



Transcript for S15 E07 The business value of sustainability communication with Daniel Cope

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 Barnard (01:02)

Hello and welcome to a fresh episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard and as ever I'm joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Walters. Today I've got a feeling that we are going to have one of our most on point conversations ever in that often as you might imagine when we're scheduling and producing we have conversations with people that are brilliant but they go out kind of months later. I know this episode is going to go out in the next fortnight or so. And the person that we're introducing to you today is going to have a lot of really interesting stuff to say about the topic that we're addressing. I, without further ado, God, that sounded cryptic. I want to introduce you to, I'm going to call him a friend actually, to my friend, Daniel Cope.

And I was just trying to remember when Dan and I first met, and I think it was just prior perhaps to the pandemic. We met at a local sustainability event. Dan is a chartered environmentalist and founder of a consulting business called Greenlark Environmental Solutions. And for the past two decades, he has been helping organisations navigate the realities of climate change. So he works with small enterprises, he's worked with global multinationals, he works with leaders to help them understand the impact of business on the climate and carbon emissions and he helps those business leaders then work out a sustainable pathway to cutting emissions, strengthening resilience and embedding sustainability into strategic decision making. So he is kind of who I think of in my head as my go-to expert on environmental issues impacting business. He has specialised in carbon accounting, net zero strategy and the development of credible, measurable emission reduction programmes.



He helps translate complex climate data into clear actionable insights and helps organisations recognise both their impact and opportunity to lead. And so here we are in late March and I can't quite work out from the news headlines this morning if the President of the United States is going to continue bombing or whether he's now to said that he's not going to continue bombing critical resources in the Middle East. But suffice to say, and I apologise if anybody thinks that I'm sounding glib, I'm not intending to be. I think I just tend towards dark humour when things are really extreme. But suffice to say, we are facing globally one of the worst energy crises in our history. And it is anybody's guess how events are going to play out in the next weeks and months. But the impact of what is going on in the Middle East is going to hit all of us hard as consumers and as businesses and as communicators of business strategy as so many of our listeners are. And so I, while we have a range of questions that we wanted to ask Dan anyway about sustainability communication, it would to me have felt really strange had we not started our conversation today by addressing a really topical issue.

And with no pressure whatsoever, Dan, welcome. Please, let's kick off our conversation today by exploring the impact that you think the current crisis in the Middle East is going to have on the sustainability agenda. No pressure.

Dan - Green Lark (05:23)

Yeah, great Cat. We're not starting with turning the lights off are we? Cat, it's great to be here, Jen and Dom also. So yes, as you say Cat, this, is very topical, isn't it? And I think what often happens when we have these global issues, which seem to be honest, soberingly more and more frequent, don't they? We have this contrasting aspect to it. On one hand, we have the traditional view of the environment, sustainability, it's a problem for tomorrow and we need to deal with the issues of today and kind of put it to one side. But on the other side of the coin and I think what we are very realistically seeing at the moment is actually it is a problem for today. A case in point there is energy, right? So it's the lifeblood of all UK businesses and our homes to be honest. And yet again, within the span of what, three or four years, we are facing now being completely, completely vulnerable and switched off to any kind of mitigating steps to to secure our businesses to make a long-term plan that can see us through. Energy prices are spiking yet again so in answer to the question I think it very much has put the sustainability agenda smack down in the middle of many businesses' mindsets purely because they have to deal with the ramifications with the cost.

We know that localised renewable energy sources is a way we can empower ourselves in the country to circumvent the issues that we all face. And we all know these issues because whether we're business owners, whether we're homeowners, we all face this in our energy costs, not just our energy costs, the price of doing any business because all businesses is linked to energy. We know we are beholden to foreign income of fuel, of energy supply.



Every day we need that to supplement our own. We know that we have the technology in place to overcome that and we have done somewhat okay at getting renewables on board but other countries have done far better at it. You can look across the continent to the likes of Portugal, where they have about 80 % renewable energy now. And during the Ukraine war, the Portuguese people were far better insulated against the impacts that these spiking energy costs had. We find ourselves in the same boat yet again. And we are very short-sighted at the moment in really realising what issues are happening on the doorstep and not actually taking action when we know the steps we can take. A very interesting University College of London analysis on wind energy showed that between 2010 and 2023, there was investment of 40, 45 billion in wind technology and that has returned 104 billion in economic value. So we know that, it's a very rational argument to get more renewable energy on board. And of course, when we have that localised energy, gives us a huge security bump because for one, means we're not kind of beholden to international imports of energy but also it's empowering to communities to local businesses if we have that energy both you know I mean to the granular level of buildings but even to our communities our villages towns counties we can have that renewable energy up and down the country we have a great asset in the the wind that comes across the Atlantic and we should really be taking advantage of that.

