



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Episode 117

### Richard Etienne: From humanising a Prime Minister to empowering the quietest voices

[00:00:00] Katie:

Hello and welcome to *The Internal Comms Podcast* with me, Katie Macaulay. I'm on a mission to improve the way we communicate at work — to move beyond the noise, to nurture real connection. Every fortnight, I sit down with a comms practitioner, author, consultant, academic. And together, we uncover how to make people feel more heard, inspired, understood at work.

[00:00:36] Katie:

My guest today is Richard Etienne — personal brand expert, storytelling strategist, and an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Richard shares in this conversation how he tackled one of his trickiest briefs: helping to make the UK's Brexit Prime Minister, Theresa May, more personable as her official videographer.

We also dive into why internal communications needs to be faster on its feet, how to craft a career that puts you at the centre of the action, and how to get those bigger, braver ideas signed off by your stakeholders. Richard shares why workplaces must work harder to hear and empower their quieter voices — and how, through *The Introvert Space*, the community interest group he founded, he's helping introverts thrive.

This is a conversation about expanding our comfort zones and squeezing the most out of life. It is my very great pleasure to bring you Richard Etienne.

[00:01:39] Katie:

Richard, welcome to *The Internal Comms Podcast*. It's a pleasure to have you here.



**Richard:**

Thank you, Katie. Appreciate it.

**Katie:**

In person as well!

**Richard:**

I know!

**[00:02:04] Katie:**

Let's start with a story. I'm going to take you back to 2018. Theresa May is the UK's Prime Minister, and you are taken into the Rose Garden at Number 10 — is that right?

**Richard:**

That's right.

**Katie:**

By two of her most senior comms advisers. And they slide a piece of paper towards you. Can you tell us what happened next?

**[00:02:29] Richard:**

Context: 48 hours earlier, I was offered a job to be Sajid Javid's videographer. I was about to take the job. Then my line manager at the time said, "Ah, Number 10's giving you a call — I think you should go and have a conversation with them."

So yes, we're sat at a circular table in the Rose Garden. It's summer, so the umbrella was up, and I thought, "Ooh, this could be my salary." I turn it over, and it says: "Make her more personable."

One of the advisers just looked at me and said, "Can you do that?" Then he took the paper back, screwed it up and put it away.

**Katie:**

Wow.

**Richard:**

And without any hesitation, I just said, "Yes. Yes, I can."



You know, Theresa May at the time was known as the “Brexit PM”. She had recently spoken about running through fields of wheat as being something naughty she did...

**Katie:**

Yes.

**Richard:**

... and she didn’t seem very comfortable in front of the camera.

**Katie:**

Exactly.

**Richard:**

So I was like, yeah, let’s do this. And straight away I thought — she just needs to get to share her story with the world.

**[00:03:53] Katie:**

She was known, I think, by political commentators — one had even named her “Maybot” — because she seemed so robotic and inhuman in front of cameras. Where did you even start with that? How did you approach the challenge?

**[00:04:08] Richard:**

Everyone has a story. Everyone has values — elements of their personality that they either keep to themselves or share publicly.

All I knew from what came out on social media or in the news was this “Maybot” Brexit PM, who was just about getting Brexit done. So my goal wasn’t to change her — it was more of an evolution.

It was: “Okay, what are some of the elements of her that I could bring out on camera that show a different side of her?”

So I asked to shadow the person who was on his way out — the previous videographer — for a week, just to be around her. And one thing I noticed immediately was how curious and intrigued she was about people’s culture, their story, their background.



**Katie:**  
Really?

**Richard:**

Yeah. So I was like, this is really nice — how can I bring this out? When she would have receptions at Downing Street, say for a religious celebration or Chinese New Year, that's when I would film and use cutaways from that to pair with the speeches she gave on social media channels, etc.

So again, it wasn't about trying to change her — it was just about bringing out qualities and values that are actually quite personable and relatable to the electorate and the people watching.

**[00:05:40] Katie:**

I love that so much, because I always think as comms advisers, we should never advise anyone to change who they really are.

A) Because no one can keep up an act for very long — that breaks down very quickly.

And B) I think also, audiences these days smell inauthenticity really quickly, don't they? They just pick up on it.

So how would you suggest others might approach this challenge? Say they've got a leader who, at the moment, is coming across... either they're wooden, or they're not personable — maybe not particularly likeable. Is it just a matter of getting to know that individual better? Is that the first starting point?

**[00:06:20] Richard:**

Indeed, yes. Whether it's through people who know them well — if you're not able to get in touch with them straight away because you've just joined a job — how likely is it you'll just be in a meeting with the CEO or a group of execs?

