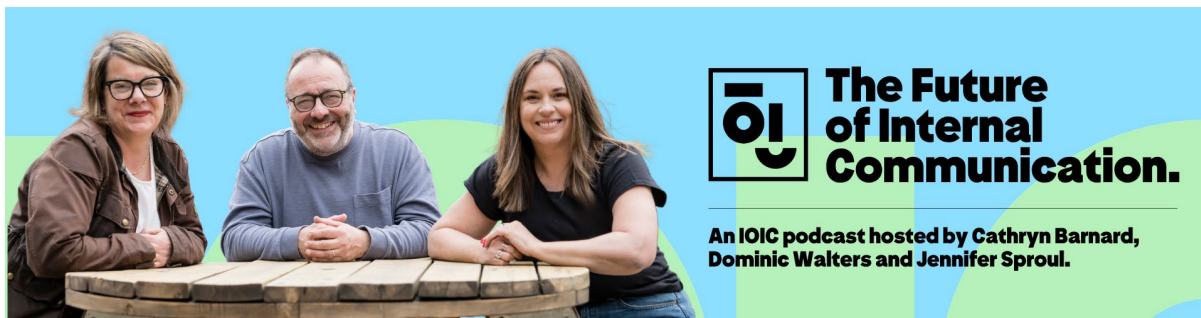




Transcript for S17 E01 Hope is a strategy with Ian Pettigrew

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 (01:02)

Hello and welcome to a brand new series of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Waters. And this is series 17 and it's taking place in autumn of 2026 and what has happened to the world, seems absolutely mad on a daily basis, does it not? And so I'm really buzzed by what we're going to be talking about today because somebody far more intelligent than me has been tapping into the zeitgeist and recently published a book called *Hope is a Strategy*, which immediately grabbed my attention as you guys you listeners might appreciate, we regularly have conversations at IOIC HQ about the pivotal roles of trust and connection and psychological safety and confidence. And we saw in this year's IC index just how much is now hanging in the balance. And Jen asked me a couple of months ago to have a think about the role of confidence in boosting organisational effectiveness. And for those who know me, I go off down all kinds of rabbit holes. And one of the many rabbit holes that I went down was making it one of my priorities to read said book, *Hope is a Strategy*. So without further ado, I am delighted to introduce to you all its author this morning.

Ian Pettigrew is a coach and leadership development consultant focused on helping leaders inspire hope. His background is that he's a Gallup Certified Strengths coach, a fellow member of the Association for Coaching and a member of the Association for Business Psychology. He's got an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology and has been named twice by HR magazine as one of HR's most influential thinkers.



So his debut book, *Hope as a Strategy* has been listed as a finalist in the Business Book Awards, Leadership Book of the Year. And alongside all those very many accomplishments, Ian has founded a skills-based volunteering initiative called Connecting HR Africa. I mean, it's just this list. This list is like, whoa, high performer. Outside of work in his spare time, Ian is currently training for an everlasting cycling challenge to raise money for charity. And all of that makes me feel very, very tired, just thinking about it all. But I've loved every conversation I've had with Ian in the lead up in the episode pre-briefing. So Ian, welcome to our podcast. Lovely to have you here.

Ian Pettigrew (04:05)

Thank you so much, Cat. And I I'm gonna maybe reject the more intelligent than you in the introduction, but apart from that, thank you very much.

Cat (04:11)

Bless you, all those qualifications gave me, made me feel a bit, ooh, you've obviously put the legwork and the hours in. So somebody doesn't just decide to pursue a masters in the areas that you have qualified in. I would love for you to tell our listeners a bit more about your industry background and then what led you to write *Hope is a strategy*.

Ian Pettigrew (04:40)

It's loads of things and it's sort of a culmination of loads of things, but I'll try and keep it brief. so first degree, applied statistics and computing. Bit of a geek at heart, , like the science, like the logic. Joined what was then ICI on the management development scheme and did lots of technical development roles, but increasingly was more interested in the people and psychology elements. And I was the first in my family to go to uni. It was weird going to uni. Nobody had ever I didn't even know about psychology when I was a kid. So there was no way I'd have ever gone to uni to study psychology. And increasingly then, saw a demerger of ICI and a merger. So then became I was working for AstraZeneca. And as I was fascinated by the people stuff, I trained as a coach.

I got involved in more initiatives, got involved in running some leadership development programmes, and my final role at AstraZeneca was as change director for Global RD Finance, so lead in large-scale organisational transformation. one of the hardest jobs I've ever done and there was a little bit of my job that I absolutely adored, which was the real people-focused stuff.