A lot of people will say yes well that's fine but when the wind doesn't blow and the sun's not out what are you going to do? Well you know this isn't black and white. If I can choose between eating unhealthy all the time or eating healthy in the day and then unhealthy at night. That is certainly the favourite option. I'd say energy first and foremost. Think when you go beyond energy, Cat, I think the supply chain disruption. I'm a big believer in kind of a global business market. I think that that's great. We can you know, use our competitive advantages as different nations to take advantage of that.

Actually, I think companies are going to start focusing more on shortening their supply chains, hopefully localised production and, you know, reduce those transport emissions. I mean, we see just how much the straight of her moves. I think many, many people would have been ignorant to the importance of that. And I think some political leaders may have been naive to the importance of that. And now we see actually it's a lifeline for for our society. So again, we have to think of ways, and I do believe that certainly the multinationals are starting to think, how can we step around this effectively?

Cat Barnard (10:472)

You unpack such a lot there. And I absolutely remember, Jen, when we were first talking, whenever it was 22, 23, about introducing sustainability communication as an ongoing trend that we would track. And I remember asking the question, what do you mean by sustainability? And it triggered a conversation internally because there are two ways of looking at sustainability. One is kind of what I tend to think of as somewhat narrow band, which is the green agenda. But then the broader kind of more systems thinking band of



looking at sustainability is what does it take for a business to remain resilient to external market forces over time?

This latest catastrophe, because I have a sinking feeling it will be not much short of a catastrophe, is exactly as you've highlighted. Like we had the opportunity to learn from things that happened directly as a consequence of COVID. So things like the supply chain shortages that triggered a cost of living crisis in 2021, 22, then the Ukraine War caused another cost of living crisis because all of a sudden we were worried about global energy security, right? And we were placing embargoes on Russia and switching over to the Middle East as an alternative energy source away from Russia, right? So we've had in the near review instances where we had to do things differently.

And yet we're still back where we are in terms of incredible national fragility. And one of the things that I noticed came out late last week was an announcement from the International Energy Association giving guidance to governments across the world. One of the pieces of guidance was reintroduce working from home as soon as you possibly can, because obviously that takes a massive amount of pressure off the oil supply situation because if you take X million cars off the road, there's more fuel to go to other places than it needs to go when fuel has become so finite. And I thought when I saw that come through, I thought, my goodness, that's really interesting, isn't it? How much that that recommendation, that mandate jars with what we were hearing very, very late last year, which was that many organisations had decided that it was time for everybody to return to the office in a full-blooded fashion, and we were just going to go back to business as usual. So I guess the question, and I will shut up now in order that I can pass over to Jen and Dom, but I guess the question becomes, how many times do we need to cycle round the same track before we get the message that things need to be done differently, that there is no option to return to business as usual. I'm not suggesting that you answer that by the way, my friend. I'm just putting it out there as a kind of existential rhetorical question for us all to think about.

Dan - Green Lark (14:07)

No, and I think in a sentence, Cat, just to add on there, yes, we can't look backwards for the answers we need for the future, So I think we all like our culture, our traditional ways, our values of doing business. And I think actually with any form of sustainability, it requires innovation. It requires that progressive forward thinking approach that allows us to really circumvent many of these issues that are coming down the track.

Cat Barnard (14:36)

Beginner's mindset is something that I'm holding on to loosely. I know I talked about it at the Leaders Forum event that we held in London in February. It's a Zen mindset. Just approach everything with curiosity and openness. Jen.



