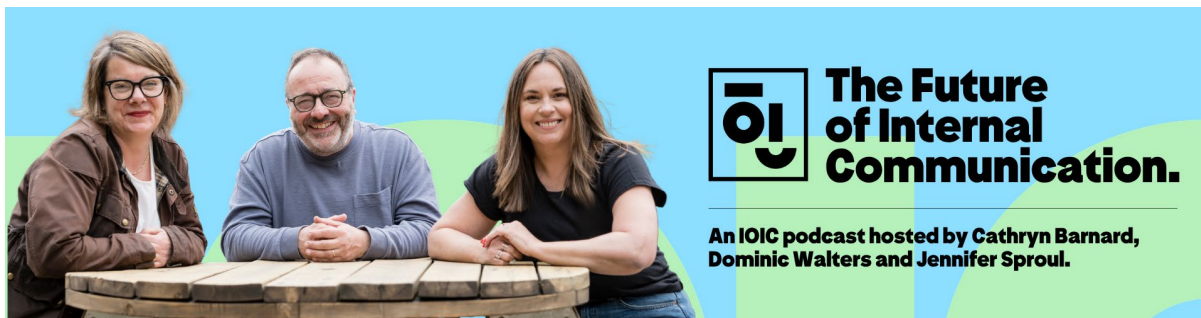




Transcript for S16, E4 - How to simplify internal communication with Chris Lovett

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 brand new episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Waters. And today we are going to have a conversation that I very much think is going to resonate with most of you. We're going to be talking about how to simplify internal communication. As you will probably know, last month, we hosted our internal communication festival, the IOIC's festival. It was a two-day offsite down in Hampshire. And by far and above, I think the single most talked about topic was just the pace of the outside world, the scope and breadth of crises that need to be dealt with. The relentless pace of change, the borderline burnout that so many people in and out of the profession are experiencing and how on earth you cut through and make a dent with your communication when there's just so much going on for people from the boardroom right down to the post room. I think I'm not mistaken when I say that the length of time on a daily basis for an internal communicator to reach their target audience has reduced since the last set of research that came out in the IC index, which as you know is a programme of research conducted by the IOIC and Ipsos Karian and Box. I think we're looking at now.



10 minutes a day is the maximum amount of time that an internal communicator has to get their key messaging across. So there is a lot going on. We're recording slightly ahead of the release date of the podcast and we even joked prior to coming on air as to whether or not there would be a new prime minister by the time this episode airs. So just gives you a little bit of a snapshot into how mad things have got. And with no pressure whatsoever, that is why I am delighted to introduce today's guest. Chris Lovett is an executive coach, TEDx speaker and author of two books about the power of less. His TEDx talk, Less Busy, More Impact and his bestselling first book, Discovery of Less, established him as one of the UK's most distinctive voices on sustainable work and living with less. His second book, which I think came out at the start of May, is called Relentless, The Power of Doing Less in a Workplace that Demands More. And that brings the same philosophy into the workplace, helping the busiest of people manage their time, prevent burnout and navigate the chaos of modern work.

Over the last decade, Chris has coached C-suite teams and senior leaders in FTSE 100 companies spanning Europe, APAC and the US and a range of industries including legal, retail and insurance. His work has been featured in The Times, The Independent, CEO Magazine, Marie Claire, very nice Chris, and HR Magazine and he's appeared on dozens of podcasts including Leaders in Finance, Truth, Lies and Work and the Self Care Club. So we are very, very happy to have Chris with us today. He has been endorsed by a previous guest of ours, Professor of Leadership, Dr. Megan Reitz, and also LinkedIn top voice, Bruce Daisley. And I think we're going to have a great conversation because in the lead up to this episode. I've had some brilliant conversations with Chris, so I think, we're in for a good one. So Chris, welcome. No pressure.

Chris Lovett (05:18)

Thanks Cat. What an intro. If I can get you to do all my intros in the future...

Cat Barnard (05:23)

I am available for a very small fee. I'm not expensive. I'm not expensive. But I am really interested. The moment that we were first in contact, your background resonated with me because I have been a longstanding fan of the concept of minimalism and simplifying your life to lead a more full and wholesome life. Now I am aware of various kind of



American minimalist influences, but I had never come across the concept of minimalism applied to the workplace as you have applied it. I would love if we were to start by me asking you, what is corporate minimalism and why does it matter?

Chris Lovett (06:17)

Oh wow, let's get right into it shall we Cat? Yeah, I mean I came up with this kind of concept purely from experiencing, from a personal aspect. So for those of you don't know, minimalism is all about the lifestyle of voluntarily simplifying. It's letting go of the things that no longer add value to your life. Generally starts from a physical aspect, stuff, physical stuff around your home. So it starts with decluttering. So you would generally declutter the things that you don't need or don't want or don't use anymore. That tends to then lead into other parts of your life, such as your digital clutter, like how much stuff you've got on your phone, like photos or apps that you never use. And then you take it even further to things like emotional clutter and mental clutter, so stories that you tell yourself that no longer serve you, such as, I can't do X or I'm too old to do Y, whatever they are, we tend to let go of those. And as I was experiencing an increase in confidence, an increase in income, an increase in just overall life satisfaction by implementing minimalism into my personal life, I went back into the corporate world and I found that the busyness and the burnout was just another form of clutter. So a full calendar became a cluttered calendar basically and I used the same methodology of letting go, of understanding what adds value, what doesn't, what serves me and I just stamped corporate minimalism into the workplace.