And I I just wanted to make that all of my job and I couldn't do it. So back in two thousand and nine, I left to set up on my own to set up Kingfisher Coaching. And I'm really fortunate in that I get paid to do my hobby. I get to do something that I'm good at, I care about, and it pays the bills. So I definitely don't take that for granted. I'm gonna be really honest here because it's like there's always one of my strengths is learner, so I absolutely love learning, so I'm always gonna be equipped for what I do. There's probably also a little bit of imposter phenomenon going back to my childhood, which is kind of, do what, if I'm gonna stand in front of you, I wanna make sure that I can reel off the I've done this, this and this, so that you sort of that I'm qualified. Because I don't think we ask the question enough what makes you qualified to say that? Or how do that to be true?

I think in an evidence-based profession, I think we should ask that a little bit more. So I always want to make sure that I'm equipped for that. So in my journey as Kingfisher Coaching, do a lot of work around strength, helping people to be more of who they already are. And I've always been really motivated to make sure that it's not just positive thinking. It's not a kind of Instagram motivational quote. Rather, I was fascinated with positive psychology. So went to do a master's in applied positive psychology and coaching psychology, absolute eye opener for me and my subject of my research for that became hope. And I discovered that hope was a real thing that we've been studying for quite a few years, mostly on an individualistic level. It's kind of all about personal hope just as an individual and I wanted to do more about the leadership aspects of hope. But I had a bad motorbike accident and parted company with a motorbike at about 100 mile an hour on the race track and was sort of off work for about six months and it took me a long time to get to work again. And when I look back I remember the physios being surprised it's kind of, yeah, we said do this exercise twenty times a day. How have you got on? And like, yeah, I've done it 20 times a day. And they're like, most people don't.

And it's like, but that kind of focus on here's how I want things to be in the future, and I am going to do what it takes to get there, it is hope. That's a big part of hope. And it kind of understanding more about hope in my academic research, just I found it to be a really useful, empowering lens, both for me and for other people as well. So that's a quick potted history of how I've ended up where I'm my master's research, my thesis was called Is Hope a Strategy? and then the book is based on both that research plus pre existing academic research and I've already given the game away about the conclusion I came to 'cause the book's called Hope is a Strategy.

Cat (08:50)

Yeah, yeah, yeah. God, that is so, so interesting. And I'm not sure that you had told me about the motorbike accident, but I immediately chimed with me because, , personal experience of having witnessed people, well, my parents both developed terminal illnesses. And I would go as far to say with a lot of time to reflect and look in the rear view mirror, I would say, hopelessness also draws very negative conclusions. And actually what I've learned through curiosity and inquiry, bit like you, is just what role hope does play in achieving outcomes and shaping the future, which is really



apposite because right now, we're not too many weeks from having had, what is it, our seventh prime minister in a decade? I can't remember. And, left, right and centre, things do feel pretty hopeless and it must be an absolute challenge for anybody in the boardrooms of the UK today to get up every morning and brush themselves down and start again and try and instill a sense of hope because it feels like we're getting battered, left, right and centre. So I love that you've honed in immediately on your findings that hope is a mindset and a heart set.

Ian Pettigrew (10:18)

It's all of those. and I think one of the key things I'm sure I'll talk about this later, but you don't need to do it alone. and I think that's key thing here, if you're gonna be the person, say, in the boardroom who is keeping people fixed, their eyes firmly focused on a better future, if you're trying to do it all alone, that's exhausting. And one of the things that comes up in my research is how we deal with the challenges and that's really important and having a support network, being able to talk openly about things is really important. So I think just putting the onus on one person to be strong and positive is too big an ask. It's a community and group thing.

Jen Sproul (10:57)

That does chime with me as well, because someone says, you want to be that person that, because behaviour breeds behaviour, right? Mindset catches and it does that thing, doesn't it? But you can't be that one to always drive that forward as well when we were in a collective endeavour. And picking up on your point, Cat, about our seventh new Prime Minister, have you noticed that a lot of his TikTok videos end with I believe in hope?

So he is using the hope narrative as part of his new communication rhetoric or language or style to kind of try and inject, can I bring that country with me and all of us with us on that kind of hope trajectory. And I love your thought that it does not have to be alone and I think that one of the things picking up on Cat's at the beginning is about the IC index that we found this year that was quite interesting for communicators as well as we asked a question to a representative sample of UK employees around good and bad news. And actually what most people found was that actually if we do a better job at having telling good news, that has a really big impact because we're forever trying to get to this place, right? We sort of go, here's a vision, follow, follow, follow, follow.