Jennifer Sproul (14:56)

Thank you. What a thing to pick up from zen-ness. How do I follow with zen-ness, I think is the way to go in this conversation, which doesn't feel very zen, you know, but we're blending it all together. Dan, thank you. That's so interesting to hear your view on that. And there's a couple of things that when you and Cat were just chatting about, phrases that stood out to me. We're short-sighted, we're not resilient, and we keep looking backwards where the answers aren't, where they don't exist. And I think that's true to fair say in many spaces at the moment. I think that short-sightedness is a real challenge and how we get past it. But moving on from the difficult topic of the Middle East, let's move on to another difficult topic, shall we? And hopefully Dom's going to come in and turn it around and make this all feel really like there's some absolutes. He's shaking his head. Obviously from respective internal communicators and all the things that we've just talked about, who are increasingly being charged or being set the agenda to look at how do we communicate sustainability but also how do we communicate purpose our value, our initiatives, what we stand for. And we know if we look at our employees and the things that are happening out there, there is an increasing expectation and increasing pressure for them to want their employers or organisations. And that could also be the brands they buy from as well as the brands they work for to stand up for the issues in society. Climate change being one of them. Many other things that could be diversity, inclusion, many many things. And if I roll back a couple of years ago, it felt like we were sort of on this trajectory of getting there in this kind of, you we're all doing good in the world and better when we care. It was a real open dialogue, a real open way for us to push purpose and agenda beyond profit not that the profit isn't important. We roll through now, just over a year ago, when we've seen that that landscape kind of change in what we communicate and how we use that language, since the US withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement. So many of our members or practitioners are sort of rolling back, OK, we can't talk about this overtly. How are we going to talk about sustainability in a different way? Is it that we just don't talk about it now? Is it that we stay quiet? Is it that we just remove that for fear and risk. So it feels like to all intents and purposes sustainability appears to have been demoted from board agendas. Like it's not something we talk about now, it's not something we express in overt language. What do you really think is going on and how can we keep this conversation which we all as societal citizens want to hear more about?

Dan - Green Lark (17:53)

It's a very good point and what I would do is push back a little on the question I think there are two really important issues here and again, it's the case of just separating them. Yes one on the political level We know that Washington can step back much like any government around the world can step back from this agenda, but I strongly believe that businesses are not. think boardrooms haven't kind of abandoned sustainability. I just think they've



reframed this discussion, this narrative around resilience, around risk and around cost control. They might not call it green strategy. They might not, doggedly chase after net zero. But I do believe that actually, due to the financial links of this theme in all other aspects of their business, those things are still just as important. Again, we won't cover energy security over again, it's the same point. I think that supply chain fragility, again, really important, but also, you know, regulatory exposure. There's a lot of countries now that actually, if you want to play in those countries, you're going to have to follow some of these approaches. So, C-Ban, the carbon border adjustment mechanism, we won't get too technical, but to do business in the EU. You know, this is something that's really important and if businesses want to keep those opportunities open, whether they like it or not, are really going to have to work towards these greater goals. In the past 12 months I've worked with, I can think, two businesses that have gained significantly large wins in contracts because the projects they were tendering for were so lucrative, yet there were stipulations in place. There were hoops that they had to jump through to demonstrate how actually they are a good company, they are doing the right things. One example of this is a very big business we work with called Chelmer Foods. You may not have heard of them, but crikey we've all eaten their nuts. They bring dried fruits, nuts, goods into the country. A lot of it is sold in the supermarket. They kind of get from farm over 50 countries all into the UK across a huge wealth of product lines. They provide some of the largest supermarkets in the UK. Lidl is an example of one of their clients and actually they've got to prove to Lidl that they are an ethical company, that they do things the right way. Now it was really easy work for me because Chelmer Foods is a fantastic client to work for because they do everything right. It's about how though they demonstrate that to the likes of Lidl, to all the other big supermarkets out there. So I think there's real financial opportunities. So back to the question of the boardroom, I think perhaps some of the whimsy of the themes might have gone and perhaps that's not a terrible thing. I think we've been beholden to that for a long time now, Jen.

Jennifer Sproul (21:03)

I agree as you were talking and you were saying it's been reframed as sort of risk resilience and all those things that we're talking about. I actually think that's clear a simpler language that we've ever had. I think this kind of thing, if I think back to many decades ago in my early career or when we were talking about things, it was the CSR agenda to the SG agenda to this agenda to the, we've over labeled it, acronymed it, complicated it. Whereas actually if I think about myself as a a citizen, as an employee, as a a consumer, which is where I think you've got to always test your communication, right? Does it understand me in such a complex space? If you talk to me about are we managing our risk? Are we resilient to survive? And do we have the capability? Are we ethical? I think ethical is the key thing in communication as well now. Particularly when we think about reputation management inside to outside and all those thing that go on. Actually that resonates with me more and I understand it because I think some of the things that internal communicators in the rise of



sustainability communications struggle with is how do you take something so complex to make it something meaningful, to make it something actionable and to make it something that we can understand our behavioural role in that, if it makes sense. Yeah and I think we all understand.