So I did that from my own perspective where it was safe or I could maybe reduce some of the tasks that I had taken on or even been given that I knew weren't that valuable. I reduced the meetings I went to. Basically just did less work, but only work that was massively impactful. And on the other side of that, I found that I had more time back, the actual things that I'd agreed to do got better. I was delivering things of value quicker. And I just thought, well, this replicates what it's like in your personal life. So I kind of used my personal, my home life as a great place to experiment and then privately experimented in work. And of course no one noticed because everyone else was far too busy.

So yeah, I turned up to work on time, I finished on time, I had a lunch break and my work was even better than it was when I was turning up early, finishing late and not having any breaks. So I thought, there we go. My home life feels a lot calmer, simplified and my work life also then felt the same. But at the same time, there was just chaos around me.



So then I helped to implement it in my team and then scale it up through various teams. And now we've gone further by going to organisations and help people simplify. And we use terms like time management because you can't really sell a product called corporate minimalism because no one knows what it means and it sounds a bit too fluffy and woo-woo. So ultimately it is helping people simplify, reduce burnout and manage their time little bit better. But yeah, underneath all of that was my minimalistic experiment back in 2018 is now.

Cat Barnard (09:54)

I love that. And as you're talking, I'm just thinking about, and I'm sure that I have bored our listeners with this anecdote before, but there is a lovely book called *How to Do Nothing* by an American author, Jenny Odell. And I'm sure it's in that book that she describes a scenario where, and I want to say it was Deloitte, Canada, where there was an employee loitering around the reception area seemingly doing nothing and people were walking past and scratching their heads because she just seemed to be idling and eventually somebody went up to her and said, what are you doing? And she said, well, I'm thinking. And they said, do mean you're thinking? And she said, well, I'm just thinking. it was a real thing that they didn't know how to deal with this employee who was doing nothing who said that she was thinking, but because there was nothing tangibly happening, she caused such a lot of dis-ease that she was kind of asked to move on. So my question had been to you, when you started to introduce this notion of decluttering and focusing on what was essential, was there actually, was there nobody, nobody that noticed that you were doing less?

Chris Lovett (11:18)

No. There was bits of work that I ignored. So I was given bits of work by more senior people, more powerful people in the system, in the organisation, and I just didn't do them. And no one ever chased me up on anything because they were just moved on to the next thing. And so obviously there's a bit of risk with that. Because if you're early in your career, you don't want to really do that because you'll get tarnished. But I had the confidence then to kind of ask better questions rather than just be an order taker which what we tend to go into that practice a bit more is like if someone in power asks us to do



something and we tend to come at it from a place of well we don't like saying no because of all the connotations that lends itself to you know destroying a relationship and causing perception of conflict and so we'll just say yeah and then we just do the thing, even though deep down we know that it might not be that useful or whether that person in power has caught what I call bright shinyitis. The latest thing, could you, would you mind doing a quick paper on X? And you go, yeah, right. You get on, you spend X amount of weeks because now you've been moved away from the other important stuff that you were doing. You then deliver that thing and just goes into the ether. Nothing, nothing happens. So I'd experienced that too many times. So you kind of got this gut feeling that you almost have to take it with a pinch of salt and go, yep, no problem. And then discard it just to see if anything happens. So I was a little bit disruptive and it was just an experiment because I could still go, oh, yep, it's on my list of things to do and no one's going to go, oh, okay, cool. Cause you're, you're clearly not, you're doing other stuff, right? So yeah, it was just an opportunity for me to push back privately and also then get the confidence to kind of go, you know that you gave me that thing last week, is that now less important than this new thing you gave me? And sometimes people will go, no, actually, yeah, no, forget that. The thing that I gave you last, that's still the most important thing.

Cat Barnard (13:27)

And I think there's something really interesting in this. And again, it's something that was discussed at the festival last month. This piece around confidence, having the confidence to push back. And I think it's really timely that we should be having this conversation. Obviously, I want this conversation to focus on people at work and the impact of burnout at work and so on. But I say what I'm about to say.

In the wake of AI adoption, we know from the data that has come out so far that productivity gains from AI adoption to date have not matched the investment in adoption. There is a reason for that lag, I think. But actually, it seems to me in all the conversations that I'm having, right across the board, across internal comms, HR, C-suite leadership, operations and more, that the push to adopt AI seems relentless and yet very few are asking whether the tasks that could be automated are actually fit for purpose. Do we need to be doing this thing?



