Dom (00:42)

Hello and welcome to another edition of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Dominic Walters and joined as always by Cat Barnard and Jen Sproul. And today we are very pleased to have Howard Krais joining us. Hi Howard. Howard, many people, many people Howard listen to this may well have met with you or worked with you, but Howard is a leading practitioner in internal communication and engagement. Having had a number of very senior roles in those fields for organisations such as Ernst & Young, GSK and Johnson & Matthey. And in fact, I think we were reminding ourselves in the preamble before recording that we first met about 20 years ago, I think, Howard, when you're working for a law firm and we were doing some work around leadership communication, part of which was the topic for today, which is leadership. More recently, Howard has, some would say joined the dark side of us consultants and a year ago, co -founded an organisation called True, which helps organisations build winning cultures through helping to unleash the potential of their people. And a key part of that, of course, will be around listening. Over the last six years or so, Howard has been working with colleagues, Mike Pounsford and Kevin Ruck on a series of reports and studies into the application, the use of the benefits of listening with organisations, which culminated in the production of a book called, Leading the Listening Organisation, published towards the end of 2023.

Howard, it would be great to kick us all off because listening is something we often talk about in these podcasts. It's something which has always been talked about as I've mentioned, but particularly the last few years has started to come into prominence. So to kick us off, please could you tell us a bit about the book itself and what you took from it?

Howard Krais (02:23)

Yeah, hi, Dom. Lovely to be here and great to have this opportunity to share a bit around what the work we've been doing on listening and why we think it's really a topic of its time, I guess. And, you know, as you said, we've been working on this for about six years. And that all started actually an industry event where, you know, we're doing something called Open Space. Some people know what Open Space is. I guess another name for it is unconference I think it's the new name for a similar sort of thing, where I just put my hand up and said, I want to talk about listening. And what particularly I wanted to talk about was our communicators listening. You know, it seemed to me that too often these days we're stuck in our head office environments. We've got travel bans. It's hard to get out. We've got so much on our plate. We've got very small teams. And we've got senior people telling us, we've got to get this done, got to get this done, you know, get to publish stuff. So how, if you're doing that and you're working all the hours just to keep up, how are you spending the time actually understanding where your audience is, how your audience is reacting to the things that you're asking them to do? And from that, together with Kevin and Mike, we thought there was something worth pursuing. As you said, we did the four reports, we did a small survey, we did some best practice work, we did a larger survey.

And then we did some focus group based stuff around leadership and listening. And as we did at the end of each report, is that it now? We're done. And we thought, well, maybe there's a book here. So yeah, and that's sort of where we got to in terms of putting the book together. The book became then not just a sort of collection of the four reports that we've done, but they were the basis, but quite a lot of new work as well. And so what the book covers is really what we mean by listening. Why listen? Some of the difficulties in listening, how to listen. We've listed, I think, something. I think I counted up 21 different ways that we're aware that people actually listen. It starts from, obviously, most people start with the survey, the big survey. We talked about digital listening. We've talked about the use of networks, in particular, employee resource groups, as well as the growing area of listening. And then I suppose the big last bit of the book is really around leadership because where we got to on our work, you know, I said it started with how communicators are listening. But, you know, what we realised that it's about leaders and it's a business. So this is a business book, not communications book, you know, I think it's very relevant for comms folks and for HR folks and EX folks and people who are across that space. But it's really aimed at leaders because it's leaders who set the culture or the climate. We use the word climate rather than culture in the book, but there's sort of interchangeable, I think.

Howard Krais (04:58)

And we've actually put a model up at the end of the book in terms of, you know, the sort of listening leader. And ultimately, you know, we believe that organisations that listen are more successful. And, you know, where this comes to, it's about performance. And, you know, we would argue that, hence the sort of subtitle of the book, you know, that if you're doing the listening properly, that you're going to flourish.

Dom (05:20)

Just on that subject, funnily enough, I've been working with some people recently, where encouraging them to do more listening and push back from a relatively new MD who's keen to lay out his store, was I don't want to unleash a load of cans of worms if that's not mixing metaphors, but you get the gist. So how would you combat that when you talk about leadership? Because that seems to be one of the biggest barriers.