Dan - Green Lark (22:24)

It's authenticity, isn't it?

Jennifer Sproul (22:25)

We all might interpret ethics differently. It might feel more morality to one, but we have a sense of an emotion where something feels right or wrong. So do you think maybe it is a good time to make that transition? But how do you see organisations like you just described making that link between what it's all about risk and resilience and ethical to make it something that feels understood, actioned through an internal communication perspective?

Dan - Green Lark (22:55)

Yes, do you mean for their workforce, for instance? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I think they come part and parcel the same, you I think what my experience tells me is that the workforce, the backbone of any company is the voice, is that authenticity, it is who they are. Certainly the businesses I work with, granted I'm going to work with businesses that obviously are wanting to engage in this agenda, who recognise the competitive advantage of this. So arguably I'm biased towards those businesses that do business in a good way. But what I see time and time again, even when you have a workforce who may initially seem defensive around some of these themes, I think actually once you get on their side, listened to their ideas. You can really understand a lot. And actually, I think employees care about the company they work for. I know my ethos, my mindset, and I think I could say it's the same for all four of us in this virtual room. We all care about what we do. **And we know none of us want to work for 40 hours plus a week for a company who we don't believe in. Again, maybe that sounds naive, but I think that's how we can guarantee best business. So I think getting the workforce involved in these conversations, understanding that it's an opportunity, not something that they need to be defensive over gets over an awful lot of that.** So yes. I think it's really important Jen. One thing we do whenever we work within a business is actually speak directly with the employee base and that's really beneficial not through management but actually opening channels directly of course with management behind it but explaining what we're doing that's one right. We send surveys out to employees too and we don't explain why we sending those surveys out and of course that leaves many people thinking well why are you asking me these questions? It's understandable actually if you get them part of that journey this is what we're trying to do



these are the reasons why. I think the majority of the workforce want to support that and fly that flag that's my experience Jen. I don't know if you see the same in the work you do.

Jennifer Sproul (25:09)

Yeah, I think so. think that if I look at the research and the things we're doing, I'll pass over to Dom now, probably will add more flavour to it in your everyday work as well, Dom, is that it goes back to what you said earlier, we need to innovate, we need to think differently, we need to have a beginner's mindset. People want to be heard, they have ideas, they want to be valued, they want to be spoken to. And actually, if the challenges we face, if we're going to not become so short-sighted and build more resilient organisations and innovate and not look to legacy ways of doing things to solve new challenges. We all want to be collectively involved in that and fundamentally if we look at how internal communication is evolving and needs to evolve beyond just sending stuff out. **That is the cornerstone of actually what good looks like is I'm listened to, I'm acted upon, and I'm fed back on, and I'm part of something.** And actually, I wish that more businesses could see the value in opening up that dialogue to solve these perhaps really difficult issues that we're facing because those ideas are everywhere in the business. But Dom, you might have a topic you are passionate about, so I'll throw to you.

Dom (26:16)

Absolutely. Thanks, yeah. And I have been nodding away quite vigorously actually. But one of the things that I'd like to pick up on is the point Dan you were making about dealing with the workforce, so stepping out of the boardroom, because we know there is climate anxiety, we know that there are economic and business issues around getting stuff right in this area, but increase, and we know also how do you engage people through conversation, and people who lead those conversations first instance are frontline managers, people managers, line managers, call them what you will. And it's interesting, I've been doing some work with a group of line managers the last couple of weeks and we've been talking amongst other things about how you have a conversation about all things related to climate. And I've had quite a lot of pushback from managers who are saying, I don't want to get into that. And I was just writing down some of the reasons and they said because we find it really hard to have a conversation about climate. We get quite a lot of pushback. First of all, as you had mentioned, the political climate is changing. So you're not going to get anything sensible about the climate from Farage and Reform and yet they're regularly clocking 27 % of the poll. You're not going to get much about the environment ironically from Zach Bolanski and the Greens. He seems to have abandoned the whole environmental agenda at least at the moment so they're not talking about it. Now they take up 20 % so nearly half of the electorate are supporting parties that don't seem to have... I'm being slightly flippant about the Greens but they don't seem to have the environment at the front of their agenda.