It comes back to, I guess, what the late David Graeber, the anthropologist David Graeber wrote about when he wrote his book, *Bullshit Jobs*. His quote, not mine. How much of the work that we are doing today is actually adding value or creating value for the respective stakeholders. And I think if we're not able to ask that of our own, tasks and workflows, how on earth do we expect to create efficient AI systems? Because if we're passing obsolete tasks into the digiverse, surely that is a known goal.

Chris Lovett (15:32)

Yeah, it's a wonderful thought and I'm totally with you. And even if you were to look at the statistics on meetings, I mean, you can find 10 a penny, but the consensus is that between 30 and 70 % of all meetings are useless.

But we still do them anyway. Because it feels like we're doing something, we're active. If we've got 16 people on a Zoom call together talking about the same stuff, at least we're all doing something. So there's not many people questioning whether the actual thing needs to be done in the first place because there's risks associated with that, right? There's so many threats individually to us as employees and to employers at the moment. So an AI is gonna take my job. The next round of redundancy, if I start getting disruptive, I'm the next one that's gonna go. There's a cost of living crisis, which means now's not the best time to lose my job. So there's always various threats that make us now regress backwards to kind of go, well, if I'm looking busy, then at least it gives me the impression that I'm still needed. And also, outwardly, it gives the impression to the decision makers that I am still important. So there's a real challenge at the moment around busyness and burnout. There's still a badge of honour to it. The amount of times I speak to people and they will quite happily tell me that they have not had a lunch break for a month.

Even though the science tells us completely the opposite, rest, recovery, lunch, breaks, it's all part of your higher performance. So I think we just need to ultimately get back to basics and simplify around what is this team, what is their measure of success. Once you kind of get back to what that is, it makes it a little bit easier to strip away the noise. And this is going to be the hardest thing now because there's so much AI slop, there's so much noise, there's so much what I call like advice pollution. If you were to look on LinkedIn, there's about thousands and thousands and thousands of people telling you do these five things, right? And then the following day you'll go on there and there's the other thousand people telling you do five other things that are in the opposite to what you've just read yesterday. So how are you supposed to kind of untangle all the advice, all



the new AI tools and systems, all of your new priorities that you've got now, by the way. and because that team over there has been made redundant, you've got a few of their tasks now as well. Right. So all of this workplace chaos and what's going on in society and in the geopolitical spheres, it's chaos, absolute chaos. So it's really, really easy to get caught up in business.

So that's the hard bit is how do you step away from that? And I would say that it starts by doing one tiny thing to prove that nothing bad happens. And once you do that, you give yourself proof and evidence that it's okay and it's safe and you crack on and do something else. So one of those tiny things it might be, leaving meeting in five minutes early. That's literally it because you've got to go pick the kids up or because you've got another meeting in five minutes you know whatever it is just step away even if you were to tell the host got to step away five you know in five minutes hope that's okay they're not going to go Chris would you mind staying right to the very end please they're going to go yeah no problem because they've got other stuff to do and ultimately they don't really notice what you're so once you know that nothing bad happens, you don't miss anything because they can send you any additional notes afterwards or the session's recorded or someone can fill you in. No one really notices that you're gone. And then you can turn up next time a bit more refreshed with a little bit of a break. So that's one thing. Another thing might be don't respond to the next message within the first 30 seconds.

Email is the slowest form of communication. If it is urgent, someone will ring you. Focus on the most important thing you've got to do today and get back to your emails later.

Dom (19:53)

Chris, I'm loving this. I think this is fantastic. You're revitalising my or changing my way of working. But you described a very clear process that you went through. So you said you started simplifying at home, then you went through the mental declutter, then the digital declutter. I mean, firstly, do we all have to go through that process? Or can we go straight into our work life from your experience? And while you're thinking about that, could you give me just one thing that most had an impact on your home life? When you started this process, I read your website, you trod on a CD case, I think, if I remember rightly. So what really had the most impact on your decluttering at home? And then the question about, we have to go through that sort of process?



Chris Lovett (20:32)

Thanks, Dom. Yeah, I love a shortcut, so I would definitely encourage a shortcut. If you can get to where you need to get to quicker, go for it. So yeah, you don't have to declutter your home or, look inwards or go travelling for six months to get to where you need to get to. I think when I was at home, the thing for me, it was a realisation that it wasn't really about the stuff. It was about emotional attachment to the stuff and the stories I've been collecting over those many years. So let's use football kits for example. Right so Dom when I was young I played a lot of football, four times a week, semi-pro. I had so many football kits so when I was in my early 20s they fit like a glove. When you're in your late 30s let's just say they were in putting the tumble dry a bit too often, right? Maybe around the arms they look great. Elsewhere, not so much. So my kind of story that I told them is, well, I need to hold onto them. If I hold onto this shirt, it represents a more athletic version of myself. Plus, who knows in the future I might go back to that athletic version and I might want to play football again.

