



Transcript for S14, E6 – Rethinking leadership for the future of work with Louise Mowbray

Intro: Welcome to the future of internal communication podcast. I'm Jen Sproul, CEO of the Institute of Internal Communication.

Since we launched this series in 2021, the world of work has been disrupted by event after event. A pandemic, geopolitics, AI, extreme weather events, remote and hybrid working, generational shifts, inclusion, diversity - the entire nature of how we work needs transformation.

This podcast explores opportunities for internal communication in the future of work. Internal comms is a critical function that helps organisations achieve lasting change, building trust and relationship between people, in pursuit of shared goals.

Please, join me, Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard as we dissect what this means for internal communication.

With relentless change the new norm, it's time to reimagine our profession.

Cat (00:02.262)

Hello and welcome to a new episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jen Sproul, Dominic Walters. And today we are also joined all the way from South Africa by Louise Mowbray. And we're going to have another conversation about leadership in the future of work. So Louise is the founder of Mowbray by Design, the future focused conscious leadership consultancy.

She specialises in the future of work and leadership and works with clients across sectors at the intersection of futures, technology, innovation, transformation and purpose driven business. She's a leadership advisor, coach, strategist and futurist and the author of a really good book that I totally recommend if you are that way inclined, it's called Relevant Future Focused Leadership.

She's co-authored another book called Uncertainty, Making Sense of the World for Better, Bolder Outcomes. And she is a sought after keynote speaker, an occasional visiting lecturer for business schools, and a regular guest on various podcasts, panel discussions, and live events. So welcome, Louise. Nice to have you.

Louise Mowbray (01:25.326)

Thank you, Cat. It's wonderful to be here.

Cat (01:27.904)

Thank you for taking the time to come and chat with us today. know offline you and I have had a number of really interesting conversations about the current business landscape, the



current economic landscape that all organisations, regardless of location or sector, are now having to navigate. And although some of the trends that

we track have been long predicted in the academic literature, I think it's probably an understatement to say that we are now in a phase of continuous change. It feels as if every day there's something new to confound even the most alert and observant brains.

I would love to start by asking you for your take and your view. What are some of the most pivotal forces demanding a shift in how we think about successful leadership in the future of work?

Louise Mowbray (02:46.094)

That's such a big, beautiful question, Cat. Thank you. It's really interesting because, as you say, we've known that this kind of seismic change has been coming for quite some time. And I can remember with a colleague starting a podcast titled Living with AI at the beginning of 2023, I think it was. I forget the...

Cat (02:48.894)

I know, no pressure, no pressure.

Louise Mowbray (03:14.946)

year ChatGPT was launched. And the first thing we did was literally interview as many people as possible who were actually working with AI and had done for many years and how they were putting things in place in their organizations and their thinking and their advice on how do we navigate this time.

in our lives and it was incredible invaluable advice. mean needless to say it ran its course. I think we were done in about nine episodes but by then we'd all caught up and caught on. One of the things when I wrote my book I you know dug into so much and one of the things that really struck me was the consistency

predictions are terrible, we humans are horrible at predictions, but let's say that in all probability the next 10 years will be the most fundamentally altered in terms of what we know and what we call familiar, right across economics, , technology of course, and the natural world.

than we've ever experienced in our lifetimes for sure. And that this next decade heralds more change than the world has experienced in the last century. Now, for me, most people are bright, they get it, understand it. Cognitively, we understand this. And we are feeling it in our everyday conditions that we're operating in and the contexts we're working in.

But understanding something intellectually and actually being able to have agency over our lives so that we can operate within it successfully are two vastly different things. And my burning passion, my drive, my raison d'etre, the reason why I get up in the morning, certainly has been for quite some years to prepare people.



Louise Mowbray (05:29.902)

for not only what's to come, but where we are. We have so much agency over our lives, over the future. In fact, we're the ones creating it. And I think just giving ourselves that permission or that honest appraisal at what we actually do have agency over and what we don't. And then taking action on it.

so that we create the future that we want, I think sometimes is missing. And one of the most important reasons why it's missing is that we're living in an age where truth and trust are blurred. I mean, it's very hard to find truth and therefore we don't trust. And if we think about the work that has been done in labs around the world from Stanford to, I don't know.