So there's not the background there. And then, as I'm sure you've heard a thousand times, as I have, people are saying, what's the point of getting involved with this when they're launching endless ordinance over in the Middle East? I've had pushback from people saying, we're not going to talk about net zero anymore because that's got us into this problem, it's exposed us, we should have opened up the North Sea. I've had people saying, it's tone deaf for me to be talking about this when people are worried about how they're to buy heating oil, et cetera, et cetera. So all those things have meant that many managers are reluctant get into conversation because they don't want offend people, don't want be seen to be tone deaf and they don't want to get themselves into a trap. So I know it's frustrating to hear all those arguments but it would be useful just to talk about how we can help as communicators, help line managers have confidence to engage in those important conversations. What sort of questions they can ask, what lines they could use, and also how it's important still for organisations to demonstrate their commitment to reducing carbon emissions when perhaps in the short term it's not front of people's minds. There we are, it's a massive question, Dan, isn't it?

Dan - Green Lark (28:50)

These questions by the way are getting more intense for each one and wait I can't wait for the question next it's going to be really existential no Dom, it's a really important I think it's a really important point and it's the elephant in the room. I hear all the points you're saying and yes I come across them too and as I said I think you know we often have defense as our immediate go-to whenever we are questioned about the work we do what we do and so on and so forth. I'm a big big believer in taking politics out of it so all of my work is very apolitical by design. I work with a number of local authorities and I can tell you they are across the spectrum they really are.

And, whilst yes, if you caught me, I bleed green at the weekends. I'm all about hugging the tree during the weekdays. I very much stick to the conventional because I know it's the conventional arguments that will win the day and actually moving away from the idealism, the activism. That's my approach. And that's the best way I can operate. So with regards to your question, which I'm skirting around.

I think we have to be rational around all of this. I think sometimes, not dictating immediately lowers those barriers. Sometimes I'll walk into a room and it'll be an office and you'll see everyone kind of working, working in the office and they'll say, this is, this is Danny's helping us with our sustainability or our net zero. And you will see the odd employee kind of kick their story cheater under the desk. Cos they're thinking don't take away my precious story cheater that warms my legs that's not what I'm there to do you know I really aren't. I think politics have to be taken out of it I think that that's kind of a core



point yes this this point about setting a net zero target because it's the right thing to do people you know we don't like numbers we like stories and narratives don't we as individuals and I think going away from, well, we're going to hit this target by this date and everyone kind of thinks, well, why, what's the science behind that? And all of a sudden you get into the bog of all of that information. I think it's about bringing it to the conventional, to about what's happening right now, the energy costs of the business. I know we're repeating the same points here, but we're losing so many of our brilliant manufacturers and goods producers in the UK because energy costs are so high so that's people's jobs that are at risk. So actually empowering the employees to tackle these issues with us is one way forward. I think younger teams and perhaps that's wrong of me to say but there is evidence to suggest that the newer workforce that's coming along really do want transparency with their employees.

They want to know the ins and outs of what their employer is doing and whether that fits with their own ethics. I think that's part of the argument but it's not just young people, it's all people that have those cares. We've just got to find out what it is. **There is a climate anxiety that's having a productivity drag. Again that's really well evidenced. It's causing worry, it's causing frustration and a sense of powerlessness** and I think anything we can do to tackle that is always a good thing. We teach something called the knowledge disconnect. And it's something that Green Lock has worked on. And the knowledge disconnect is effectively looking at the very top of the workforce, that being management, the leaders, the board, and looking at the bottom, the kind of, you know, where the real work's done at the coal face. And actually, the knowledge gap between them can be really huge at times.

And that can lead to so many systemic issues within a company. And actually by reducing that gap, by each understanding the other, a really good and quick example, let's say we've got a coffee shop and the leaders say of this coffee chain, right, we're going to start bringing in this enhanced recycling across all of our coffee chain and all our baristas will follow this approach. Then we have the workers at the coal face who saying, well, hang on, we can't have all these waste receptacles. It won't fit in this room.

Where are we going to put it? Real knowledge disconnect there. Actually, when we bring both to the table to find those solutions, we come up with far better answers. Once we get beyond the politics, beyond the defensiveness, I would like to believe that people do have the best interests of the company at heart. It means the well-being of them in the long term and their continued salary.