And actually, but what we're doing in all those steps is all we're finding is we're just concentrating on the negative things, the barriers, the challenges, why that plan has not worked. Sorry, we've made more layoffs, redundancies, or that plan hasn't gone to this space, or this hasn't happened. And then that consumes us. But alongside that, there is so much good that happens that we don't then say, I talk about this with my team as well. We often talk about we're trying to get somewhere



and the feedback I get a lot is we don't take enough time to celebrate the small wins as a collective and we need that to feel like we're moving towards something.

So I guess my question with all that just thinking what you said is, what is hope for you as a business strategy and how strategically important is it and how can that, I guess, feeling of hope make a more resilient, more driven, more promised or more successful organisation, shall I say?

Ian Pettigrew (12:58)

Before I answer the question and Jen, can I comment on what you just said because it's so fascinating. And I think like one of the sort of the reasons I think we need positive psychology is we've got what we call the deficit discourse and that is human nature to focus on what's wrong. There's a famous research paper by Baumeister called Bad Is Stronger Than Good which is where we focus. And so, I spend a lot of time travelling between Manchester and London on Avanti West Coast. If you looked at people's social medias, you would think that we very rarely actually made it in one piece from Manchester to London and back again. It's like, we post when it's like can't believe it, have to go via, this today or two hours late. What happens when it's right? What happens when we arrive bang on time? Really nice journey. Nobody says a thing. And so the deficit discourse leads us down some really wrong rabbit holes and we can get caught into that. And but the answer to that isn't toxic positivity. And I think sometimes leaders almost go with a right, it's like that, let's go. And we've seen that in UK politics quite a lot. As well we've seen the extremes of doom and gloom and toxic positivity. And one of the things that I think leaders can play a massive role in is helping people see those glimmers of hope. Because the glimmers of hope those signs, that sort of green grass that's all around. Sometimes we don't see them, sometimes they're hard to spot. Sometimes we're looking at the wrong indicators. We need to look at leading rather than lag. But just seeing them, it's motivational and this challenge I'm training for is to indoor cycle the height of Everest in a day. And it's similar to running four marathons back to back. It's gonna be about eighteen to twenty hours of cycling.

After my motorbike accident, I also have broke all three major bones in my ankle and then committed stupidly to do this challenge. And I say stupidly because I didn't have the slightest idea what I was letting myself in for and the training has been hit and miss and work has been busy and I've done a bit of a hope reset and I've scaled down. So I did in July, I did Everest in a month. Now I could look and say, I've got to do it in a day. A month's pathetic. But I'm not, it's a good sign.

Then I've done Everest in a fortnight, which I finished last week. And it's like, and my next target is to do a quarter Everest in a day, and then half Everest in a day. And it comes down to a simple choice. Am I gonna look and say, I'm never gonna make it, it's so big, and find excuses for not doing it? Or am I gonna look at those glimmers of hope, that progress that I see, and feel motivated? Which brings me round to what what hope is.



So hope is the belief that the future will be better. Along with knowing what we can do to make that a reality, doing what it takes to get there, and being flexible and navigating the bumps in the road. That's hope. So hope is about making things happen and getting to somewhere better.

The origin of hope research actually was from a big research project that was exploring the psychology of making excuses. And they were diving deep into like, I can't do this because and yeah, that failed because. And the researchers were just a bit curious about I wonder what the opposite of this is. And they started to explore the opposite of making excuses. And that was the first research project into hope. And we've got a big evidence base. So hope increases the likelihood that we achieve an outcome. If we have hope, it increases engagement, it increases well being, it increases productivity. But even if we look at things like we've got we've got research showing the impact of hope interventions in prisons, for instance, we've also got a lot of research about what difference hope makes to people who are terminally ill to pick on to Cat's point. And even in, for instance, terminally ill cancer patients, hope and hope interventions, we've got to be really careful about this, had a slight extension of life. Slight on average, but also reduced anxiety and depression. So we're not saying anything stupid like hope cures cancer. Absolutely 100% not. But where people take control and make the most of the hand they've been dealt and accept the things they can't control, that things are better.

Jen Sproul (17:36)

I love it. I had a comment as well about just what you were saying about when I think about change and the fact that what we're seeing at the moment in organisations that employees are saying, well, I don't believe it, I don't understand it, I'm anti it because I don't think we have presented a narrative or a pathway or a set of steps or a way forward. And because I think we generally feel a lack of control.