Cat (06:11.061)

Yep.

Louise Mowbray (06:27.522)

I don't want to name any, I mean I've been blogging about this for the last 10, 15 years, around the behavioral science and social sciences used to create algorithms that nudge us in certain directions. I mean they are well and truly mature, let's put it that way. And...

The tricky thing at the moment is that we are living in the age of distraction. The war is being waged on our attention. And we've known this too for some time. And as we keep going back to this, it's one thing to understand something intelligently, cognitively. We can wrap our heads around that.

Cat (07:01.131)

Yeah.

Cat (07:08.245)

Yeah.

Louise Mowbray (07:17.772)

And yet it's all too easy to get caught up in the noise of what's going on. So it makes decision making really tricky. And it makes actually having some space between where we are and what's going on.

Cat (07:26.656)

Mm.

Louise Mowbray (07:32.716)

so that we can make the types of decisions that we need to in business today. I mean, there are a lot of defense mechanisms we have for these types of things. A lot of people throw themselves into more work, more busyness. You it's almost a dis-ease of busyness. And I



remember when I first started working, I worked for the Financial Times Group in London. And...

Louise Mowbray (07:56.908)

Of course, in those days, you came in, you sat at your desk, you know, half an hour earlier than your boss, and you read the paper. You know, as long as you looked busy, you know, all was good. And I think it's very easy to busy, you know, bury ourselves in just taking on more work. You know, being incredibly busy, so we don't have to think about anything else because we don't know what to do with it. I mean, the beautiful thing about the future is that we don't know what it's going to be.

Louise Mowbray (08:26.732)

and the beauty lies in the fact that we get to create it and I think sometimes we forget that that's where our agency lies.

Cat (08:38.326)

I think you raise some really fascinating points. For me, some reflections in response. I agree entirely, you know, it's tragedy really, isn't it? That there have been people blowing the whistle on attention and attention manipulation for the last decade. We are aware of it, but we don't do...

enough about it. I think there's some really interesting dynamics at play. I think we're living through a, an era where the culture is really performative, where we probably overestimate the importance of being seen to be busy. And we had,

Megan Wrights and John Higgins on the podcast earlier this year, and they had written their white paper on spaciousness. And as you were talking before, it reminded me of a book that I read a couple of years ago by Jenny O'Dell, who is an American writer. She wrote a book called How to Do Nothing, which was quite a dense read, but very, very interesting. And in the book, she had mentioned a scenario where a

young woman, I think it was, was working for one of the big four consultancies. It was named in the book, but I won't name it here. And she was in the reception area and she was doing nothing. And it was really confounding people. Like, what was she doing there? Why was she there? Why was she just loitering, not seeming to do anything? And eventually somebody from HR was sent to ask her what she was doing. And she said, I'm thinking.

and they literally did not know what to do with that. isn't it interesting that the literature tells us that in order to successfully navigate the coming decade, the future of work, the trends disrupting work, however we want to phrase it, that we need to be very conscious, we need to be present, we need to take time to reflect.

Cat (11:04.909)



and think through what is in front of us, but the culture doesn't reward us for it. And a fear response is to just get busy and just do and react. Lizard brain responsiveness. And I know that you and I have talked about conscious leadership offline. It's such an interesting...

time to be reflecting on what we need now because to your exact point we get the future that we deliberately design or manifest for ourselves and yet the culture, the situational circumstance in which we find ourselves

lends itself brilliantly to just kind of lizard brain responsiveness and thought lessness if that is not too bold a word.