Howard Krais (05:41)

Yeah, definitely. And I think that what we find is that when you ask people to use their voice and to be part of the conversation, the fear that sometimes some leaders have of, we're just going to get deluged with all sorts of things. Well, first of all, if there are, then that's a worry in itself that maybe there's all sorts of things that are wrong in the organisation. But anyway, let's leave that to one side. I don't think people do. I think that from a lot of the work I've done, people are absolutely get why they're being asked to do something. So, I think one thing that's really important to start with is the definition of listening. What do we mean by listening when we talk about it? So we talk about

listening as that in essence that you have a chance to share, you know, to have your voice, to share what's on your mind, but something gets done with it. That's the really key piece.

And I think that if people trust, if people believe that their voice counts for something, if they work in an organisation where they trust that that's going to happen, I don't think you start getting, you know, this can of worms of all the stuff that I don't want to hear was not relevant. I think that people understand why they're being asked, but they won't bother if they don't believe anything's going to happen with it. So I think that's the first thing. I think second of all, actually, if you unleash a can of worms and so what, is that really a problem? It may be highlights and stuff going on in your business that you might want to know. Again, from a definition point of view, I never believe that when a leader says they want to listen, that people expect they're going to walk away with a shopping list of things that they need to do. I think, again, it's help me. The key thing about leaders is to say, I'm curious. I don't know all the answers. Help me to come up with better answers. So for example, talking to people who are actually dealing day to day with customers, what are customers saying?

You know, help us to have better products or maybe better. I was thinking about this in relation to an example, you know, personal example I had recently where I was pretty unhappy with the way that the customer service people in the organisation were responding to my challenges and my queries. If there's good listening going on, it may be that the answer is we give you better scripts, we give you better training, we give you better ways of, you know, explaining why we as an energy company are doubling our prices or an insurance company are doubling our prices so you've got some better answers so you can be more empathetic. So it's not necessarily going to change the policy or you're going to change the direction but we can do, you know, we can be better in how we respond to what people are saying and I think that should come from listening. So I think there's lots of ways where listening can get you to better outcomes without opening the can of worms and even if it did, I don't think that should be seen as such a problem. One of the things we talk about in the book is just around leaders, and just finishing on that is something we call the parental trap. And where, in a sense, leaders feel they have to have all the answers. And so they're not listening, because they sort of think, the old -fashioned hero leader model, where I need to be able to answer every question. Now, we can come back to this in the conversation, particularly over psychological safety. But we don't believe that leaders need to have all the answers. I don't think it's a bad thing when a leader says, help us to come up with a better answer. And so that's very much at the heart of what a listening leader needs to be.

Dom (08:56)

So I'll pass on to Cat in a second. So what I've just taken a number of things, but particularly from the right part of the conversation is my words, but it's about showing leaders who are reticent that they're actually stopping themselves and getting useful information, notwithstanding all the relationship benefits, but it's about getting useful information to help them shape profitability or shape productivity or shape useful things that bother them rather than just because it's a good thing to do. And that's, I think, a very crucial insight.

Howard Krais (09:21)

I think in the main, and again, my experience, most of my career being in-house, it's always a surprise, again, why you as a communicator should be out listening as much as you can be, how much people are passionate about the business that they're in. Sometimes it surprises you, you know, people in blue collar jobs, whatever it is, people would be very proud of the company and they have views, they have thoughts, we can do this better if, you know, we can be more sustainable if dot dot dot. This process could work better if. Now some of that can be built in of course to ways that you know continuous improvement processes and stuff but that in itself suggests I'm listening. I think that people when they join an organisation they want that organisation to be a winning organisation and so if they have ideas, if they have views, why not share them? Because I think people's motivation is we can be better, we can perform better as an organisation.

Cat Barnard (10:14)

I think there's so much in that. I think one of the things that's occurring to me is what incentive could there possibly be for anybody to undertake better listening to customer needs and future customer needs if they themselves don't feel that they exist within an environment where they are well listened to. That's a first point that I would make. And another is you know, the tables have turned. We've had various people on the podcast in recent times who have validated that we're now operating in a very different labour market with very different dynamics. We've had Neil Carberry from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation on twice now. And you know, if you're not as an employer absolutely bending over backwards to listen to each and every one of your internal stakeholders, then you can only expect high attrition because in the changed landscape, people are putting their own needs first and foremost. We've almost been force fed a socio-cultural narrative which is hyper individualistic where, you know, we win or lose based on what we singularly contribute. So there is some collective thinking in organisations, but organisations that don't embody a collective sense of unity are the ones that are spinning through the talent. And I'm really curious to find out your thoughts, Howard on why you think so many organisations struggle to prioritise and act on feedback from their internal stakeholders.