And with it comes the benefits to the planet, which is the first time I've said that in this conversation, right? You didn't hear me say anything about getting clean air or the benefit of the planet. It doesn't need to be part of this conversation. We can really keep that away from all this if that's necessary. And of course, those things are really important. But to be honest, if we're heading in the right direction, I don't know about you three, but I don't care what the conversation looks like if we're heading in the right direction.



Dom (35:03)

That's an incredibly important and useful point, I think, because I think what you're saying is it's okay to talk about the short-term benefits, about how we get through the next six months or whatever it might be. I think lots of managers don't want to do that. They feel it's wrong. They feel it's almost cheapening the problem by talking about our fuel bill when the planet's burning potentially. I think it's really interesting that we reassure managers they can have a conversation about that and that, as you say, will bring its own benefits. Many a muckle makes a mickle, whatever the phrase is. So small benefits now will have a longer-term effect.

I think something else I've really picked up from what you said that's incredibly helpful is you don't need to be a scientific expert. I've spoken to leaders who said, I don't want to talk about this stuff with my team because I don't want to get bogged down in the science because there's bound to be someone in my team that knows more about it. I'm going to be exposed. I don't understand all the ins and outs. I just instinctively know it's right. And I think what you're saying is you don't need to. It's OK not to know that. You can focus on what it means for us here, which of course is really one of the key communication roles.

The role of line managers is to help you make sense of what's going on and what it means for them and their team. So there's lots of reassuring stuff in what you've just said. I'm going to pass over to Cat now.

Cat Barnard (35:15)

I think it is just so fascinating because to me, to some degree, climate anxiety is like a untapped resource, right, and I just want to pick up on the climate anxiety because I know we reported on it a while back and I think these data points still stand. So in 2021 the Lancet did some research and it surveyed 10,000 children and young people between the ages of 16 and 25 across 10 countries. Including Australia, South America, Europe, India, Africa, and the USA. So roughly a thousand participants per country. And actually what it discovered was that across all countries, 59 % of respondents were either very or extremely worried about the climate and 84 % were at least moderately worried. I think there's something really interesting in this topic that bleeds in and out of other conversations that we've had on this podcast, which, I'm glad about. One of the things is one of the most productive things that I think we can do for ourselves and for our colleagues is learn how to sit with the discomfort of difficult conversations. And I know that I've banged on about this before on the podcast and off the podcast that to some degree our digital lives have taken us out of the practice of sitting in the discomfort of difficult conversations. And I know that next series we've got a brilliant guest lined up to have a conversation about that very point. And another thing that I think about is the potential of the organisation when all voices are included in discussion around an important agenda. And, we've had Megan Wrights and John Higgins on in the past to talk about how we might create better speak up cultures



where we might harness the power and potential of all of the unheard voices. And I think for me, this is a key point. When you think about climate anxiety, if that data is true, and I also think, first and foremost, it's Lancet data, so I'm going to treat it as fact, but it is as tiny subsection, isn't it? 16 to 25 year olds, what about all the people in the workplace who are above the age of 25? What do they think about the climate? What kind of anxieties are they harnessing?

And I think what I come back to is that this, climate anxiety is a galvanizing sense of unease that can be leveraged and put to good use. And what I loved about this conversation in particular, Dan, is the way that you've introduced some stories about client work that you've undertaken. I love the story about the fruit and nuts. And I think it's really important to keep telling those stories about harnessing the anxiety for good. So curious really whether you've got any other little anecdotes or snippets where you've observed client anxiety to accelerate more sustainable business practices.

Dan - Green Lark (38:40)

Yes, many Cat to be honest. I think that the point you make about that anxiety first and foremost, yes, I do a lot of work in schools. It's quite sobering and sad to see how young people now are viewing climate change and when I say young people, children, teenagers and they are very aware of what is around the corner and it really is around the corner now. You know, we used to talk about it being my grandchildren, I want to work for them and now it's actually the teenagers and the children who are saying me, you know, my life in the future. They are very hard conversations to have and I'm telling you I have far more articulate conversations and impacting conversations with those young people. With regards to the workforce, it's people again are wanting authentic. I think, you know, I go back to Chelmer Foods, great example, when we surveyed their staff, we sent a survey out, we wanted to know how they were getting to and from work, what they're working from home, situation was like to see how we could make improvements that help them, but also help the company in becoming more sustainable in its narrative. We sent a survey out, this was sent directly from Green Lock and it received 27 % response rate so just one in four employees responded to this which to be honest won't surprise you that it was that low. And leadership said yes not we expected that but there you go kind of thing and the leadership at Chelmers are fantastic.