Louise Mowbray (12:09.292)

Yeah, it's interesting. whenever I think about the future, and by the way, when I talk about the future, it's not some lofty place out there. The future is not because we're creating it in this moment, right? So whenever I think about the future, we can either get involved because it's ours and we're to have to live it. Or we can set up the sidelines like accidental tourists or,

Louise Mowbray (12:36.398)

Critics, commentators, remarking on, what a terrible job everybody's doing. And I think the interesting thing is that we know within ourselves when what we're doing is just trying to run faster in a world that is becoming automated. And if this year has taught us anything at all, it's that we can't outrun.

something that is now ubiquitous and available to everybody. data and knowledge and information are cheap, they're ubiquitous, it's everywhere and available to anyone with an internet connection. There aren't any AI platforms that you can't join for free. Well, there are plenty of specialists, just the bigger ones that are available and open to most people. And there's a massive...

danger in outsourcing our thinking to large language models and generative AI. t mentioned Trans Cat and of course we're seeing a lot of reports, a lot of studies on the fact that we're losing critical thinking. We're losing independent thought. We're losing the ability to actually dig into something and understand it rather than being

Louise Mowbray (14:04.728)

consumers of generated information. And I think as with anything new, we also have to take all of this with a bit of a pinch of salt. Everybody leaps forward looking for the savings, higher productivity, cost savings across businesses, anything that can be automated will be automated. mean, we've got to accept that.

Louise Mowbray (14:31.214)

But one thing we do know is we still need that independent thought. And I worry most about young people because here we're all sitting with decades of experience and expertise



and insight and ups and downs. And we built resilience through life's knocks and scraping ourselves off the floor.

Finding the wherewithal to start afresh and use the wisdom that we've gained to build something better. Young people coming into the workplace today don't actually have to do a great deal of legwork to take on the doingness of things. And it's only in the doingness of things that the knowledge and wisdom arrive. There's information, sure, anyone can have that.

at any time, in any quantity, manipulated in any way. But what do you take away with you if you don't have a knowingness, if you haven't experienced it, if you haven't gone through some trials and tribulations and met the challenges that you're going to meet because we're going to meet them all along the way? And of course, the ability to recognize

the opportunities because they never look like yesterday's opportunities. They always arrive in a new guise and if we're not, we don't have the space between what's going on out there and what's going on in here. And I'm pointing at my chest, I know this is a voice only recording, but there's the inner game and there's the outer game. There's the inner consciousness, the ability to make conscious choices. And I've just been writing a blog post.

where I'm focused on, how do we build bridges? The bridge all of us need between now and the future we want to live in. And building a bridge is an activity. It's not a thought, you know, it's not lying back in a meadow full of, I don't know, foxgloves or daisies and dreaming about the world. You're building a bridge. And the bizarre thing about building a bridge when you're looking at the future is that we always have to see ourselves as intrepid explorers.

Louise Mowbray (16:44.814)

full of awe and curiosity and...

knowing that we're going to meet some really tricky challenges along the way. And there are going to be all sorts of extraordinary opportunities that present themselves. And we need to recognize them and master them and use them to our benefit. And I have a feeling that perhaps we're not that kind of human resilience, which we just take for granted, is not being afforded to young people.

coming into the work environment today in the same way that we had. And I know I'm sounding like I want to go back. There's no going back. have no desire to go back. But somehow we also need to build the rich experience of life into things and not try and eradicate it from every single one of our processes and operationally how we do business.

And I think that's really important for all of us, all concerned. And it's only with that experience that wisdom arise. And we're able to determine which direction is worth investing in and which one is worth discarding. And I think the difference today is that we need to be able to do the thinking time slower and the decision making quicker.



Dom (18:11.691)

Louise, listening to what you're saying, I've been thinking about what this might mean for leaders. Because I think you've laid out a job description for effective leaders. as you were talking, these are my words, but leaders need to help people take agency. You were talking about taking agency. So how do leaders help people within their teams do that? You talked about making effective decisions. How do they deal with things?