Howard Krais (12:09)

Yeah, we'll probably just talk about that question for the rest of the podcast. I totally agree in that the way that, you know, the generations, different generations, people are expecting to be able to have their voice. And I think if you just look at, you know, our behaviour individually in terms of social media, glass door, Tripadvisor, you know, we're in a sort of a world where our opinions are asked almost all the time. So why shouldn't we expect that when we come into a work environment that the same thing should exist? I think people increasingly do have that expectation and that desire. So I do think that building the trust that says that and the recognition that says that your voice is important and your voice can make a difference and improve things is one of the elements of creating a culture that people want to be part of, I think that's right. So why can't that happen? I mean, there's many reasons. And one of the things we've done in the book is a Canadian consultant

called Elizabeth Williams did some work for us and basically looked at, I think it was 18 different sort of top business schools, you know, the sort of Ivy League schools in America, Russell Group universities and the like and looked at their management programmes, their MBAs and looked at and did a word search almost for listening and saw how many times out of 18 different high profile courses does listening come up and the answer is once.

Cat Barnard (13:31)

Wow, can I just pause? I think that is immense. I just want to stop that right there. I'm absolutely stoked that you guys did that research because it just brings into stark reality some of the shortcomings of these MBA programmes that cost an arm and a leg. And as you say, that are so highly thought of, so kind of gilded with prestige, and yet the bare -bone essential, the one thing that creates unity and cohesion and goodwill and collaboration is absent.

Howard Krais (14:11)

Yeah, and just to give you a bit more context that where communications is taught, which is not all of them, it's broadcast. It's about how I deliver messages. So the teaching, the way that future executives are being taught, where they're taught at all about communications is about how I get my message across, how I broadcast to external or internal audiences. So I think straight away you can see it's not a core capability. I've been very lucky and worked with some amazing leaders who just got it naturally. But whether that's many leaders I don't know. I'm sure hopefully most people have some good experience of working with amazing leaders, but there's plenty who just don't get it because it's never been part of what they've had to do to be successful.

Cat Barnard (14:58)

And to some degree, you know, the MBA has become the kind of cookie cutter emblem of elite leadership, hasn't it? And so the fact that such an elemental vital skill set is not only not taught, but it's not even given any daylight as a topic of crucial consideration. And I was drawn to what you said earlier about, you know, the last 15 years, we've all become immersed in life online. And actually what I find really interesting is that feedback has underpinned agility in the Silicon Valley version of agility, your beta testers in the software world, their feedback allows you to hone, enhance and improve your software products. So that feedback is an absolute, again, crucial component of progress and innovation. And yet then in parallel, we seem to be of the view that internal feedback isn't valuable. And in the uncharted waters that we're now in, I would wager strongly that there is no such thing as useless feedback. And my goodness, Dom, to go to your client example of somebody who didn't want to open a can of worms, I mean, that I don't even have words for it, it's just so short -sighted.

Dom (16:55)

I think this particular individual has recently come off an MBA type thing as well, so just to reiterate, it's a practical example of your point, I think.

Cat Barnard (17:02)

But to me, that accentuates that within industry, within business, we're not focused on the right skills. And the other thing that I would add into this mix, just to add a bit of complexity to chaos is, you know, those same business schools are telling us all that we need to get on the artificial intelligence bus first and foremost, so we need to become digitally competent, but we also need to double down on our human skills, the ones that technology cannot replicate. Isn't that just funny that listening is a vital human skill that isn't being taught either, you know, the professional educational settings or at a grassroots level within our organisations.

Howard Krais (17:48)

I mean, yes, I agree. And the thing is, I think with this topic is it's one of the reasons we carried on and kept going on it is when we've done work on it, it's really resonated with people that we've been talking to, which is great. And the first chapter of the book is called The Age of Listening or What's That Effect? And I do think this is a topic of its time. And so I think that there's a lot of reasons why now listening is almost like a necessity. I think it works in terms of growing trust and engagement. I that, here's a stat, I was talking about this the other day, I think McKinsey's user stat, which is maybe a little apocryphal now, 70 % of all change programmes don't deliver what's promised.