**Katie:**  
Good point.

**Richard:**

What I tend to do when I join somewhere new is find out who's well-respected — who are those tastemakers or key influencers within an



organisation. I get them to share an idea that I have, so now I have someone else tooting my horn instead of me. That then gets me a bit closer to the individual I need to learn about.

Again, it's like shadowing. I didn't just say, "Hey, can you put me in front of the PM?" It was, "Can you put me in front of the person who is closest to the PM?"

That's how you can find out about their authentic self — not just what they like, but also what they don't like. So you can make sure that either isn't included or is reframed in what you present to them.

Because I like to challenge one's idea of themselves. We all have our own idea — our personal brand. But the thing is, there's what people say about us when we're not in the room — that's one mirror.

And there's what we think of ourselves — that's another.

So it's like: this is who you want to be — I understand that. However, this is how people perceive you today. So what's the bridge? How do we bridge that gap?

That's where you'll find the ideas to help bring that leader's story out.

**[00:08:06] Advert:**

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**[00:09:03] Katie:**

You describe yourself as a storyteller at heart. I'm just wondering — first, where does that come from? Have you always been a bit of a storyteller, even growing up? Did you love sharing stories with people?

But more specifically, related to your career — how has that love of storytelling influenced your career choices and your approach to internal comms?

**[00:09:27] Richard:**

Love that question.

My father was someone who was quite senior in the community — especially within religion. I used to listen to his talks on stage, and he would always start with a story. I'd watch the audience — they were just glued to him. Their eyes, their attention — I loved it.

I love films — I'm a filmmaker myself. And the thing about my personality — and we'll get to this — but that introverted side of me meant I preferred being behind the camera. I didn't — definitely not then — like the stage or attention. So I found comfort, and a bit of joy, in expressing my curiosity by telling other people's stories.

So when I moved into my career, communications just seemed the ideal choice. And it wasn't something I knew existed, if that makes sense. It was only after looking back at my CV after 10 years that I realised, "Oh... I'm a comms guy!"

**[00:10:37] Richard:**

I remember picking up my camera only because — very short story, but I love this story — I was probably about 14 or 15, sat in front of the TV in the living room. My father was at his bureau in the corner. I was flicking through the TV channels.

Now, I'm old enough that the sound of the channel changing made noise — right? TVs don't make noise anymore when you change channels.

My father said, "Can you just find something to watch?"

I said, "I can't find anything — there's just nothing I want to watch."



Then I heard the thud of his pen drop on the desk. He spun his chair around — I thought, uh-oh — and he said, “Well, why don’t you just make something you want to watch?”  
Whoa.

Then he spun back around and carried on.

And I’m telling you — my first role, when I started working for myself, I picked up my camera and filmed local businesses. I offered to create promotional videos for their websites. This was before YouTube and all that. And I didn’t even realise that was a form of storytelling — it’s just always been there.

So, taking that into internal communications: when I join an organisation, I look at it as joining a family. It’s not just “send something out and see if it sticks” — these are people you speak to regularly. It’s about finding out how they take in different information and what stories work with certain individuals.

Because yes, there’s company policy and all that, but behind it are the people. Without the people, there is no company. So how can we bring their stories to the fore?

**[00:12:14] Katie:**

You’re not doing yourself full justice with that story — because when you were thinking about videoing businesses to bring their stories to life, to get them more customers, you were actually sitting in a Job Centre at the time — is that right?

**[00:12:28] Richard:**

That’s correct, yeah.

The story starts a bit sad. My father passed away when I was 20 — he was only 51. He had a rare autoimmune disease called sarcoidosis, and I’m now on the board of the charity because we’re still trying to find a cure.

I remember putting off uni because I couldn’t concentrate — it just wasn’t the right thing for me at the time.



So I'm sitting at the Job Centre — my first time — feeling baffled, uncomfortable, confused. I was looking around and saw a poster for grants for new businesses.

Now, most people would see that and think, "Okay, let me get a grant and start a business." But I remember asking the woman at the desk, "Is it possible that each time you give a grant to a business, I can create a promotional video for them?"

Long story short — that's what happened. I started working with the Department for Conventions, and that's how I eventually got into the civil service.

**[00:13:30] Katie:**

Amazing story. There's obviously something quite entrepreneurial about your attitude to the world — to make that leap, sitting there.

I think many organisations say they value storytelling. They're keen to do more storytelling. But it always makes me laugh — if you go to a website and you see "Our Story," when you click on that tab, you rarely get a really compelling, engaging story. You just get a string of very boring facts.

What makes a truly compelling story? How do you define that?