How do leaders help people make sense of stuff? Because leaders are in a great position to help individuals start to put things into perspective, particularly within organizations. We talked about how they can use their intellect. People have an intellectual understanding of what's happening. Often they need help to process that intellectual understanding and apply it. And I think above all else, you were talking about trust. And you said that we live in a world where

trust is declining. think it is. think we all agree with that. But I suspect we all have relationships with family and friends where we do trust and we trust for specific reasons. I think there's a, from what you were saying, there's an onus upon leaders to build that degree of trust within their teams. To say, whatever else may be undermining trust elsewhere, let's make sure that we have a trusting and useful and effective relationship here. So there's lots more as well, but those are the key things. I think taking your building the bridge analogy as well, leaders have a role to deploy

in helping them structure the bridge without getting too technical. Become the Thomas Telford of people's future. How about that as a way forward for leaders. taking all that together, and those are my assumptions on what you're saying, what skills do you think leaders are going to have, modern leaders or leaders in the modern world are going to need? Because I can imagine listening to that thinking, that all sounds quite tough. So from your experience, what are some of the skills that leaders need to start to focus on and build?

That's assuming, Louise, that you accept that incomplete picture of the leadership's role that I've painted, course.

Louise Mowbray (20:15.158)

I do, Dom. it's interesting because leadership to me has always been why people follow someone else. It's not because we're appointed to be leader. And we've all worked with leaders in the past, I'm sure. It's not too much of a leap saying this, where we absolutely, there is something magic about that person and we would go the extra mile and we would do that extra thing and stay late and...

do stuff on weekends, I'm not suggesting that we should advocate for that at all, but we've done it. We've all given that much more for somebody we're happy to follow. And I ask every single client I work with, and if I'm coaching one-to-one or even coaching executive



teams, I'll say to them, who do you admire? What are the qualities in that person that you would like to learn for yourself? And I have to start off by saying that we have to assume

We can learn anything. Curiosity may not be your natural way of approaching life. It may not be a trait that you lead with currently. However, you can always develop it to a better degree than you have it. So we just have to assume that we can learn anything and give it a bash. But when we talk to leaders, we're so busy telling them.

telling them about how they should lead, I think it's got to start with the self. I think leaders need to take a step back and actually start with self because if we are the things that we're wanting our people to emulate or aspire to or grow into, the best way to do that is to show it, not tell it. And it's in our small actions and behaviors every single day. It's how we deal with the crisis. It's how we deal with the good times and bad.

Are we that trusted person, that advisor, that people naturally gravitate towards, even from other teams, other companies, colleagues in the industry? Is that something that happens? And often when I start, let's say, working with a client on an individual basis, coaching one-to-one, I say, well, let's measure something you can't directly impact. And often it's the simple thing of how often do you get headhunted for a role that actually you would consider doing?

Louise Mowbray (22:39.144)

and what if we set a target which you cannot directly impact as a measure of what you're doing actually is working. In other words, people are talking about you because you are known to be that thing. once a month for example, or once every six weeks or whatever the case may be depending on the person. And it's really interesting how when we get into the work of building our own self-knowledge and trusting ourselves first and foremost and being much more inquiry-led than direction-led.

off on everybody around us. And in my book, and I call this Future Focus Leadership, it's just one of many aspects. I think I wrote about 22 skills, traits, and competencies that I believe leaders absolutely need to develop for themselves, bearing in mind that we could...

got to assume that we can learn anything to a degree better than what we've got what we've got today. And then there are not harder skills, they're not difficult, but they are perhaps more academic based skills.

or I prefer to, skills are such a bizarre thing. Skill is something that you do again and again and eventually you're great at it like a handstand or a cartwheel. mean, it's really not tricky, a skill. You can just simply keep doing it and getting better at it and you'll be okay. But I like to think of future bogus leadership. In other words, what we need, who we need to be in order to navigate this complex,

Louise Mowbray (24:25.548)



rapidly evolving world of work with more ease and that's ultimately what we're looking to do is to be able to do it with more ease as being kind of rooted in a couple of key things which fundamentally are all about how we think.

not what we think. And that's almost going back to what I said earlier. The intellectual understanding, the what, the knowledge, the data, the information that we used to believe was the most important part of who we are, identities in the workplace. It's what we were paid for. It's how we were rewarded.