I can confirm that's not happened. I'm now 45. But it was letting go of them that made me go, well, these are mostly just stories. Behind the physical stuff, behind the calendar invitation, behind the high volume of emails, it's mostly just narratives. And once we kind of realise that it's narratives that we can relinquish, everything becomes so much easier. And yeah, you forget. You really really quickly forget, I mean I decluttered pretty much everything in my home, I can't tell you what books I had, I have no idea. The CD case in question was Mark Morrison Return of the Mac, the only reason why I remember that is because I have to tell the story multiple times a month, but I couldn't tell you, the DVDs I had, no idea. I couldn't tell you the cookbooks, the cookbooks, honestly I think I had 12 to 20 cookbooks that I believe would make me a better cook. I never looked at them once. I can still make a banging slice of toast but I didn't need the cookbooks for that. So yeah, so you end up forgetting what you relinquish and just focusing on the things that are most important.

Dom (22:58)

You can see behind me that I haven't quite mastered that decluttering thing as yet, but there's plenty of scope.

Chris Lovett (23:03)



I'm on my way around mate, I'm on my way around, don't worry.

Dom (23:05)

You were talking about football kits and so on. I haven't got any of that but I have got some Land Rover brochures from the 1970s that I'm not going to throw out. But there lots of other things I should do away with. But what's particularly interesting, I think you're saying that we hold on to things, be it an idea or an object, because of the narrative we tell ourselves. And think that really does play into the internal communication situation at the moment. I think we've talked about this a lot. We are a profession where historically we have demonstrated or tried to demonstrate our value through the outputs that we do. Our worth is based around the fact that we're excellent writers and we're fantastic designers and there's been some merit in that but increasingly, it's always been the case, but increasingly we need to shift to outcomes. So I think we have to change the narrative that we're telling ourselves as communicators and you've outlined very clearly why that is because it means we hold on to stuff that no longer has huge amounts of value there I think. But you also talked about the idea of back-to-back meetings, the fact that we're incredibly busy and I think sometimes we feel as if we've been brought up to feel that that's how we work, that's what work looks like. I guess it'd be interesting to look into some of the research you've done or some of the findings you've done about what impact that sort of life has on people, their performance on the organisations, because I guess playing devil's advocate, you could say, when does self-care start and end? And when does I can't be asked when does that fit in? So how do you actually look at the impact it has and the damage it's doing?

Chris Lovett (24:32)

Yes, it's great point. I mean, there's an element around back-to-back meetings and just looking at the science and the data that is done by people more intelligent than us, right? So hours and hours, weeks and months of research, not by just one area, multiple areas across the globe, tell us back-to-back meetings are bad for your brain. So the attention starts to drop. Your stress increases and it increases when there's like, my God, I've got one minute to go and I've got to join another one. And obviously you've got no time to go to the toilet. You just bounce from one. And mostly, most of the time what tends to happen is you finish the first one late, you join the second one late and then it cascades throughout the day and then you're chasing the tail.



Professional elite athletes don't sprint all day. They sprint, review their work, stretch, rest, recover, go again. That's what they do. And these are the elite athletes across the globe. But yet as corporate athletes, where our muscle is our brain, we tend to just squeeze as much out of it without any breaks.

And at the end of the day, we're surprised why we log off and we either walk back to our train station of choice through the commute like a zombie or at home and our partner goes to us, how was your day, babe? And you go, oh, I dunno, I'm exhausted. Well, yeah, of course you are, because you have not stopped. But yet we glorify that. We glorify, oh yeah, I've worked really hard today. What have you done?

I've answered all my emails, I've been to 17 meetings. Brilliant. No one gives a shit. Actually, what is the outcome? How have you impacted people? How have you got closer to your goal? How have you moved your business forward? How have you, progressed a project? They're the measures of success. I don't know anyone that went to an interview, and got asked the question, so what's your world record of emails you've answered in a day?

Now what? You're not employed to rack up a high volume of meetings. If the meeting doesn't add value, stop doing it. Or even just get into the point of questioning, why are we doing this? Does it still add as much value as it did before? Similar to our stuff. If the books still add great value, keep the books. If they don't add as much value as they used to, there's a question there. What are the other options?

Dom (27:16)

Just to very quickly on that, I'll pass over to Jen.

As you're talking about that, I'm thinking it's about how we frame this, I guess. So you said this at the start, but it's how you have a conversation with the person that's determining what good outcome is, I guess, so that they understand what you're doing and why you're doing it. Otherwise, guess, if you just stop doing the stuff without explaining it or without having the conversation about what's important, someone's going to say, well, what are you up to? So I guess it's all about having that conversation and asking questions.



Chris Lovett (27:45)

I think with ourselves first, we carry a whole bunch of inner narratives that we've brought through from childhood, education, family dynamics, the workplace conditions that we've worked in. We have so many narratives. Like we said earlier, can't say no to stuff, especially people in power. I have to attend all the meetings because it might make me look bad. I have to have a meeting that is an hour long.