And they say that one of the major reasons for that is not bringing people with you. And I think that, again, listening is a major factor. In my experience personally, it is a major factor in helping people through change. So hopefully, if companies are realising as they go through continual change, they need to do things differently because it's just not working as they hoped. They'll realise that there's some of the people aspects of this and listening being a huge part of that. I talked about working with customer-facing staff. I think innovation, just about every company I know has innovation more or less in its value statement. So, listening to different voices is one way that you're going to innovate and do things differently. You know, we see the growth of DEI, for example, and diversity and the growth of employer resource groups, again, if you're going to take them seriously, then you're going to listen to different voices. That's underpinned by having different diverse voices as part of how you make decisions. So I think there's all of these things, better risk management if we're properly listening to the organisation. I think there's all of these things underpinned as well by a feeling of what I've sort of grandly called social justice, that it should happen.

When we grow up as kids, we sort of expect as we have conversations with our friends and at school that we're going to be listened to. So why shouldn't we expect that that's the case in the workplace? So I hope and I think that there's a lot of things. I see more organisations that are beginning to have listening strategies. The growth of employee experience, I think, is helping that as well. And I also see

more agencies who are coming up with listening solutions, which may be largely survey-based. But I think, again, the language of listening is out there.

So I hope it's, nothing changes in five minutes, but I hope it's, things are beginning to change and there's a realisation in many companies, I hope that we have to do things differently if we want

Jen (20:37)

Absolutely, and I think that, you know, us listening here and Cat and Dom have referenced it as well on this podcast, that the theme of listening and conversation and dialogue has been, whenever we've asked most guests, what do we do to solve the complex challenges that we've got in business or in what we're doing? It all comes back to have a conversation, listen, act and feedback.

You know, and it's innately born in us, right? As children, we want to be seen, we want to be heard, we want to be valued, we want to be reassured, we want to be recognised. It's an innately human need, I think, to it. And I think that, you know, you talk about employee experience, but customer experience that you talked about earlier, that's based off emotional ways we interact and how we create that feeling, which creates brand loyalty, brand trust, all the things that the organisations want to do. And I think that certainly here at IoIC and what I've seen on the podcast, we are absolute champions and to see listening taken more seriously or more sort of, I guess, put on the business agenda is really important. And as I said, I think beforehand, we've been looking at our history and we can see it's been in their archive, but we just haven't put the perhaps the light in it. But one of my questions I just want to ask listening into all of this, we've talked about this, your book is obviously about leadership and then leading listening organisations, but also is applicable to people working in IC, HR, EX, anyone around that. And I guess one of the things that, as you say, it's great to see it's being more widely adopted. We know it's perhaps the thing that is needed to solve some of the complex things that we're all dealing with, whether that's from pace and change to how we deal with misinformation or how we deal with all those sorts of things. But from the work that you've been doing, how are you seeing it being placed in organisations structurally? Cause I think half the problem we've got is we've created so many systems and processes and structures in our organisations because they've gotten so huge. That's the problem. It's surely the size of everything has grown so much. So the, the chains of things are going. So where does things sit? And we get in these kinds of really weird arguments. Well, it's not mine. It's yours. It's here. It's there. And that can be a real distraction from just getting on. But I wondered from your work that you've been doing, how you're seeing it actually being adopted in organisations and that kind of alignment piece, I think, between management and all those other functions that we've talked about.

Howard Krais (22:54)

That's a great question because there's no simple answer here. You know, what people told us what people have always told us. No surprise. What's the main method of listening in an organisation? People would say it's the big survey, whether it's annual. I'm never sure if by annual is every two years or every six months, but I mean every two years, you know, so organisations who do these big

surveys still, of which there are many, let's face it. And that's always been the number one way people have told us that they listen.

So where does that sit in an organisation? Typically that will sit in HR in terms of where it's owned, albeit that the internal comms people have a very big role to partner with it, with IC and in terms of how it runs. We could talk forever about the big surveys. I think when they're done well and lead to a small number of big actions, they can be very impactful. But that's the exception rather than the rule, is my experience where often I wonder if the focus is more about response rates and stuff which really creates noise rather than actually creates difference and improvement. And so when people say these days that they've got survey fatigue, I think that for me what that means is we keep being asked our opinion and nothing happens to it. I don't think as we do too many surveys, I think we'd be very happy to do more surveys if we believe something would happen. We could see something happening with the feedback.