That is slipping away because now of course we have machines and AI that can do it faster and it's more, I don't want to repeat myself. So where information and knowledge is ubiquitous, what is it that we need to focus on? And probably the most impactful thing we can do is focus on how we think.

how we process what's coming at us, how we process or understand or build or imagine or create the future and how we create the working environments that our people need. Now, I think this truth and trust thing, they're coupled at the tot. So, you it's not that, you know, we don't trust people because they're doing terrible things consistently and of course, why would you? It's because the...

idea of what is truth has shifted dramatically. I whose truth? You know, we've always got to ask, yeah, this is a fact. Well, whose fact? And we didn't have to ask that five, 10 years ago. We didn't have to clarify. And I think probably one of the most important jobs that all of us have as leaders today is to not accept anything at face value. And it sounds laborious and exhausting.

Louise Mowbray (26:30.37)

The beautiful thing is we have some lovely AI tools that can help us to fact check and do this for us. So less laborious than it's ever been. But we really need to dig into things. Don't accept,

statements or broad statements pushed out in the press or the platform that you forget press that doesn't really exist in the way that it did but on the platforms that we you know the people we follow or the algorithms that are pushing us in a certain direction if you really want to get to the bottom of something just dig into it get beyond your AI search and get back into a search engine that will take you directly to the source rather

to spend the time thinking and investigating and taking a better look at things. And then I think the most important thing about all of this is to hold everything very likely because what is truth today or the thing that you trust today, you may not trust or may not be the truth tomorrow. I don't think there's in any piece of news that ever comes out, there's probably, you know, a...

I don't even want to say a breadcrumb of truth, but there's a bit of truth in it. There's enough truth in it for us to understand the, or perhaps even buy into the hypothesis, but it's never the whole truth. And sometimes the whole truth is not revealed. So there's some



other, and I'll just sort of throw a couple of other skills in there that I think that, ways of thinking, ways of understanding our filters on the world that are.

developing for ourselves if we're in a leadership role at any level in an organization. And the first one is we've got to understand complexity because what's complex and what's complicated are different. We need to treat them differently and even if one issue has you know

Louise Mowbray (28:34.612)

is partly complicated and partly complex. We need to be able to separate it out and actually work with each one in the way that's best suited. So complex issues don't have a start and an end. They don't have something we can unravel, figure it out and throw some expertise, money, time, attention to add it and we'll fix the problem. Complexity means that it's emergent.

And there is no solution. So the best thing we can do with truly complex situations is to, I always jokingly call it stalk the issue, watch, wait for more to be revealed and pull out the bits that are complicated because, complicated situations we can throw the right stuff at and we can get it sorted. So that's the first thing. And...

Together with complexity under that lovely umbrella, complex adaptive systems, we also have systems thinking. That's definitely worth digging into. And I mean, you're probably already a systems thinking yourself, but just haven't wrapped the words around it or the understanding. But, in the same way that our organizations are complex adaptive systems, so too are our

systems, the universe, our bodies, you all of these things. I mean, that's how the world works. It's the natural order of the world. And yet somehow in business, we feel that everything should be neatly put into little boxes and we should be able to measure and manage it, an annual profit cycle.

And of course, today, it used to be that perhaps we'd be out by about 20 % or something like that, where unexpected things happened. Whereas today, as you rightly said at the beginning of this Cat, there isn't a week that goes by where something, an event or situation happens, either globally or locally, that doesn't throw our beautiful plans or strategies out of the water and we need to rethink them.

Louise Mowbray (30:37.814)

So that adaptability comes together with that systems thinking. And under that same umbrella is something called sense making. sense making is literally the ability to make sense of where you are and what's going on and act.

accordingly, act for what's right in that situation. But of course, if we just leap onto the nearest label of what that thing is, or accept somebody else's truth of that situation, our actions may not lead us where we need to be. So that's a really important part. The other



part, think, is conscious leadership. it's the foundation of all that I do. I studied conscious leadership in 2010 or 2011, I think.