**[00:14:02] Richard:**

I think it needs to be relatable to as many people as possible within your audience. You won't please all of the people all of the time — but there's definitely a way to make the majority happy.

It needs to be concise — or at least easy to digest.

And it's even more amazing if it links to what's popular at the time. If there's a way to do that — because, as we know, with trends (especially on social media), they come and go. But when it's timely? It's impactful.

We've all been in organisations — at least most of us — where the internal comms team has latched onto something trending on TikTok and people go, "Wow — how did they do that? How did they know?" That's pretty awesome.



So yeah — concise, relatable, and on-trend.

**[00:14:53] Katie:**

I imagine there are so many internal comms teams that would love to act more quickly — to pick up on a trend.

It's always struck me as quite weird — I don't know if this is your reflection as well — but sometimes we can't move as fast as our friends in media relations or public affairs, or even investor relations. Our sign-off process just seems so much longer.

Has that been your experience too?

**[00:15:19] Richard:**

For sure — and especially since COVID, when internal comms became the front-runner.

**Katie:**

Yes — wow.

**Richard:**

Senior leaders finally realised how important internal comms was. Not just a glorified noticeboard.

And because of that closer connection with those at the top, the sign-off process became longer. Multi-layered.

And by the time we got any kind of approval or resolution, that trend had passed. Or what we ended up delivering wasn't even what we had originally proposed.

**[00:15:51] Katie:**

What you're making me think is that a lot more IC teams should — if they can — ask for forgiveness rather than permission. Or at least be given the green light upfront. To say, "We trust you enough to move forward with this idea, so you can be in the moment and hit that trend."

I just think that would be so powerful.



You've said that storytelling isn't just about telling any story — you said it's about telling the right story for the right audience. So how do you go about discovering what resonates with a specific audience?

**[00:16:21] Richard:**

Within internal comms, the teams I've worked in — only two so far — have both been really good. And what they both did were internal audits. You know, surveys — just some way of finding out what people want.

And another really impactful way is during live events.

I've worked in both the public and private sector now, and one thing's for sure — in the private sector, those at the top are often much more nervous about live events. Nervous about what questions might come in and how to answer them.

But I truly believe those are the events where you gain the most valuable insight. And faster too.

There are some wonderful leaders who do clinics, drop-ins, lunch-and-learn sessions — those create a more personal link with their people. And it's often through those you find out about the biggest challenges, the most pressing changes, the real opinions of employees.

So yes — I'd say a mix of audit, some form of survey, and being a little less nervous about live events.

Allow comments to come in. I'd probably suggest turning off anonymous comments — because that's when people sometimes just... yeah.

**[00:17:45] Katie:**

Yeah, yeah — chat nonsense.

**[00:17:46] Richard:**

But live comments — when they're attributed — can be really helpful.

**00:17:49] Katie:**

It's interesting. I was speaking to a comms colleague the other day. They were working on a purpose campaign. And she said that a whole year after a live event — where people had come together to talk about their



personal purpose and how it connected to the organisational purpose — *that* was the thing that really stuck.

It was the live event. It was being in the room. And it was being with colleagues. So there is something there, isn't there — about the connection and the community that kind of moment fosters?

**[00:18:20] Richard:**

Indeed.

Even CEOs — leaders — who open live events by talking about something personal. That makes a difference.

It could be something like, "Thanks for joining today — oh my gosh, I almost didn't have time to prep for this. My daughter just graduated from X," or "We just finished her grade five piano."

It makes that individual more relatable. More attainable. It puts people at ease. And that makes it easier for the audience to share their own thoughts, ask questions, or just comment.

It's a really effective — and authentic — technique.

**[00:18:59] Katie:**

Do you have in mind a leader — and that can be a leader from any field — who you think has really got it right when it comes to storytelling and their ability to connect with an audience? Is there someone that automatically comes to mind?

**[00:19:13] Richard:**

"Automatically" is not quite the word I'd use — I had to think a bit outside the box.

Because I thought: leader, audience.

And if there's one leader I've often listened to — all the time, really — it's former President Barack Obama. And knowing how comms works in government, I was curious: who were his speechwriters?

Turns out the lead person was a guy called Jon Favreau.



What he did, working with Obama, was always find a way to either lead or end with a story — a personal one — that connected with the audience.

Obama did two terms. His speeches are still referenced regularly — by leaders, by anyone who wants to communicate with presence, with authority, with humanity.

So I'd say Barack and Jon together really inspired me — to always make sure it's not just *any* story, it's the *right* story.

**[00:20:33] Katie:**

When we spoke in preparation for this episode, you told me about something called “A Month in Pictures” that you were running at the time.