Ian Pettigrew (17:57)

Absolutely. And I think how we like let's face it, we're not gonna have less change, are we? We're we're gonna have more. And one of the things that cropped up in my research is the danger of restructures. Because restructures can destroy hope. And I think some of that is down to comms. And I think some of it is sometimes we're starting things that aren't actually addressing the challenge with fixing what the thing that isn't necessarily broken. So there's a potential topic. But hope is so important because think about it at an individual level. If I've got hope, writing my book, I'm not a natural writer. It's one of the hardest things I've ever done. I nearly gave up several times and in fact I'd thought about doing it for years. What's got it on the bookshelves?



Every time I walk past the bookstore now, I go in and see if they've got it, and most have. I go and visit my book, which is a really sad confession, but most authors do it. What got it on the shelves and Foyles and Waterstones and everywhere? Hope! It's that, okay, look, that's the outcome. We'll do it. At a team level, if you've got hope, you don't focus on excuses and blame, you focus on how are we gonna get there. And organisationally If you go into a really challenging situation, if you haven't got hope, you're less likely to achieve that outcome. So hope is really powerful. And there was a big piece of Gallup research that was presented at the World Government Summit in 2025. And we've got loads of leadership research, but we have less about followership. And Gallup's focus was what do people want from leaders? And the answer was hope.

That was the thing that people said they wanted most from leaders. And that was all around the world. And that was leaders in organisations, families, education, community, government. People said they wanted hope. And it was actually more pronounced in younger people as well. And the hypothesis there is they've got more of their lives ahead of them. And they want hope, they really want a belief that it will be better. So hope, yeah, it's a really, sometimes I get asked about, what do you think about passive hope? And it's like, there's no such thing. Hope by nature is active. And it it changes things. That's how we're gonna change things is by collectively having hope.

Cat (20:19)

Can I cut in really quickly, but Dom, I'm going to segue to you and you're going to love this segue. What I've immediately thought about as you have described that, Ian, is how certain people at certain times in history imbue a sense of hope. And I am not a historian deferring to Dom, but I have read literature around Winston Churchill wasn't the most effective leader that he has been painted as in the history books. But the fact is that he was able to imbue a sense of hope in the wake of so much hopelessness during that Second World War period. And I literally do need to shut up now because Dom is the historian. But that's what that made me think about. And Dom, please say, well, you've got that all wrong, can't you? You've the wrong books.

Dom (21:17)

Cat, I would never say that. Also, whenever any historian gets asked a question like that, the standard response is, that's not my period. And that gets us out of everything. But I think there's a lot in what you're saying there. And I suspect with Churchill, it was also around circumstance, I imagine as well. Leading on from that, I was going to ask a question about what makes up hope.

And I think, Ian, you've answered it very comprehensively. I've just taken out a few thoughts. And these are my words, so I'm putting together some of them wrong. But it's about, first of all, belief. sounds like what you're saying is to be hope, to have hope. You've got to have some belief this is possible. And so going back to your training and other things like that, I guess a bit of agency, so



ability probably more than agency. We don't want to encourage unrealistic hopes. So people have to have the ability. And to be able to unlock that ability, I think, is coming through very strong which goes into control. You've made this point very clearly about control. And then I try to think of the right word, but the sense of perspective perhaps. So I think what you're saying, well, what you definitely were saying is people can sometimes get very pessimistic about stuff. They see things from a very closed way and leaders need to help them to see it differently. Let me ask you a question about what you said about the Gallup research, because you said that people are looking for hope from their leaders. And is it about hope they want or do they want leaders that can facilitate hope? Is something you can give someone directly or can you create these circumstances in which they develop their own hope? And to what extent does hope have to come from your own heart? Sorry, there's about 10 questions all wrapped up in one there.

Ian Pettigrew

Yeah, they're ten very good questions. So and I think one of the things that comes out of my research, so my academic research and I write about in the book, is that hope is influenced by what's gone before. So it's almost, take any situation and almost we might think that do you know what, there's a secret formula where we can help a leader find the right words to magically produce hope. But there's two things. In some of my research I call it the ghosts of past hope. There's two things that influence it there. One is trust in leadership. So if this is the third time you've stood up and promised a really amazing change project that you've hailed a great success and it hasn't delivered the benefits you promised, what's gonna happen? Trust is low. People won't believe you, they won't have hope. So trust in leadership. Trust is such a precious commodity.

And I often end up in coaching conversations encouraging leaders to optimise for trust. It's sort of solving for trust. It's such a valuable, precious commodity that takes a long time to build. But the second thing, and Dom, you were right to call this out, is self-belief. And but also not only self belief, but belief in the team around you as well. So delivery and the ability to deal with past difficulties and changes increases hope. Those war stories, those stories of success, they all increase future hope. So we can almost treat hope as if like we're starting from zero and we're looking to the future. But it's not. Hope is really influenced by what's gone on before, and some really poor behaviours in the past can bite you on the backside when suddenly you're like, come on, come with me.