And I was at the fourth annual Conscious Capitalist Conference in Boston in 2012, and meeting people like John Mackey and sort of the originators of this business as a force for good back then. And what I would say is that it was a nice to have in 2012, 2015, 2020, but perhaps post pandemic, we suddenly started realizing the value.

in what it means to be purpose driven and what our world will look like if we are not using business as a force for good. There are just too many things that are happening at such a fast pace and are we contributing to our demise or are we contributing to something that turns that massive ship? And I hope it's the latter. And then of course we've got to look at futures and foresight.

futures, these are all fundamentally academic fields at their core, but today, fortunately, they've been brought into the light for the rest of us to use and understand. And futures is really, really useful, not because we want to predict the future or, perhaps go unimaginative, what have tapped tails, although imagination helps enormously.

Louise Mowbray (32:42.658)

But really to be able to think in multiple futures, because the future isn't linear, strategy isn't linear. it might be for three months, but , no sooner does something...

or situation occurs in the world and suddenly we have to relook at all of that. So the ability to hold different futures lightly and look at all probabilities, all possibilities means that we're actually prepared when whatever happens, things that are out of our control actually happen and we can act in that with a sense of confidence.

and make the right decisions or make the decisions that we're best capable of at that time. And then of course we've got to look at all the things like agility, the human traits and that we hear so much about. I don't think there's a year that goes by that there isn't another flavor of leadership, courageous leadership, empathetic leadership. I mean, there's always something that the world needs more of right now.

And for me, the foundation of all those flavors is conscious leadership. Because if you don't know thyself and have the ability to get thyself out of the way, then pretty much anything you touch is going to be tricky. things like agile thinking, innovative behaviors. And, you know, we always think innovation has been the flavor of, well, change and innovation has been the flavor of the decade.

Innovation starts with how we think about ideation, how we think about being curious and imaginative in our organizations. Is there space for that? Or is it something that the innovation team do, or the change team do, or the strategy and innovation team do, or the technology team do? I mean, is it something we hand over to someone else? Whereas if we could create that culture of innovative behaviors in our organisations and



Louise Mowbray (34:45.678)

Now, I'll just say one last thing about this, and that is that we are naturally creative, innovative, imaginative. We are. Look at any child. Perhaps by the time we've got a degree in an MBA or we're sitting in strategy, it might have been knocked right out of us. Or not, you know? And we might be feeling that we're in the wrong culture. But it's there. It's all there. We just have to create the conditions.

that allow for it in our organisations. So no, you can't build a culture of innovation. I mean, I think that idea came and promptly flopped. But what we can do is create the conditions for our natural, innovative, creativity, imagination to actually live, be alive and well in our organisations. And then we start to see very different results.

Dom (35:44.524)

Thank you for that. I'm going to pass over to Jen, just one second. I'd like to highlight just a few things that you said that we've heard in previous podcasts, which is starting to build up a picture of what future leadership may look like, or what it looks like now, fact, as you say. This one about sense-making, I'm fascinated by that. That is something that think we're finding more and more, that leadership is around sense-making, helping people make sense of stuff and thinking things through. That then goes into this whole area about behaviours. I think you've made it very clear that behaviours are going to be

even more important than they ever have been. More important than knowledge. It's about how do you ask questions, how do you get people to think things through. But I also was particularly struck by my words, but you said basically we know what we should be doing. People know what they should be doing. You said you start your client conversations with who do you think is good and what do they do? And I've come across that myself. And think it's more more than ever it's upon leaders to help have that conversation with their team members as well.

help them bring out their own behaviors in this as well. So yeah, thank you very much. I'm going to pass over to Jen.

Louise Mowbray (36:49.634)

Thank you, Dom. Before you do, just want to say that one of my recent articles is on sense-making specifically. And what I'll do is I'll share the link and hopefully if you publish it with this edition, then your readers can, or your listeners can happily go and dig into a little bit more.