Now, I know our listeners are always keen for practical examples of what actually works in internal comms. So can you talk us through what A Month in Pictures was — and why it was so successful?

**[00:20:52] Richard:**

Yes! “A Month in Pictures” was a series I introduced in one of my previous roles. It started around the time the COVID lockdowns were almost over.

It was a way for colleagues to still feel connected — especially in an international organisation where we'd hear about people, but not really know what they looked like.

When you've got platforms like LinkedIn or Facebook showing people's faces, personalities, achievements — it felt strange not to have that visibility *within* the workplace, where we spend most of our time outside of sleeping!

So the series had a connection to our internal comms pillars — a strategic narrative. We had three core pillars, and each image submitted by colleagues had to tie in with one of them.

And once we came out of lockdown — and people were volunteering, meeting clients, doing offsites — the amount of user-generated content just exploded. It grew tenfold.



Eventually, I had to go through submissions and get clearance — it was a great problem to have. And at the time, it became the most viewed and most engaged-with internal comms campaign we'd ever run.

It was easy to take part in, it was visual — which people love — and it still aligned with strategy, which is ultimately what IC is there to support.

**00:22:38] Katie:**

Just a couple of supplementary tactical questions about that. What was the final format? Was it a video of static images, or... how did people interact with it? Was it a slideshow or—?

**[00:22:52] Richard:**

It was your regular article on the intranet, with a selection of still images.

**Katie:**

Perfect.

**Richard:**

And over time, people started submitting a few videos too.

**Katie:**

Yeah, right. Okay.

**Richard:**

Which we couldn't always use — because they'd crash the site!

**Katie:**

Yes — typical internal comms! Our wonderful channels...

I remember someone once saying to me, "Well, you do have video, but there's no sound." I was like, "Okay. Right. Great. We're halfway there!"

**[00:23:13] Richard:**

Exactly! And then, being an international organisation, there were different languages — so you'd have to get subtitles and all the rest.

Video is great — I'd love to do more with it — but technically, it can be quite a challenge.



**[00:23:31] Katie:**

And just for anyone thinking, “Ah, this could be quite an easy thing to get off the ground...” Did you have to work hard to get those early submissions of people’s pictures and stories? Or did they come in quite organically from the start?

**[00:23:51] Richard:**

They came in organically — *after* I pushed. But I pushed the right people.

Within different teams and units, there’s always that one person who’s a bit creative, a bit cutesy — and they *get it*. Right?

So again, it goes back to that idea of having other people toot your horn.

I was new. So I thought, “Okay, let me speak to those individuals in each team who’ve been here a while and are well respected.” I asked them to make the first submissions.

Once *they* did it, others followed. No problem.

And I’d also say things like, “Look at what this other team’s doing — their pictures are great!” That kind of friendly comparison spurred people on too.

**[00:24:28] Katie:**

You’ve spoken more than once now about how you use others to support you — to lobby for you, to be the “extra you”, if you like.

We can’t all clone ourselves, but we *can* have an army of people out there helping us out.

Has that always been quite a deliberate strategy?

**[00:24:45] Richard:**

Not deliberate at first. That goes back to my introversion.

I found it difficult to approach people. Difficult to ask for help. Difficult to network.



So I'd talk to the people I was comfortable with. And most introverts — we're great at that kind of one-to-one or small group conversation.

I'd like to think I'm personable and friendly — so when I join, I make an effort to say hi to most people and find out a bit about them.

Then, once I've built that network — with people just a bit more extroverted than me, or with wider networks — I'd ask them for help.

And over time I realised, "Oh — this is actually a pretty solid strategy." So now, I think more consciously about how to make it more formal, more impactful — almost a project approach.

**[00:25:40] Katie:**

I really want to talk to you about the introvert side of things — and your work on The Introvert Space. But before I do, I've got one final question specifically about internal comms.

When it comes to taking a bolder approach to storytelling — or just crafting internal content that's a bit braver — it's not unusual for us to get pushback.

I'm wondering: is there any argument you've used over the years to help get buy-in for a bolder, more creative approach? Something that others might use too?

**[00:26:02] Richard:**

Okay. I'll offer three things.

First — your job description.

The advert that we looked at, that we applied for, that got us the job — I view that as like a wanted poster. Like in the Westerns. Except in this case, they don't want you dead... they want you very much alive!

You are *the person* they chose to solve a problem. You're the answer to the issue they identified. So it's about — politely, diplomatically — reminding whoever's pushing back that this is why you're here. This is your value. Trust me.



**[00:26:44] Katie:**

Yes — that's brilliant.