So all of these kind of these default narratives are again, once were useful can now be questioned because things have changed. Things change it. Well, there's too many meetings. Okay, well, they can't all be an hour then. So what do we do? Maybe let's either make our weekly meeting bi-weekly or let's reduce the hour meeting to 45 minutes. These types of conversations then start to bring in the concept of less, simplifying and you then you start to go, right, we're just evolving the way we work but because there's lots and lots of stuff going on all the time we have to be alive to eliminate something because we can do anything but we can't do everything.

Jennifer Sproul (28:49)

Chris, I feel like this has almost been like a personal therapy session as well. So thank you for that. If you wouldn't mind, yeah, that's fine. I'm happy to pay for it. And I should also say as well, I yesterday went to my local hospice and donated two bin bags full of books. So I've decluttered here. That was my yesterday task. But you're right, and I'm listening into this and there's so many things racing through my brain from a personal.

Chris Lovett (28:53)

I'll send you the invoice Jen, no worries.

Chris Lovett (29:06)

What a hero. What a hero. Some heroes don't wear capes, Jen.

Jennifer Sproul (29:14)



kind of analysing myself personally really. I'm like, why do I do that? Why do I feel that way? And I think, and then you go back and you bring it in, I feel like this emotional responsibility to do everything right by everybody and to be that person and to listen and to do that. But that's my burden that I've placed on myself and a narrative of my own brain that I need to course correct, right? And I think that one of the things though, as you were talking through it and I think we can all look at how do we emotionally detach ourselves from those obligations we think to see that we're valid and we're validated and we're needed and all those sorts of stuff. But it's also, I feel like in business and I say this from my position is what we're like in a constant state of panic. It's just we live in a state of panic and panic and fear and that panic can be as you say keep my job seeming relevant but it can also be panicky because everyone's moving on everyone's developing everyone's innovating and I haven't innovated and I should be learning and I should be moving and well if I'm not how am going to stay relevant or my god the market's going to collapse how do I get ahead of the market how do I keep the money coming in how do I make sure the business is still what people want to buy from if I don't move it from here to that's my own brain right now you can see and that's going like 10 to a dozen in your head. And I say that from a leadership perspective and sort of as someone who runs a small business, that constant state of panic, going well if I take my foot off the gas for one moment, I'm gonna be responsible for this organisation not succeeding or maintaining relevance in difficult conditions.

I go back to a phrase that I've heard quite a lot over time and I'm sure this resonates, behaviour breeds behaviour. So how do we get to the top of our businesses that are inducing panic and fear and that panic can be we've got to move quick quick quick people and this agility word and this other that then just finds its way all the way down. Is there any work you're doing with leaders or those at the top of it that can kind of, calibrate that sense of what does good look like rather than the sense, I think business is being led in a state of panic and that behaviour breathes down an organisation without the risk being considered. Does that make sense?

Chris Lovett (31:25)

Yeah, yeah, Jen, I felt the panic in my chest after you when you asked me that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I could feel it. I could feel it myself. And yeah, I've built a simplification programme for Footsie 100 company because of this exact same thing. I will let me unpick a couple of bits there. If you go back to Covid, we got really used to what I call crisis habits. There was no commute, so the commute went, which meant we logged on earlier.



Everything was a Zoom call, which was new to everyone, and everything was really urgent. And at that point, all of that was relevant, because there were many crises going on at the same time. So yes, of course we were on high alert. And then as we came out of those crises, we retained those habits. So a lot of us still work with a sense of false urgency, believing that everything needs to be done immediately when deep down we know it doesn't. So, but even if you get those habits, which a lot of them are subconscious, they come from positions of power and authority. Can you get me this slide deck by the end of the day? God.

Yeah, we don't ask why or what the purpose is. There's a couple of great case studies in the book where one of my clients was going through this is that the same thing. And she was basically saying, well, leader in the C-suite said, can you deliver a pack by the end of the day? And so she got her team to work on it really quickly, obviously dropping everything else that was urgent, delivered this PowerPoint slide back, but by mistake had forgotten to send the password out. So she sent this thing out, password protected, and only half the recipients got back to asking what the password was.

So the only reason why people asked for it in the first place wasn't because there was a deadline, it was because it suited someone else's annual leave. And so these are the kind of narratives that we carry around in systems where if I'm being called on urgently, then something must be really important. So yes, it taps into our own innate desire to be wanted and be needed and of course get a little dopamine hit.

And we go, oh, I'm going to go, of course, right, ready. And then we tell everyone about it at the weekend. How was your week? Oh, chaos, mad, brilliant. So you're giving off all these social cues as well that you're important. But yeah, it happens in systems all the time. So if we can prove to ourself that things are not as chaotic as they need to be, then we can slow down.