You're right about the we can't do hope to people. It's often I'll interchange this a bit. Sometimes I'll talk about giving people hope,, because we can, but more often I'll talk about helping people find hope. And I've been really fortunate to be involved with the global anti slavery charity working to eliminate modern slavery and human trafficking. I served on the board for a few years. Each year I try and take a team of people to work in Uganda or Ethiopia to work alongside the staff and we do people stuff with the staff. And I was sat in a remote rural community of women in East Africa and



one of them was telling me a story or telling us all a story about, I joined this group because I'd heard there were a group of foreigners and I thought you might be giving away some money. She was smiling as she said it and we're talking about people that were incredibly poor and really vulnerable to trafficking and there was a lot of children being trafficked from that area. And then she paused and because the work we were doing involved giving no financial aid, it was a local facilitator in a self help group. And she said, but you've given me a gift far greater. You've given me hope. And you know what, to see a group of women empowering and supporting each other. No external intervention, no creating a dependency, was just people helping themselves and really growing and thriving was amazing. So yeah, we can't do hope to people, we can inadvertently disempower people, but leaders can really help people find hope.

Dom (26:12)

And I'd love to look into that in a bit more detail. So that's a very powerful story you've told us. So let's stick with that example for a moment. What happened in that area, that space, that room, what happened to generate that hope in that individual? Because I suspect that you were all there having a conversation, I guess. And so the hope came out of that conversation. And we spent a lot of time on this podcast talking about the power of conversation, how it's a major component of communication, how leaders one of their key roles in communication is to foster and encourage good conversation. So what was it you think in that scenario that generated that emotion, that response?

Ian Pettigrew (26:50)

Short answer community. Slightly longer answer and I'll try and keep this concise because I could talk about this all day. There's a lot, when I've spent time in East Africa, you see a lot of very clumsy but well intentioned, ignorant interventions where some middle-aged, middle class white bloke like me turns up, looks and says, I know what these people are struggling with, here you go and found something and spends a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of effort to do it. The work that Hope for Justice are doing is as a result of an evidence-based research initiative, and it was basically they found that in areas where there were weak family ties and there was extreme poverty, children were more vulnerable to traffickers. So children would turn up on the streets of the city, a thousand miles away because they were vulnerable to traffickers. So a clumsy intervention would be me sitting there thinking, this is wrong. I'm going to build this or set up the Ian Pettigrew Foundation to do this. A better intervention is to sit alongside people and help them figure out what's going on. And the model there is that that's used by several organisations is one of self



help groups. And so the group of women meet together regularly. They save a tiny bit of money. And they have a local facilitator who lives not that far away from them anyway, or is part of the community, who gives them a bit of education on nonviolent communication or entrepreneurship. And they make micro loans out of the money they've saved.

And they use it to start businesses. And then they can do something, they support each other, and they pay it back. A more recent example from when I was in Ethiopia in November, I was really fortunate to visit one of these groups in the far rural south, and one of the women in the group basically stood up and said, let me tell you my story. She said we were starving. And when she says starving, they mean starving. They mean that the family are unlikely to survive. And she said I joined this group and through the power of my friends here, at which point she gets a massive whoop and a clap from everybody around her, she said, we saved literally we're talking pennies, but I borrowed enough money to buy a goat. And then I sold the milk. But the problem was that I had to travel so far to sell the milk that, we had to go on the the back of a taxi motorbike and that meant to make no profit. So together the women lobbied the local authority to give them a little bit of grass by the side of the road to create a market. And she said, so now I could go and sell my milk and I paid off the loan. And then with the profit I bought a second goat. And at this point she clicked her fingers and had somebody bring them and these two goats appeared and she was like, look, now my children are fed.

And we are educated. And that is helping people to help themselves. That is people not being inadvertently disempowered by external clumsy interventions that takes away that agency. That is people who are the most inspiring entrepreneurs I've ever met in my life, we can go to all things and hear great people on stage, but it's in Ugandan, Ethiopia. I've met some of the most inspiring women I've ever met in my life. A little bit of help and a little bit of guidance to just facilitate and help people help themselves is changing society. And you end up then with strong families, economically stable, and children that are significantly less vulnerable to traffickers. And actually in Ethiopia in November, I saw a group of the children who totally off their own bat without any suggestion from anybody had written a play about modern slavery and human trafficking and had decided to go to other local schools to put on this play for kids about the dangers of trafficking. And that that's hope and that's people facilitating and helping and helping people to help themselves, not disempowering.