Jen Sproul (37:09.56)

Brilliant. Thank you. I've sat here listening intently and there's so many things that you're saying I think even in my day job it feels very reflective of the reality that we're living in. I think that's something you said earlier I'd like to have time to think to make better decisions



and I think that that's something that we all strive for but I also think there was something you were...

saying very early on as well about this issue of agency and this issue of what's going on and the complexity and how we deal with that and I worry if the workforce feels that everything is being done to them not being done with them so therefore they don't feel that sense of agency so are we

in a point now where we're in a panic where leaders are focusing on too much on speaking, not enough on listening or not enough on that dialogue that creates those conditions you talk about.

And I think that that does feel like at the moment we've lost control, things are being done to us, but actually we can take control. We can be part of it, but how can the leader communication relationship drive that sense of agency, empowerment, innovation, conditions, help with the sense making, help be that something that you talked about earlier where they are somebody that people want to follow. So.

in terms of all that conscious leadership that you talk about and where we're going and the fact that we need to, stalk complexity but solve the complicated, isn't it, in that regard?

Jen Sproul (38:46.376)

What part, how can leaders really think about what is effective communication look like in that successful leadership space that we're moving into? How can they position themselves to be somebody people want to follow and somebody that connects rather than speaks out and rules those conditions you talk about that allow our natural abilities in all of our workforce to flourish?

Louise Mowbray (39:12.334)

Such a good question, Jen, thank you. And, kind of just gonna loop back to something I often say, always gets a laugh when I'm delivering a keynote, which is know thyself, and then get thyself, meaning your ego, our ego, my ego, out of the way. And the point of that...

And actually I usually say the hell out of the way because the whole point of that is that if we are operating through ego, which is fundamentally fueled by insecurity or not feeling good enough or feeling the need to show leader, be leader, or perhaps we're under pressure ourselves and that's our kind of default back to that mode, which is not.

massively conscious, we're not making conscious decisions in the moment, then that's what's going to come through. And therefore, lack of trust and all the other ills that come with unconscious leadership. So I think for me, it's the simplest thing on the planet. It's not complicated. We don't need a degree for this stuff. It's very simple. the greatest gift you can give another human being is to make them feel heard.

Yeah. So actually listen to. And that means that you're able to sense when perhaps when things aren't right. You know, this whole story about bringing your whole self to work, thank



goodness that's all been kibosh because we don't want whole selves at work. We want your professional selves at work. We want your leadership capabilities at work, your conscious leadership capabilities. And that means. Yes.

absolutely providing direction when it's needed but treating everything as a coaching or teaching opportunity you want to leave the other person better off than when you found them and the only way that we do I mean the reason why people come to work in the first place is to learn and earn you know as long as you're paying people enough money so they're not thinking about money it's off the table and they're thinking about the work then that's the money sorted it needs to be fair

Louise Mowbray (41:32.802)

People only think about money when it's not fair. So assuming you've got that right and that's off the table, then people are thinking about what they're going to learn, how they can use this to solve into whatever issue they're dealing with at the moment, or find a better way of doing it.

And if they can't come to you and ask questions where you either say, I don't know, that's a great area of inquiry, you go and do the project, let's have a look. Or you can give them some direction, but with the types of explanations that need you as leader to ask enough questions to know how to frame that for the other person.

So, one of the biggest challenges we all face is how do we frame what's going on in the world for ourselves so that we get it? we, unless we get it, we can't give it. So always, I keep coming back to self. We have to develop that within ourselves in order to be able to be of any value or use to any other human being. And I would say that people who resort to

literally giving direction, focusing purely on productivity, talking way more than listening, or even asking any questions that show that they are remotely interested. Well, everybody can play the game of leader and reportee, but it doesn't mean a damn thing. And that game just doesn't...

last long, it doesn't hold out under challenges and stressful times and difficulties, things tend to fall apart. So just go back to what it is that you know that you appreciate when you're learning and growing through somebody else. And that is that they listen intently, I call it deep listening, and they ask.

Louise Mowbray (43:40.768)

loads of questions. But you will only ever know what question to ask if you've listened deeply in the first place. So be curious. You don't have to take on everybody's issues and problems. You're not some sort of columnist where everybody's writing in with their problems on a weekly basis that you have to solve. Not at all. But...