With the other bit you mentioned around the pace and things like that, I'll go back to Cat's quote earlier when she said around a person that was just thinking by reception, there's a great story from Henry Ford, who I think went back in maybe 100 years ago, he'd hired a consultant and paid them 20 grand a year in about 1930 right so you can probably guess how much that was now and there was a guy in there and he basically just had his feet on the desk so laid back feet on the desk the whole time and someone said to him why have you got this person work with his feet on the desk and Henry Ford said well when he had an idea that saved me two million dollars in 1930 or whatever that is now his feet were exactly where they are now.



And again, we go back to the science, we go back to things like lunch breaks, like rest, recovery. It helps your brain connect dots. Your most creative ideas don't come from work. I can tell you, my most creative ideas for solutions to problems are either in the shower, outside walking, or in traffic, right, weirdly, which is annoying. But again, here's a really recent case study that is related to the book, I did a book launch on LinkedIn called Do Nothing and I invited hundreds of people to do nothing for an hour. I had to really make sure that people knew what I meant but basically I invited people between 12 and 1 on the day that book was launched to do nothing. There was no Zoom link, there was no event to turn up to, there was no one talking at them, it was just their opportunity to hit attend to themselves, right. The amount of feedback I got from that saying that's the best idea I've ever seen, that idea is genius, my publisher said that's the best book launch they've ever seen, right. I got that idea whilst having a lay-in.

I was in bed. I was in bed, right? So your best ideas for solutions to the problems you're currently having are not by working another three hours late. They're probably out on your walk or just after you've had a nap. So what I tend to do is encourage this concept called strategic laziness where you take time out your day, so just stop.

That's literally it. And if you can, go and get bored. Fold your laundry. Or if you're in an office, you walk to the further end of the building for no reason. You do something else. You let your brain stop, catch up, and then try to reorganise your internal files, connect dots that weren't necessarily there before. It's why kids, when they say to you, I'm bored.

How quickly do they then create a new game? Just out of thin air? Exactly, right? So if you are back to back all day long, if you're not having a lunch break, you are at higher risk of not finding the solutions to the problems you're working on.

Jennifer Sproul (37:31)

What imagination guys, doesn't it?

Jennifer Sproul (37:48)

I love that and I think I'm going to take strategic laziness I might just put that as my out of office on my email if I don't get back to you soon I'm going to because I have strategic I'm doing strategic laziness but I agree the only thing I need to work on though Chris is when I do have those moments of good ideas which like you say are often if I'm out and about or



I've seen something or sometimes I'm just watching some drivel just because your brain's kind of taken something else a bit. The challenge I have is when I have a good idea, I email myself. So then can walk in with too many emails.

Chris Lovett (38:18)

Well, this is the thing, and I do the same, right? So I just, the brain's not there to store stuff, it's there to show it to you, and then it's going to flush it in a couple of minutes, right? And I'm sure you've all felt the same, where you've been wandering around and you've gone, that is a bloody brilliant idea, that is. And then you've gone into another room and you've felt this void of like, there was, I had this something there, it's just gone. I don't know what it was.

So just get it out, get it out really quickly and you can get on with the rest of your day. So I just have it on my notes, right? Or use your AI Assistant of choice. I've got like a little agent I've set up. So every time I have an idea, I go put it on my phone and the AI bot go, is this to park or is this something you want to work on now? And I was like, park it for later. And that's it, it's done.

Jennifer Sproul (39:08)

I think there is something Chris in launching an AI agent for strategic laziness. I think there is absolutely something in that. just as you're go on, well, I'm sure we'll do some crowdfunding or something, whatever they're called. Just on that as well, because I think it's really important as well is that.

Chris Lovett (39:15)

Trademarked it. That's it.

I'm looking for investment Jen, if you've got any investment that I send my way, feel free to. Yes.



Jennifer Sproul (39:29)

And what you say now, and I can self reflect in this businesses and the work that we're doing, we're all running around busy doing stuff that we're not sure is actually creating value to the business, driving the outcomes the organisation is looking for. I do think that we are breeding behaviour upon behaviour upon behaviour in all of that sense. So we need to take personal accountability as well in that. But I guess my question is, how would you position the risk to organisations of not thinking, well, how do I set that behaviour that breeds through that allows this to prosper? What's the risk if they don't? What do you think that with how prolific, for example, burnout is in 2026 and where we're going, what do you the long term implications of that are going to be for businesses in this space?

Chris Lovett (40:18)

Yeah, your best people are going to burn out. That's probably the headline. And as you've seen with most of the research and stats recently, it's only going up. People are having what I call ampersand jobs. So by stealth, as is the organisation, contract, shrink, move. People are getting loaded with more stuff to do, more titles.