Dom (31:17)

That's a fantastic example, I think, because it's tempting to think of hope as an emotion. Well, it is an emotion, I guess, but it's something that you either got or you haven't got. And I think what you've given us there is a very detailed story about how you can help people get, put them in the best possible circumstances to build their hope. How could people make sense of stuff, first of all? Seeing things for what they are, seeing things clear, seeing them better than they are, but not seeing them worse than they are as well. So giving them clarity seems to be a very powerful thing.



Ian Pettigrew (31:46)

It's multifaceted Dom and it's like so hope can be a trait, hope can be an emotion, but hope can be a process as well. One of the things I've done in the book is create something called the hope play sheet that you can download for free from a website that's just a really simple process to try and sort of almost put hope on autopilot. So hope can be a project, hope can be all those things, and Jen mentioned something earlier which is about the way it can be effectious, infectious and emotional contagion is a real thing. It's a concept we understand in psychology. And emotional contagion can be about the negative, but emotional contagion can also happen about hope. And I'm not just saying this because of what you do, but I think the two of the things that surprised me, in my own primary academic research were two of the most important people at an organisational level in hope, internal comms and your project managers fully communicating with people, but also making it happen. It's all of those things.

Dom (32:51)

I'm going to pass on to Cat, because I know she would like to talk more about the trust stuff, but I think what you've really helped me understand is hope is, it's a positive corporate resource and it's something that can be developed and improved and expanded and leadership is a key way of doing that. And one of the key ways is through an informed conversation. I know it's a lot more than that, but that's a very solid strand there about how we help leaders be better communicators, I'll pass on to Cat.

Cat (33:17)

Do you know what? It's so, so interesting when you brought up sense making, I think, Dom, I immediately thought about the conversations that we had when I was writing the white paper, The Future of Internal Communication. And Jen and I had various backwards and forwards about what sense making actually was, because obviously it's taught in the Masters programme the Masters in internal communication management, but for me I really chimed I witnessed people achieve extraordinary things that work and I think the key to it bluntly is creating the environmental conditions for people to in a safe space sense make, make sense of things and then work out the answers to the problems that they face. And to your point, Ian, I mean, your stories are so inspiring. The idea that these small things can make such a seismic difference, quite literally a difference between, life and death or remaining safe or becoming a victim of slavery, as you say.



What I think is really interesting and I think we all need to hold very close is that hope doesn't become some mechanical tokenistic constructs seized by boardrooms because I think we have seen that happen with trust to some degree. We've definitely seen it happen with psychological safety. It's become a very sexy buzzword to be enforced upon people, which kind of denigrates the entire genesis and basis of it. And I'm reading a book at the moment. I'll share the details with you afterwards, Ian, but the book has really turned my thinking on its head. It's by an American sociologist. It's called Trust Fall.

And I had imagined in the beginning that it would be about, basically I thought it was going to be a book about deteriorating trust levels in industry today. But in actual fact, because I've misunderstood, a trust fall as described by the author is your ability to believe that somebody will catch you if you fall backwards. So that trust fall that somebody will catch you. And what she's argued through a whole load of situational research is that when people come together in teams to support one another because the system is letting them down, the system is so precarious and counterproductive to being able to do good work, feeling safe at work, feeling respected at work, etc. The trust that bubbles up between and amongst people is this is where I think the book's going, I haven't finished it yet, so bear with. It's counterproductive because it gives bosses permission to negatively leverage that trust and take advantage of it. So people's solidarity and camaraderie towards one another becomes abused by people at the top of the tree who are seeking profit maximization over any other factor. So, all of this is fascinating. It's making me ponder what the link is between trust and hope. And I concede you've done a brilliant job of explaining what hope is. Unless you tell me otherwise, I've yet to find a succinct, commonly accepted definition of trust which I think probably creates a bit of ambiguity in and of itself. But what are your thoughts here? What is the link between trust and hope?