Louise Mowbray (44:05.998)



Actually care. I think that that's what it is. That's the thing that breeds trust. And say when you don't know, for goodness sakes, applaud people who ask questions beyond what you've thought of because they will help you to grow.

Jen Sproul (44:23.66)

Love that. And I think that, again, that theme of listening, but I also like that word used, care. I think that's what, if we look at that with employees, it's that sense of care**. ** And I think that that deep listening and the asking questions and the curiosity and the connection is something that we're seeing as a really, really strong theme. And I think that sometimes when we feel under pressure, we feel like we just need to give an answer rather than ask a question. So how do we reframe that balance in ourselves to take that breath? And I also think,

what you said earlier is really important because for people to remember when we're looking at because I think particularly larger organisations leaders can become so so so far detached from what's going on in certain parts of the business they don't you know they don't have that time for all of that but I think if I look at what's going on and the things that we're seeing from the workforce as well as they they want to know how they can develop they want to move forward they want to feel that safe and they want to have those skills so if we're not focusing in on how and development is there's lots of ways of development but every conversation is a development opportunity.

And I think that's really important and that helps people then take agency again to then do those things. So I think those things are really an important interconnected relationship, shall I say. So anyway, that was my thoughts, but I think I'm going to throw back. is me and Don throw the baton now at this point. And I throw back to Don who always helps to wrap up this podcast.

Dom (45:51.412)

Okay, Baton Court, thanks Jen, thanks Louise. Conscious of time, so let me ask a question to bring us into land if I can mix my metaphors. We've covered a huge amount of fantastic stuff about leadership.

I'm thinking about many of our listeners are internal communication practitioners. to bring us into land Louise, and it's tough question, we started with a tough question, we're going to finish it off I suppose. What are the three key things that you think internal communicators can do to help their senior colleagues do the stuff we've just been talking about and improve their communication skills? That's a massive question, but what are the key three things you think they can do?

Louise Mowbray (46:39.202)



first thing that popped into my mind is read the room. There's no point in dishing up whole lot of guidelines and instructions if you haven't got a finger on the pulse of what's actually going on.

Louise Mowbray (46:57.006)

try and keep it short and sweet. That's tricky. The second is ask. Ask. Ask loads of questions. Ask questions that haven't been asked. And the only way you can do that is by reading the room. You know, it's all connected. And then the third is stop dishing up slop. That sounds terrible. I'm sorry to have to say it, but do not.

go to chat GPT and produce 10 points or five for the week or whatever the standard thing is, actually think about what these, pressures that people are under and what causes them to perhaps not communicate in a way that would help them and the people in their teams and the organisation you all serve.

So it requires you, once again, it's back to agency. You've got it, use it. I mean, there are many places in the world where people just don't have agency. You have full agency in terms of the organisation you choose to work with, the culture you choose to work in, the people you choose to work, you know, and it all comes back to this. not great things happen, in which case make a choice. Do you make a choice?

So I hope that was short and sweet enough, but yeah, the responsibility is yours.

Dom (48:26.891)

Yes.

Fantastic. think the responsibility to yours, take agency. I love read the room. I think there are many t-shirt messages, but one of them is also stop serving slop. I think that's also very true as well. But in particular, it's about asking questions, isn't it? It's about taking a step back, asking questions, and helping leaders to ask questions as well. Louise, thank you very much for joining us. Thank you for giving us your insights. And thank you for giving us a different take on both leadership and leadership communication.

Louise Mowbray (48:58.924)

My pleasure, Dom. Thank you so much for your deeply insightful questions.

Cat (49:05.301)

And just to finish off, just to share with listeners, there will be some show notes at the end of this conversation linking to some of the articles that Louise has written on some of the topics that have been discussed today and also a link to her website and her book, because this is really, really, really important stuff. so the more that you as proactive learners listening in,

can do to enhance your thinking, the better we all become. So Louise, thank you. Thank you so much for joining us today.



Louise Mowbray (49:42.894)

pleasure Cat and thanks Jen, thanks to you too.

Jen Sproul (49:45.039)

Thank you. Lovely. Thank you very much.