I said let's run at it one more time I'm just going to tweak the wording. So we added a little introduction and in that introduction we we added three things we added the word team right hello Chelmer team it's really simple and a little emoji waving we added a 25 pound gift card to one lucky winner who who responds I covered that myself Chelmers food still need to reimburse me for that I'm joking of course and the third thing was and something I missed was at the end thank you for your **continued support** and yeah yeah and it was continued support. I know it was one of those three or a contribution of those three the response rate was 87 % and that same survey and no strong arming had been done by



management and these workers had completed it. You know, those little tweaks have made it that a company could be one that says, and you will have heard it, our employees won't respond to this. They won't do that. Chump Foods didn't say that, but you know those companies exist. They'll say, our workers won't be bothered about that. **Changing that language, just tweaking it little bit to actually communicate in a more authentic way to lower those defences to know this isn't about questioning what you're doing and why. You are part of this ongoing solution that we're trying to find thanking them for their continued support.** Right. Do we do it enough? Maybe a little 25 pound gift card. I mean, you know psychologically that immediately is going to lower the defences. And I don't know if you three are the same. I'll do anything for a competition for a prize. Even if I, you know, I don't need the prize. I'm in. I'm in. And I'll fill any survey or questionnaire in if there's a potential prize at the end. And you know, we even had, bless her, the lady who ultimately won that £25 gift card emailed us and told us what she'd spent it on. And you know, it was a real wake-up call for us at Greenlock to think, you know what? This is definitely something we're going to build into the way we do business, the way we have these conversations. So that again, it extends beyond the workforce because actually, you know, people say, you know, companies have said to us, we do put out what we're doing about sustainability on social media, but people don't really engage with it. They say, we tried it once, right? And they only got a couple of likes or clicks or whatever the kids chase nowadays.

And they say, our customer base aren't interested in that. Again, just tweaking those words, how we're connecting with the audience, with those customers, those clients, can completely change the kind of interaction we have. I know I'm speaking to you three and obviously you guys know this far better than I do. Communication is what you do best. But for me, crikey, that was a real empowering moment to see.

We need to put double the effort into the exact words and how we're phrasing this to ensure we get the best results. Otherwise you put all that hard work in and you know, you don't bear the fruit of your labour. I don't know if that helps answer the question at all, Cat.

Cat Barnard (43:51)

Well, it does. I mean, I obviously am the least qualified person in the room because I don't, my background isn't in internal comms. So without further ado, I will hand over to Dom and Jen, because I know they'll have lots to chip in on this point.

Jennifer Sproul (44:05)

Can I make a couple of observations. I'm going to pass to Dom, who is the best person wrapping up a podcast, shall I say in that sense. But just as I've been listening to the last number of questions and conversations and going backwards a bit, there's a couple of things that it's made me really reflective of how we go forward from where we've come from.



Going back to that very beginning, I think we need to ditch the backward way we think about communicating sustainability. Because going back to that anchor of it's the science or it's this or it's that, it's like it's freezing us to doing something, right? So I think it is that think of loosening that and thinking about that moving in a more human way. And as you were talking as well, it just made me think, just go back to earlier, remove the politics, just over there. We need to have, people just want to have real conversations about real issues in a real narrative in a way that, and that could be something that solves the today and it could be something that's for the tomorrow.

It doesn't really, really matter. And going back to your example as well, Dan, when talk about the work you're doing in schools, which sounds amazing. And I think that it just leans you into the humanity of things and the humanity of moments and the humanity of messaging, the humanity of recognition. But also, I think the biggest challenge we've got as internal communicators is navigating that complexity of how we all respond, feel and prioritise as human beings. Because what matters to a 16 year old versus that people manager that's getting pushback from Dom, are worlds apart, right? So how do we think about the navigation of that message and that role and that conversation and that realness in that complex way? And I think that there'll always be context and reasons to it. Those were some of my reflections. I feel like... there is a sense of unease in the world, but my unease might be different from Don's unease to your unease, to the 16 year old's unease. **But with unease you need realness and openness and making it feel safe to have conversations or safe to be able to do things or safe to be able to move.** And I think if we move from this performative kind of, not performative but this sort of sense of it's all science rather than just human challenge. It connects it right?