And if as an individual, if you don't figure out your own way of managing that, you're going to quickly succumb to the risk of burnout because there's no point waiting on your system to fix it for you. Despite there being so many wellness or self-care clinics, latest stats have only found like one organisation has done it really well in regards to looking after their people, I don't even know who that is. But most employees of organisations say that mental health and burnout has not got better despite the investment in all of these other things. So there is a sense of empowerment and ownership and accountability on you as an individual to create these small boundaries. Like I mentioned earlier, do the small things first, know that it's safe to do it and you can start creating slightly new habits that no one will even notice. And once they do notice, they'll look and they'll say, you are having a lunch break, you're still doing incredible work, but you're doing it sustainably. They're going to go, how are you doing this? You become a role model, you become a cultural champion. And then you'll be asked, can you roll this out? I'll be like, yeah, well my secret message is take a lunch break.

Who knew? So yeah, the risks for individuals, massive burnout, the risks for organisations and teams is that you just simply work on far too much and you don't solve anything.



Jennifer Sproul (44:21)

I think that the other risk as well that you've highlighted many ways and the way you're describing it is that innovation, ideas, they're just going to get drawn out of us because we're not having that time to generate that or that cognitive reset that allows us to think that through and I think that there's a lot of symptoms we can see if we treat one by one we might get to the cause.

Chris Lovett (42:46)

I think that now's probably a really great time to look at simplifying as a competitive advantage. I work in it every single day where I have clients go to me. My team are trying to change four documents and it's taken them a year and it's laughable. And I'm like, what do you mean? They're like, well, you know, we started it off when there was like three people involved and then we asked someone else's opinion and then we got their team involved and now there's like 25 people and every time we send it out there's an iteration is it my god like honestly your one job was to change these documents right and it's taken you a year how is that high performance in any way shape or form and if you go back to some of the stats we mentioned earlier right your your brain is your weapon in corporate life, in white collar life, Ideas. How do you get your ideas? You rest. How do you stay attentive to when you've got now probably multiple people reporting into multiple teams? Well, here's an idea. Don't go to back-to-back meetings all day long. So again, they sound very counterculture and I understand that. But we've got to a point now where busyness is an epidemic, burnout is a massive health issue, people are dying through overworking. I think the latest stats for the World Health Organisation is around 245,000 people a year are dying through stroke and heart disease that are linked back to overworking. When you put all that together and you hand it off to the C-suite team and you say, right, how are we going to high perform this year? It's not by doing more, it's by doing the right things that matter. And that's literally it. And having that ability, the bravery, the courage and the intelligence to let go of the stuff that we'd love to get through, but we just can't at the moment because we've got these things to do.



Dom (44:52)

Chris, let's pick up on something there because you said simplification gives organizations a competitive advantage. And we've recently been talking a lot about great internal communication helps organisations perform better. So we've spoken about how we as communicators can manage ourselves.

Can we just, for the final few moments, just change the focus slightly and say, look, what can we do as internal communicators to help reduce overload, help people to rest, to encourage recuperation, and generally help other people do the stuff we've just been talking about? Because guess if we do that, then we're doing our job of helping organisations perform better. What's your experience with that?

Chris Lovett (45:28)

Yeah, yeah, thanks, Dom. Yeah, say less. Yeah, just say less. There's this, there's a great term called baffle gab, which I encourage everyone to look up and it's basically whereas corporate waffle becomes so much that people don't understand what you're trying to say. We've all got so much going on. We don't have time to try and decode what you're saying. Tell me in simple language in as few words as possible. Tell me what I need to do, where I need to go and just tell me in as little words as possible, right? Because I haven't got time. My brain probably can't attend to paragraphs and paragraphs of verbiage, all this wasted language, just say less and do fewer things. And so that would be my recommendation.

Dom (46:20)

Just one more thing then I'll pass over, but in your experience of working in organisations, what have you seen in terms of communicators helping to create a culture of being more targeted, of being more mindful of how you do stuff and using your time better? What experience have you had of that?

Chris Lovett (46:33)

Yeah, think again, putting it into the hands of the people use data. How many people want to receive this stuff? How many are actually getting to it? And what is it that they are



picking up on? If you are, mass market going out to everybody. I've had so many people who just don't even have the time to unsubscribe or just delete.

So reanalyse who needs to see your stuff. Those are the people that are giving you the right data. Serve them. Serve them up with the right stuff that is respectful of their time and attention. Don't waffle. Leave out the corporate jargon. Just tell people in simple language what they need to hear, when they need to hear it. And those people who are not subscribed, let them go.

Jennifer Sproul (47:29)

Powerful phrase, isn't it? Let them go.

And I like that, be respectful of other people's time. And I also think that one thing that as you've been talking and that I've been reflecting on and thinking is a, as also a habit and behaviour that we've talked about in other podcasts, we've talked about in our research, we've talked about on the podcast before is also around, we need to be really good at active listening. Because actually, if you actively listen to somebody else, because at the moment, I think we also speak to go, what have I got to say next? Or can you do this for me? Rather than actively listening going, do I need to ask them that or have they already answered that? Or do actually, is there actively something in that where I'm hearing a signal where I could change my behaviour so it doesn't bring that behaviour down? And I think there's a lot of intelligence that we can gather from that sense of active listening to recognise the wrong or the right things that we're doing. But also, I think we're missing.

