Gift attitude, skill, gift attitude skill, gift, attitude, skill. And it turns out that almost all of them are attitudes, wow. 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 comms and actual internal training, not compliance, but actual training unlocks this spectacular opportunity. 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 47:46

It's interesting because the light bulb moments 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, or the potential of those 100 people or 150,000 people, in some cases, with my clients, wow, wouldn't that be amazing.

Katie 48:19

So that is a wrap, not just for this episode listeners, but also Season 12 of the show. We will be back early in 2025 with Season 13. All the links to all nine shows and plenty more are in the show notes, plus a downloadable transcript. So head over to our website. That's abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. As we begin to research and plan new guests for a new season, please do reach out to me and tell me what you want more of, less of, I genuinely want this show to be as helpful as possible to you. In return, I have a small favour to ask, if you could like or rate this show on Apple Podcasts and maybe even subscribe so you never miss another episode. That would be incredibly helpful. It just means it helps other IC pros around the world find our show. So my lovely listeners, have a wonderful holiday season and until we meet again, stay safe and well and remember it's what's inside that counts.