**[00:26:45] Richard:**

Second — use FOMO. If that's still an acronym we're using!

The fear of missing out. If you can show that someone else — another team, another organisation — is already doing what you're proposing, and it's working for them, then your stakeholder is much more likely to come on board.

**[00:27:16] Katie:**

Yes, yes!

**[00:27:18] Richard:**

But third — and this one's important — minimise the risk.

With every idea or campaign, come with the risks already anticipated and addressed. Let them know you've thought this through. You've done the prep.

If you need to, use GenAI or whatever tools you have to ask: "What questions will this stakeholder likely ask me when I present this?"

**[00:28:03] Katie:**

That's a smart idea.

**[00:28:04] Richard:**

Exactly — come prepared. Show that you've considered the risks, and show you're not going in blind.

**[00:28:08] Katie:**

That's really smart, actually. You could even go in saying, "Look, this might sound a little risky, but I've already anticipated some of your concerns. Let me walk you through X, Y and Z."

It shows you're really thinking about what could go wrong — and that you've got their backs.

I love that answer. Thank you.



[00:28:28] Richard:

You're welcome.

[00:28:30] Katie:

Let's talk about navigating your career.

Your backstory — your LinkedIn profile — it's very impressive. You've worked at Number 10, the Cabinet Office, *The Economist*, the Department for International Trade...

When you first set out, did you have an overarching plan or goal?

And if not, did you have a way of weighing up opportunities — something that helped you decide whether it was time to move on or time to stay?

I'm just curious.

[00:29:02] Richard:

Mmm, I love that question.

The thing about these roles... I'd say about 50% of all the jobs I've had were actually created *for* me.

So I'd approach a particular organisation or department and say, "Hey — I've noticed there's a gap in [X]. I have these skills. What do you think?"

[00:29:39] Katie:

Whoa!

[00:29:40] Richard:

For example — at the Department for International Trade, they didn't have a Head of Leadership Communications.

But based on what I'd done with the Prime Minister in the role before, they created it for me.

So if there *is* a link that connects all these roles, it's probably that they were always related to something innovative, something current.



When Theresa May was Prime Minister, she was the Brexit PM. She was at the centre of everything — the news, the public discourse. It was intense.

So I thought, “That’s where I want to be — where the action is.”

Then, with International Trade — well, Brexit was coming. So I knew the UK would be focused on international partnerships. Again, that’s where the spotlight would be.

Then, more recently, with Elsevier — a major name in medical publishing — we were right in the thick of it during COVID. That felt like a place I could make a difference.

**[00:30:38] Richard:**

So yes — it’s partly about what’s globally or nationally relevant. But also: where can I make the biggest impact?

That’s closely linked to my values. The reason the civil service — the public sector — means so much to me is because of how it affects my neighbours.

This is about the people I walk past every day. I can actually help make their lives better.

And then with healthcare — well, that’s self-explanatory.

I’m on the board of Sarcoidosis UK, trying to help find a cure for the illness that took my father’s life.

So, it’s about using the skills I have — and if no role exists that uses them? Then let’s create one.

**[00:31:18] Katie:**

You’ve just slightly blown my mind there.

Because I don’t think I’ve met anyone who’s talked about their career like that — not just looking for opportunities, but *creating* them.

You looked at the sector, the trends, what was happening in the world... and then said, “Where’s the gap — and how can I fill it?”



That is super, super smart. It's thinking at such a high level — looking at where attention is, what matters in the world, and then matching your skills to it.

Essentially, it's making your own luck. Creating your own opportunities.

Are you still doing that, do you think? Is that how you live your life generally?

**[00:32:09] Richard:**

First of all — thank you. I appreciate that compliment and observation.

I think I *still* do it... just not *consciously*.

It's more like, in hindsight, I look back and go, "Oh yeah — I *did* do that. I *did* head in that direction, didn't I?"

So, who knows? Let's have this conversation again in a year's time, and you'll be like, "Yep, Richard — you did it again!"

**[00:32:32] Katie:**

Yeah — but are you constantly keeping up with world events?

Is it something that's really important to you — to have a sense of what's coming, what's trending? Not just the obvious news, but deeper cultural shifts too?

(I'm trying *not* to use the word *zeitgeist* here, because I hate that word... but I've done it anyway, sorry!)

**[00:32:54] Richard:**

[Laughs] Too late!

Yeah — absolutely. For sure.

I make a point of reading summaries of the full spectrum of news — right, left, centre.

There are easy ways to do that, thanks to social media and certain publications. But for me, it's also a natural way of looking at life:



How can I make the most of the time I have?