Dan - Green Lark (46:28)

Jen, there are thousands, thousands of peer-reviewed research papers that show demonstrably exactly the direction we're moving in. We don't need any more. We don't need any more and no more will make that argument. You are absolutely right. It has to come down to the personal narrative to actually get any movement forward now.

Jennifer Sproul (46:52)

Yeah, brilliant. Thank you, Dom I'll throw it to you now.

Dom (46:54)

Yep. One key question, Dan, is what did the winner of the voucher spend it on?



Dan - Green Lark (46:59)

Her and her daughter went shopping and got the daughter a new dress. So it was very nice and you know it's rare we get those opportunities and I have to say it really made me smile just to see the level of engagement and one thing I can tell you is if we have the pleasure of working with Chelmers Foods in the future which I feel we will, you know that worker will be engaged 100 % in the long term. They will always now contribute to anything we want and we've got them. I mean, that's a real asset for 25 pounds, isn't it? To have that. So yes, it was a nice dress, Dom, something that you and I probably wouldn't have spent the voucher on. We may have, but yeah.

Dom (47:46)

No, possibly, but no. I think it would have been really funny if she'd come back and said, I spent the money on some cheap flights to Paris. But good job. But no, that was a really good thing to spend on, a good story. I've got lots of notes here. So I wonder if we could come into land to stand the flying analogy inappropriately for the moment. As an internal communicator, I imagine many listeners will have picked up on lots of practical things from what we've discussed. So as we finish, unfair question really Dan, but if you could highlight maybe three things that you would suggest to internal communicators they can practically do now to help promote the agenda, the sustainable agenda, sorry, and start to erode climate anxiety. What are some of the things you think they could do?

Dan - Green Lark (48:32)

We're going to cover all ground here, Dom, but I'd say if you're going to limit me to three, I think it is remove that knowledge disconnect. It is actually share why we are doing things. Understand why we're doing things. That's a good place to start. Why are we doing this as a company? Is it to engage our customers better? Is it to reduce our costs? What is the core reason beyond because it's the right thing to do. That's a great argument to have, but I think we've all agreed here that it doesn't always win the day. **So find the practical, pragmatic reason why we are doing this and translate that to our workforce so that they get on board because they're going to be intelligent people.** They will get the reason if we just tell them why. So firstly, remove that knowledge disconnect. Secondly, **get them part of the solution.** So it sounds very idealistic and nice.

But actually ask them, ask them, in a very non-threatening way. This isn't to kind of cut costs, find something that's going to make their lives harder. But actually, what do they think we could do? You know, people have great ideas. Once they're part of the solution and they know they don't need to be defensive, they're going to be all ears and a lot of mouth because they'll know far better than us at the top in the boardrooms what's happening on



the ground and actually where those real practical aspects and opportunities can be saved. So that's the two. I think you're going to push me for a third one. What's the third thing? I think, **definitely keep a log of what they are doing. Build the story**, right? So every day, every week, every month, businesses are taking these little steps with their workforces to better how they do business, but they don't log it. They don't keep a diary, a journal. And actually you say to them, what have you done over the past five years? And they say, not a lot. And then actually, once you start prying at that, you realise, well, we did do this. We did do that. You know, we, we installed this implementation for the employees wanted and so on and so forth. And all of a sudden you have this rich tapestry of information and you say, that's, you're doing great. You're really moving in the right direction. So I would say, keep a journal of everything you do. It doesn't have to be a glorious, glamorous thing. It can just be a word document. Date you did it, what you did, why. And then when you look back over the last 12 months, many businesses are surprised to see, you know what? We're doing a lot of good here. And that in turn builds empowerment because you think crikey with you know the trains moving and we're on it what else can we now do so I'd say third and and lastly dom dear diary start writing that journal.

Dom (51:19)

That's fantastic, in fact just very quickly to sign off I think that last point is something we can learn on a bigger scale about our work towards the climate because I think one of the reasons why some people get disconnected is they don't understand the progress we have made so I think it's a really important point to make. I love the phrase knowledge disconnection as well I'm going to use that more so Dan thank you very much for some great insights and some great practical tips and thank you for joining us.

Dan - Green Lark (51:52)

Excellent. Thank you, everyone.