In the sake of busyness, I think we're missing nuggets of gold and information and queues around us, if that makes sense.

Chris Lovett (48:29)

There's honestly, Jen, there are opportunities everywhere. And you're right about the signals. They are around, right? But keeping people too busy head down to lift their head up and spot what they are. And even if they're spotted to go to eliminate things. So active listening. Yes, incredible. Having the courage to just ask, why are we doing this? Or, what's the purpose of this new thing we've got compared to the thing that we've just spent a million pound on that we've just launched into. What tends to happen is we, a person in power will have an idea, right? So this is not their fault. They'll see something



out in the industry, probably a peer, a competitor, and they will go, I want to have a bit of that. And they'll bring it in and they'll go, can you do me some research on blah, blah, And we'll go, yeah, all right.

But we should be having just more better adult mature professional conversations around. Yeah, we could. We could definitely do that, right? But I just want to remind you that your team member, your peer, your stakeholder also has this, this, this, this, and this on their list. So can we just have a chat around what is the most important thing now? If it's changed, that's completely fine.

If we need to review our priorities, of course, we probably need to do that every quarter anyway, right? But we can't just knee-jerk to the latest thing that's happening because we will never get anything done.

Jennifer Sproul (50:12)

Yeah, and then you just get the free state and that's not progress, is it?

Love that, Chris, thank you so much. There's so much I've taken from that. And I think there's so much I think that you've said as well that probably list as well. That's what it's like for me at work every day. I think it was an example you said about they hear this and they do that and they're like, yep, that or this document or bring this person in and do that. It feels a lot. But I think there's a lot in there about being respectful of people's time. Adult conversations. I think that's something I wrote down as well as the power of the cognitive unload to create ideas and innovation and that thing that we can do to ask questions, to actively listen and to take some personal accountability and look at how can we emotionally and physically declutter our lives and our habits to allow that behaviour to breed to others, but also to allow it to benefit ourselves because that will make us a more valued and important human, colleague, whatever that might be. So I think there's just so much on that to take, so thank you.

Chris Lovett (51:07)

Yeah, brilliant. again, just in closing, these things are not that hard. They're only hard because we think it's another thing we've got to but actually, if you start your day tomorrow, and that's what the whole book's about, you can actually pick it up, read a



thing, and go, oh, I can do that now. If you log on tomorrow, don't let your email be the first thing you open. Work on the most important... Exactly.

Jennifer Sproul (51:32)

That's a hard habit of a lifetime to change, but I think it's a brilliant one to start.

Chris Lovett (51:36)

Right, just something, just don't open it. Just give yourself a couple of minutes or even a half hour if you can. Focus on the most important thing first and then open your email, right? And you now know that email is the slowest form of communication, which means if somebody's emailed you, you do not have to respond straight away. Most people say that by the end of the day is completely fine if a response is needed at all.

And again, here's a quick hack for you, right? A quick hack is if you're in a group message, don't be the first one to respond.

It probably needs somebody to respond. It doesn't necessarily need you. There's a task on there. It doesn't necessarily have your name on it. So if you are looking for a task, looking to, strengthen your career, of course, yeah, put your hand up, right? But if you have already stacked, you've got so much stuff to do, don't feel obliged to put your hand up.

Cat Barnard (52:40)

I just want to echo what you said, Jen, that the whole hour almost felt like therapy, hasn't it? Even listening to the tone and cadence of the conversation, I think we've kind of collectively brought our heart rates down a notch. There's a lot in here. There's so many things that I'm thinking about. But one of the things that hit me hardest, maybe like five or so years ago was, and I know that Seth Godin talks about this, sorry, name drop, , but there's another American business woman who's got a huge social media following called Marie Forleo, and she advocates for this all the time. If you consider yourself to be a creator, and I hope that almost everybody working in the field of internal communication does consider themselves to be a creator. If you work in that field, you must create before you consume. And I love that because it ties into everything that you've told us



and shared with us this past hour, Chris. So I feel like we're going to want to need you, we're going to need you to come back onto the podcast at some point soon, if only to soothe us and to provide some more free therapy. But it's been a really good, useful hour spent, I think. And I hope our listeners agree and can take at least one thing from this conversation and apply it to their practice. So thank you so much for joining us and we'll look forward to having you back at some point.

Chris Lovett (54:18)

My pleasure, my pleasure. And yes, no worries, I will definitely be able to come back. And who knows, by that time, there'll be even more opportunities to simplify things that I haven't even shared this time around. so yeah, looking forward to it.

Cat Barnard (54:36)

Love it. Here's to strategic laziness. Thanks so much. It will, exactly. Thank you.

Chris Lovett (54:40)

Damn right, that's right. You'll see it in the mainstream media soon, I'm sure.

Jennifer Sproul (54:47)

Thank you.