Because here's the thing — my dad died quite young. And that's had a lasting impact on me.

**[00:33:39] Richard:**

I'm literally 10 years away from the age my dad was when he passed.

So I think to myself: he lived such a full life in a relatively short time. How can I do something similar?

That mindset — squeezing as much out of life as possible — means I stay curious. I stay tuned into the world. I want to know what's happening, so I can help people, make a difference, be useful.

And yes — keeping up with trends is definitely a part of that.

**[00:33:56] Katie:**

Squeezing as much out of life as possible — because you don't know how long you've got.

And I'm guessing you're also fighting the algorithms all the time? Because if you're reading left, right and centre, the algorithms aren't designed to help with that.

So you're deliberately seeking out views you *don't* agree with, just to understand them?

**[00:34:24] Richard:**

Yeah. Basically, yes.

We're getting a bit technical here, but you can use incognito mode — private browsing — when you search. That way, you're not fed the same stuff all the time.

But there are also some great publications out there.

I hope you don't mind me naming one — *The Week* magazine?



[00:34:42] Katie:

Absolutely.

[00:34:43] Richard:

They do a brilliant job of consolidating global news from all the political strands — all sides.

So there are easy ways to do it. More technical ones too. But it's definitely something I'd recommend.

[00:34:57] Katie:

If someone's feeling a little stuck in their career right now — given everything you've said — is there one simple step you'd encourage them to take?

[00:35:09] Richard:

Find a mentor.

Someone who can hold up a *different* mirror in front of you.

Because like I said earlier, there's what *you* think of yourself... and there's what *others* think of you... but then there's also who you *want* to become. Or how you want to be perceived.

Mentors and coaches are brilliant at helping you get there.

[00:35:28] Richard:

So many of the qualities we seek — the things we admire in others — are actually already *within* us. We just don't know it. Or we've pushed it down.

There's also a fear of success.

I used to work for MySpace — remember them?

[00:35:53] Katie:

Oh wow — MySpace!

[00:35:54] Richard:

Yeah, I was a blogger for their music platform.



And I got to interview some really big names — like Beyoncé and others. Well, I say “interview” — I was behind the camera. I never actually *spoke* to them directly.

And the truth is, I didn’t *want* to be so good at my job that I’d always be chosen to go meet them — because I was too nervous!

That was literally fear of success.

**00:36:15] Katie:**

Whoa.

**[00:36:16] Richard:**

So I was suppressing and neglecting the qualities I *had*, because I was scared of what success might bring.

That’s why I say: get yourself a coach. The guy who ran that blog — Andrew Davis, amazing guy — he basically became my mentor. And he shook that out of me *very* quickly.

**[00:36:35] Katie:**

Just a little bit of advice there about finding a mentor or a coach... Is it about going up to someone you admire — maybe someone you’ve worked with a little — and saying:

“I’m looking for some advice and support. Would you be open to playing that role for me?”

How would you go about finding the *right* mentor or coach?

**[00:36:56] Richard:**

Yeah, I’d go about it two ways.

First, within your own circle — friends, family. I remember telling my dad when I was younger what I wanted to do, and he introduced me to a cousin I’d never even met, who was an amazing musician.

So yes — have your *personal* mentor.

But then also a *professional* one.



[00:37:20] Richard:

If there's someone you've seen speak at an event, and you thought they were amazing — maybe you didn't have the chance to talk to them at the time — reach out.

Connect with them on LinkedIn. Find their email. Speak to their executive assistant, if they have one.

Or at work — tell people you trust what you're hoping to do next, what direction you'd like to explore.

Because someone always knows someone.

[00:37:42] Katie:

It's true. And it's surprising, I think, how often people *do* want to help.

They're more open to it than we imagine.

[00:37:52] Katie:

Thank you very much for that.

Let's talk about *The Introvert Space*. You've done extensive work on introversion in the workplace.

Let's start with this:

What do you think is the most common misconception about introverts at work?

[00:38:12] Richard:

Two things.

First — that they're shy.

And second — that they don't like people.

Introversion — like any personality trait — is really about *energy*. It's about how someone gains or loses energy.

So for example: I could go to an event, a social one, after work. I'd be loving it, chatting to everyone, having a great time. Not being especially loud — but just being *everywhere*.



But my *sand timer* runs out faster than other people's. So I'll be one of the first to say, "Hey, I'm off."

**[00:38:57] Richard:**

It's not that I don't like people — it's just that my energy's done. My *social battery* is low, and I need to recharge.

So yes — the biggest misconception I've come across is that introverts are shy or antisocial.