Ian Pettigrew (37:31)

Psychological safety is also an important part of hope as well. That came out in my research. But psychological safety as originally developed and designed by Amy Edmondson, I'm kind of I'm conscious how many conversations have ended up in about psychological safety where people talk about it, but it doesn't bear any resemblance to kind of what I've read about from the research. It's like it feels a bit more made up. And you can't fake psychological safety. You don't announce psychological safety as a leadership team. You can create the conditions for it and build it over time. But people will be the judge of whether they feel psychologically safe or not cos there's the levels of safety, whether they feel safe to try and give it a go and fail, whether they feel safe to challenge. So I can send you some good links that will some really good solid research and resources around trust. But from a hope perspective, let's think about a leader's gonna stand up and say, we've got this there's been these regulatory changes that have made this whole industry more difficult now. We're on it, we're gonna be okay, we're responding to it in this way and we will be okay. You will attach a level of certainty to their statement. Probably based on how well you



think the organisation can deliver, but also based on to what extent do you trust them. And I'm a believer that people will teach you who they are if you're prepared to listen. And some people will stand up and will just spout any old nonsense, and they'll quickly teach you that they will spout any old nonsense and you can't trust them. I think every research paper about trust that I've ever read always quotes the same Dutch proverb, which is trust arrives on foot but leaves on horseback. In other words, trust takes ages to to kind of build, but you can lose it very quickly. And I know that, one of my one of my development opportunities is that if you teach me I can't trust you, you're out. You're dead to me. It's like one strike and you're out. I'm kind of sorry, I'm not proud of that. It's probably too much of an over disclosure. But it's kind of if somebody proves to me that I can't trust them at all, then I'm not giving them seventeen chances. It's kind of I'm like, right, you've shown me who you are. I'll kind of I'll believe that now. So trust is about when somebody stands up and says we're gonna do something, to what extent do we actually believe them? That does that answer the question?

Cat (39:58)

I think it's a really good summary and definition and it certainly plays and intersects into the theme of hope. So yeah, I think that works for me. What about you guys, Dom and Jen?

Jen Sproul (40:12)

It does work for me and I think it's that thing we've seen in our work in as well that trust is just falling in every way because, and I think it comes back to the fact that people have stood up on platforms and said, I'll do this, they haven't done that, so therefore I don't believe. And it's run away on horse. Going back to that analogy, so I think that that's really quite true and I think that one thing I want to ask, because there's so many things you talked about there in terms of that I think internal communicators as a profession can kind of take away and there's a practical application. There's some things that we can't control, leaders and personalities and people and who they are or who they are. But there is so much in there that when we're thinking about what we can do to create conditions and what we can do as internal communicators to do that. So I guess what I wanted to ask really more now is thinking about that trust and that hopefulness. What role can we play as a profession to help build that kind of hopeful hype? Is there something we need to change?

In the content that we're sharing or the way we're coaching or the way we're enabling conversation and connection? What do you think that if you are an internal communicator looking to build a hopeful workforce that you could practically deliver, what would be that one thing you'd do?



Ian Pettigrew (41:24)

Does it just have to be just one. I think it's massive. So firstly we need to paint really vivid, compelling, inspiring visions of the future of how it could be. And I know, having been involved in leading change, I think sometimes we can get stuck in let's articulate the burning platform and it's and then we end up in the negative an awful lot.

So I believe the first thing is to create a really compelling vision of the future. And some people might not buy into that. They might feel that's not the future they want. It's like if we were having a debate, look at UK politics. A lot of talking about hope in UK politics. a big part of it depends on do do you want what is articulated? , so some people will feel hopeful, others will not, but

Jen Sproul (41:26)

Okay, I'll give you a few, you have a few in there.

So I believe the first thing is to create a really compelling vision of the future. And some people might not buy into that. They might feel that's not the future they want. It's like if we were having a debate, look at UK politics. A lot of talking about hope in UK politics. A big part of it depends on do do you want what is articulated? So some people will feel hopeful, others will not, but that probably takes another half hour, that conversation. So creating a really compelling vision of the future. Another massive part internal comms can play is then in finding those glimmers of hope and amplifying and magnifying them and celebrating them. I think sometimes we need a brass band cheerleaders and a party for the stuff that we just take for granted when I work with a modern slavery charity, one of the big problems is that people working in really complex environments do the impossible day in, day out, and take it for granted and that they forget that they're almost doing a miracle each and every day. So really shining a light and celebrating those successes it is really fantastic. And one of the ways of creating change is positive deviance it's let's find those real things where it goes well and amplify that and say, yes, more of these please. So it can work for so many reasons.