So I think surveys that typically sit in HR, it's interesting what happens to survey results as well. Again, personal experiences often, this creates a lot of interest in the competitive interest often in senior leaders. And two months later it's gone. So you think about how financial information, which is looked at on a daily, weekly, monthly basis and senior leadership meetings, the familiarity with how the big leavers take place. But maybe two months out of 12, or maybe the month before the survey when we suddenly remember, we made some commitments or we said we're going to do some stuff a year ago, it sort of drops off the agenda almost as quick as it goes on. So again, I'm being very general and I'm sure people who are listening not in our organisation, we've got brilliant processes and I'm sure that they exist. I think the growth of employee experience is a really interesting area here because whether it's looking at the moments that matter and the life cycle, there's a lot more listening built into that now, which I think is really good. But talking to one client of mine at the moment, what they're wrestling with is we've got too many sources of information coming in, how do we put them together? I think that's a really interesting thing, especially where you overlay that with something like diversity and equity and inclusion, where if you've got the groups and you've got the resource groups and other things, you're getting, and other networks too, there's not just within DEI. You can be getting a lot of voices, a lot of, so how you bring this together, so that you're really hearing what people are saying and can be quite specific about it. It can be owned anywhere, but that's one of the challenges, I think. And I think people will crack there. And I hope that what you'll start to get is some really powerful joined-up thinking. One of the jobs I did at GSK, certainly, and we reference this sort of thing in the book a little bit. I think for some of the very bigger companies, where they will go, where they've already started going, is by using, even guess, AI now we might say, big data we were saying five minutes ago, we'll call it something else next week. But when you're using that sort of, bringing the sort of different sort of data streams together to start predicting what's going to happen in certain areas where you can get early warning about things. I think that's really interesting way of using listening in sort of a way for tomorrow. I think that's going to require, so again, where does that sit? Perhaps HR, but you know, wherever. But I think it's going to require organisations say we've got fantastic data, how can we start to use that to improve?

Cat Barnard (26:56)

There's quite a fine balance also to think about here though, isn't there? Because too much listening could be construed as surveillance capitalism. And, you know, we've seen not quite so much as recently, but there were certainly headlines that were indicating a backlash against the use of kind of keyboard monitoring in the early days of the pandemic where organisations wanted reassurance that their employees and staff were on task. And I think there is something really interesting Jen and I are working through some data at the moment about the application of generative AI and use cases for internal communicators. But, you know, through one lens, these new technologies yield rich insights and through another, they could be construed as an invasion of privacy, right? And so I'm not saying that to ask you specifically for an answer, I'm more saying this is the complexity in which we now find ourselves. And actually, if I was to call it, just even thinking that through, I would say, the antidote must surely lie in the questions that you ask each and every internal stakeholder to understand their preferences and their attitudes towards the extent to which they are happy to be monitored. I'm using inverted commas for anybody that's not able to see the video. But you know, that's it in a nutshell, isn't it? It's actually we need to understand the preferences in order that we can find out from our internal stakeholders, their level of comfort in how our information and behavioral insights is tracked.

Howard Krais (29:08)

I 100 % agree, but I think the one addition would be transparency. And, if you say this is how we're going to use this data, I think that, and again, if the trust exists within the organisation, then people know, and then, you know, just be upfront about it.

Howard Krais (29:22)

So I think that that's the challenge of AI, for example, in so many things in comms, isn't it, around transparency. And I think for me, just be open about what you're planning to do and why you're planning to do it. And I suspect with people, different parts of the world, people think different things. But there's always going to be a concern about how you're going to use data. There's a similar article I was reading last week about many companies who are using data from social networks and various to look at what their employees are saying, but just be open about what you're doing.

Jen (29:56)

I know Dom, you're going to come on to you in a second, but I was just going to add my anecdote as well, because obviously, you know, many, a couple of decades ago when I was working in the consumer insight industry and the market research industry, right, when big data was born, which then became smart data and then came back to, I think, big data. And I think that one of the things that actually similarly did that was the development of things like the Tesco Club Card by Dunn Humby. People then, and then the internet and everything's been building and then it starts to become inventory and then it starts to become algorithms and then it starts to become all of that. And I think as consumers, maybe personally we see a different way to our information being shared than we do in the workplace. Perhaps that's something to understand because trust baked in at the outset is really important, as you say, and I think transparency is part of that.