And people often say to me, "But wait... how do you do podcasts? How do you speak in front of people if you're an introvert?"

And that's when we have the *energy* conversation.

**[00:39:16] Katie:**

Mm. That makes *so* much sense.

Is there a certain workplace habit or practice you've seen over the years that unintentionally excludes introverts?

And if so, can organisations — can teams — fix that?

**[00:39:34] Richard:**

It's the word *brainstorming*.

As soon as I hear that... oh my goodness. Really?

Because brainstorming is essentially a competition — for who can say the smartest thing first.

**[00:39:47] Katie:**

Or just the loudest.

**[00:39:48] Richard:**

Exactly.

And for introverts, many of us need *time* to process. Especially if you haven't sent out the agenda ahead of time. If this is the first we're hearing



of the topic — we need context, time to reflect, and space to generate ideas.

One good session I went to asked people to write ideas down on Post-it notes and stick them on a wall.

**[00:40:07] Richard:**

Then, whoever was leading the session would go through *a//*the ideas.

That way, *everyone* could contribute — without having to raise a hand, or shout to be heard.

It gave everyone a chance to reflect.

Also — with meetings in general — please send the agenda in advance. I worked with someone who used to say, “No agenda, no attenda.” I loved that.

It lets people, especially introverts, think about what they’re bringing to the table.

And also — the meeting doesn’t *end* when the time’s up.

Let attendees know, “If anything else comes to mind, here’s how to follow up.”

It’s just another way to include *a//*personality types.

**[00:41:20] Richard:**

And with the rise in awareness around *neurodiversity*, this is another area where inclusive communication styles can make a big difference.

It helps bring out the best in *a//*your people.

**[00:41:24] Katie:**

You’re now working full-time for *The Introvert Space*, the organisation you founded.

What’s the mission of The Introvert Space — and what impact do you hope it will have on the world?



**[00:41:39] Richard:**

Yes! So The Introvert Space is here to equip introverts with the tools and resources they need to thrive — in the workplace and beyond.

And it's also about helping institutions — whether they're educational or in the workplace — to create environments that are more inclusive for introverts.

**[00:41:57] Richard:**

And ultimately, what do I want the impact to be?

I want to get to a point where... nobody even needs The Introvert Space anymore.

Because onboarding practices would already include training on *all* protected characteristics — including personality.

Line managers would use personality assessments or quizzes to get to know the people they manage, so they can adapt their communication styles accordingly.

And people would already be using the kinds of meeting practices I mentioned earlier.

**[00:42:31] Richard:**

I want The Introvert Space to become a kind of casual, safe place where introverts hang out... and talk introvert stuff!

**[00:42:47] Katie:**

Do introverts have a superpower?

Because I've observed over the years — and with a son who has dyslexia and ADHD — that a lot of things we sometimes think of as *problems* actually come with *superpowers*.

Strengths that others don't have.

So... do introverts have a bit of a secret superpower?



[00:43:05] Richard:

I really do think so. Of course, I'm biased!

But I think introverts have this way of connecting with people that extroverts either don't realise or really admire.

And this isn't an "us versus them" thing — because we all move up and down the spectrum.

But for those who lean more into introversion, that deep connection... that ability to listen and think critically... that's a superpower.

[00:43:25] Richard:

There's a quote I love about diplomacy:

"Diplomacy is the art of letting other people have your way."

And introverts can be really persuasive — *because* they connect, and *because* they're such great listeners.

They don't just sit there listening so they can say the thing they've already prepared.

No — they *actually* listen.

Deep thought. Real connection.

00:44:01] Katie:

So what they're doing is what so many people *don't* do — which is to take themselves *out* of the exchange, to actually be *present* in the moment of listening.

As opposed to what you've just said — which is what a lot of people do: they're just waiting to take their turn in the conversation.

You're speaking, I'm speaking... but I'm only half listening because I'm just waiting for *my turn* to talk.

That idea of being truly present — it's reminded me of something Chris Voss said. He's the former hostage negotiator who wrote *Never Split the Difference*.



He talks about “tactical empathy.” And it’s a very similar idea.

**[00:44:31] Katie:**

It’s about *deep* listening — understanding what someone’s *really* saying. Not just the surface level. But who they *are*, what they value, what they care about.

Really, really smart.

Thank you for that.

**[00:44:47] Katie:**

You talk about *expanding* your comfort zone, rather than *stepping out of* it — which I really like. It just doesn’t feel as scary for a start!

Can you describe a small but actionable step that an introvert listening today might take — to expand their comfort zone *slightly*, starting today?

**[00:45:13] Richard:**

Yeah, sure.