But the other thing is how we lean into the negative as well. And I think this is to go back to your point about emotional contagion, Jen, we've got to be really careful about, when you announce something that, you're really excited about and you're met with a lot of negativity and a lot of concerns. How do we handle those and this is one of the things I talk about in the book because if we suppress them and if we sort of say, no no, do you know what? It's all brilliant, don't worry about that and again we've had this in UK politics with, doomsters and gloomsters. It's kind of if we try to suppress it, one is people we will be disengaged because they toxic positivity doesn't inspire hope. But also, often those concerns are it's really important data that will help us to increase the likelihood of a better future. So it it's this kind of , I I often draw it as like a dial between doom and



gloom and toxic positivity on the other hand. And the answer is we need both we need to be relentlessly positive and inspiring about keeping our eyes fixed on the prize. But at the same time we need to lean into the negative and we need to listen to people because that it's important and that way we can make things better. And I think internal comms can play a big part there, but often if we do that in like big town hall events, there's a danger of emotional contagion we get a ripple effect. And so often it means we might need to do listening in much more smaller groups and in more intimate settings so that we don't spread that contagion. But that we genuinely listen and respond. Because, we all know listening to create an illusion of listening is again destroys trust.

Jen Sproul (44:55)

That's worse.

Ian Pettigrew (44:55)

Absolutely. And it's to Cat's point, Rachel Botzman's work on trust is worth investigating because she talks about, how we behave and about the predictability and the reliability and how that builds trust as well as empathy and benevolence. So yeah, so I think the main things would be be really inspiring, communicate those glimmers and make an absolute party about them, but also find a way to to help to lean in to the challenges. And don't let leaders engage in toxic positivity cause it ain't good.

Jen Sproul (45:30)

Ian, this has been one of the fascinating and enjoyable conversations I've spent on a whatever slightly gray day where I'm feeling far more hopeful at the beginning of my day now than I did at the beginning of my day. And I think you've unlocked something really powerful and also something that in internal communication we have agency to do in our profession. We have agency to bring that is in terms of that. And you've also put on a point that I keep hammering home is for internal communicator as well as that you can be all those things as well, but also as well when you're thinking about that that small community of feedback and listening. That is intelligence that a business can solve. Don't suppress it because then you can't fix it.

Ian Pettigrew (45:09)

Thanks, Jen. And I agree, it's like there's there's a difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will be better, but it's sort of without me being a part of it. I don't know. I've read the news this morning. Am I optimistic about the future? I don't know. But am I



hopeful? If I think about if I do my bit, I'm on the call with three absolutely amazing inspiring people here. Just think about what we can do if we do things differently. If people make different decisions, if we change things, and that has a ripple effect and inspires other people and it catches. And it's like so Jen, I think, it's an absolute I'm ever so grateful to you for inviting me along here today because just the chance to just to share this and give people a way of to Cat's point sense making is really powerful. And individually we can do loads if we've got hope. But actually together as a community. It's not overstating it to say we can change the world, is it?

Dom (47:13)

I don't think it is, and I think obviously the title of the podcast is the future of internal communication and I think this conversation has condensed into the key things that we as internal communicators can do and just echoing what Jen said when I came to this podcast I suppose if I thought about it I saw hope as some sort of ethereal emotional thing if I remember rightly wasn't hope what was left at the bottom of Pandora's box when everything all the evils of the world flew out and I've always seen it as something to help us cope with that. It's a real assurance but you've changed that perspective and you've re-emphasized that it's something that organisations need and that leaders can help build and communicators can help them do that and that's by helping them do all the stuff you're saying, give a positive for the future but not a false positive, not dwelling too much on the burning platform because at some point someone is going to say stuff it let it burn so that I think that is a template for us.

Ian Pettigrew (48:07)

I talk about I talk about Pandora's box or Pandora Pandora's jar in the first chapter, a brief history of hope. And there's lots of interpretations of that, but sometimes it's all we've got and it's kind of it's all that remains, but we can start from there and we can build bit by bit.

Dom (48:24)

And I think just go back to your proverb, the Dutch proverb. I love that proverb and I've used it for years. And last November I was training some leaders in Holland and I thought fantastic. I'm in tune with the local folklore here. So I gave this proverb and said, you must know this. And I was faced by blank stares. So I don't know what that meant, but it's a fantastic.



Ian Pettigrew (48:44)

Well my relevant story to that is there's a supposedly African proverb which is if you want to go fast go alone if you want to go far go together and I was in Uganda or Ethiopia but I saw that in a wall on a wall somewhere. I was so excited, it's like everybody told me this is an African proverb and now here I am in East Africa and I've seen it on a wall. So I'll take that.

Jen Sproul (49:12)

Well, Ian, thank you so much for spending this time with us. We've thoroughly enjoyed it. And I hope and I'm sure all of our listeners listening in have felt the same. Thank you so much.

Ian Pettigrew (49:20)

Thank you ever so much for having me. It's been an absolute privilege.