If, for example, public speaking is something someone’s nervous about, I’d start by *creating videos*.

That way, you’re just talking to your phone or your camera lens. Just you.

Then — move on to webinars. You’re still not in a room with people — and you can even switch off their cameras if you need to. You’re just looking at a green dot on the top of your laptop.

**[00:45:45] Richard:**

Then — upgrade to where we are now: a little studio. Just four or five people. Lovely. Comfortable.

Then maybe... you deliver something at a charity event, or a team meeting — a slightly bigger group, but still familiar faces.

And before long, you’re on stage talking to thousands — because *you chose to*. And because you’re *comfortable* doing it.



[00:46:06] Katie:

Mm-hmm. And you're not afraid of success coming back to bite you!

[00:46:10] Richard:

Exactly.

[00:46:12] Katie:

I get very nervous on stage — which always surprises people, because I don't think I *look* nervous.

But I've never thought of it the way you just described. That sometimes, when we're tempted to say "no" because we're scared... we might actually be *suppressing* the very thing that makes us successful — or could make us even more successful.

So that reframing is really helpful.  
Thank you for that.

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[00:46:35] Advert (Katie):

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[00:48:02] **Katie:**

Shall we head over to those quick-fire questions?

[00:48:05] **Richard:**

Is there a theme song for this bit?

[00:48:07] **Katie:**

We could sing one...

I'm tone deaf, though, so it's not going to be pleasant!

[00:48:16] **Katie:**

If you could travel back in time, what advice would you give your younger self?

[00:48:22] **Richard:**

Don't try to be someone you're not.

I did that a lot. I wanted to fit in.

I was the only child in my secondary school who had braces on my teeth.

[00:48:34] **Richard:**

I was shy. I was like, "I'm not talking to anyone."



I didn't... there are no photos — no photographic evidence of my braces. I never smiled in pictures.

I wanted to be like the cool kids. I tried to speak like them, dress like them.

And actually — no. People actually found me intriguing *because* of my braces. That's what was cool. They'd say, "Yo Rich — have you seen Richard? Oh my God, that's so cool!"

And I totally didn't see that.

Don't try to be someone else.

**[00:49:04] Katie:**

I cannot believe you weren't one of the cool kids!  
So there you go.

**[00:49:08] Katie:**

What's one piece of bad advice — or unhelpful thinking — that has consistently dogged the communications profession, do you think?

**[00:49:21] Richard:**

Giving the stage to the same voices... too frequently.

Because most organisations have teams that are operational, functional — and *so* needed. Like Finance, Ops, even the internal comms team themselves.

Give *them* a platform. Find out what *they're* up to. Get a story from *them*.

And show that not all superheroes wear capes.

**[00:49:53] Katie:**

It's great.

If you had to recommend one book that all comms pros should read, what would it be?



[00:50:02] Richard:

That book is *Smart Brevity*. I can't remember the authors — I know it's written by more than one person. It's not a long read, as you can imagine!

But it really helps communicators to bring out what's *important* — in a very concise way.

[00:50:22] Richard:

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said:

"Be sincere. Be brief. Be seated."

That, he said, is the way to engage an audience.

So *Smart Brevity* is a great book.

But obviously, I also want to mention one of *my* books.

If you're someone who wants to create an inclusive environment for introverts, I've written a toolkit called **TIMMI** — the Toolkit for the Inclusive Management of Introverts.

And that's available on my website.

So: *Smart Brevity* — and *TIMMI*.

[00:51:00] Katie:

All links in the show notes, as ever.

Thank you very much.

[00:51:04] Katie:

And finally... on The Internal Comms Podcast, we give you a billboard — a bit of a metaphorical billboard — for millions to see.

(Although we *will* mock it up for you!)

You can put *any* message you like on that billboard.

What's your message going to be, Richard?

[00:51:22] Richard:

My message will be: **Look up more.**



I feel like we miss so much beauty because we don't look *up* — whether it's architecture, or nature.

Just... look up.

Let's not look down at our screens all the time.

Just look up for a second.

**[00:51:43] Katie:**

Fantastic advice.

Thank you so much for a wonderful conversation.

**[00:51:48] Richard:**

Thank you. I've really enjoyed this.

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**[00:51:52] Katie (closing):**

So that's a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast.

Everything we talked about — the links and the full transcript — is waiting for you on AB's website:  
[abcomm.co.uk](http://abcomm.co.uk)

If something we talked about resonated with you — if it made you think differently, even for a moment — it would mean the world if you left a quick review, or shared it with someone.

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Until we meet next time, lovely listeners...  
Stay safe and well.

And remember — **It's what's inside that counts.**