But I think the thing I was just going to comment on, and I know Dom, you want to ask a question next, but the thing I was going to comment on as well is it is about how you mine those datas together, those data points, whether that's qualitative, open, quant, anecdotal, whatever. But I think that where the power lies, once you get your head around that, and you're trying to use listening to create action, to create feedback, which is the fundamental piece which creates the trust and the circle and the continuous improvement is one of the greatest skills internal communicators have is storytelling. And it's all about how you map that piece back into the cycle. But I think Dom, you want to ask more about actually being better listeners, don't you? So I'll shut up now and talk about why listening is good.

Dom (31:22)

Which of course it is. Now it'd be interesting to shift the focus slightly because we were talking a little about leaders and sometimes leaders are reticent to listen. I think some of it must be down to their personal securities and skills. I remember recently a little while ago. We're working with a company where two sites came together. One of the managers from the sites was in charge of both now. He was saying how can I get both on side and we were saying go out and talk about three months later? We did some quick surveys to find out how that worked and it been a disaster. And one of the reasons was when he went out and talked everyone thought it was a raw visit. He went to the same people asked the same questions look very uncomfortable look down to his shoes didn't do anything. So I think one of them one of the things is about personal skills. That's not just leaders. That's all of us. I'm sure many people will have heard of the song by Mike and the Mechanics many years ago called The Living Years when he said one of the lines that struck me was we can listen as well as we hear which brings it out very nicely. A lot of people go through the motions of it. So based on your research Howard and your experience of working with leaders, how can leaders, how can all of us in fact become better interpersonal listeners? What can we do?

Howard Krais (32.24)

There's this thing called active listening, there's thing around sort of the mechanics of one -to -one listening, you know, around eye contact, nodding, all that's playing back what you've heard which we haven't really got into ever. So, you know, in terms of a skills thing, probably haven't got a lot to say other than, you know, what's sort of fairly straightforward, I think. But I think it's a state of mind to me. So that would be my answer is that if I believe that I don't know all the answers, if I believe that other people can help me to make better decisions, it's hard to think that people don't know how to listen because I'm sure they do that in their personal lives as it were. So I actually have a different view as a leader, not the view that says I'll go where I'm comfortable and just hear from the people who I know who are going to tell me what I want to hear, which is challenge obviously. The psychological safety is a big topic on its own. There's a lot written about it. And we see psychological safety really operating in two big ways here. One is the obvious way I suppose is, you know, people who are reticent to actually speak up because they're worried they'll say something they shouldn't

say. It might be the silly question. It might be, that fear that in times of change, if I ask something, difficult that someone's going to make a note of that and it's going to be held against me one day, we've all come across that and just might be natural shyness that says, I find it difficult to speak up in a sort of an environment. So I think the leaders have a duty to try and get people talking. And, you know, Dom, we reference the work we did the other 20 years ago. We worked quite hard on that. But even back in those days, the people in a room were encouraged to, so good facilitation skills could be that ability to make sure that there wasn't someone who could hide at the back and not say something, something that we worked hard on. What we recognise is that leaders also suffer from psychological challenges here. What happens if I don't have the answer? What happens if I'm asked a question?

I feel uncomfortable in answering. What happens if someone asks me that difficult question, which I might have some sympathy with, but I feel that I can't, you know, I can't be honest with the answer. And so I think you've got to help leaders as well recognise that it is a difficult, can be to your example, that leader going into a new site where they may not know anybody, not sure what other people are going to say, but that may have been a big challenge for that person.

I might feel very uncomfortable just walking up to someone saying, what's on your mind? But really good leaders, they get it. And I work with several who just have that knack of being able to make you feel that you've been listened to. You know, I'd sit in a room, 25 people, include a CEO or who's a really good leader and 24 people walk out that room, they do their own storytelling telling their colleagues that person listened to me, really got what I was saying, got me to be honest, got me to share my story, didn't necessarily tell me everything was going to be okay, or didn't necessarily give me the answer that I wanted, but my understanding's a lot better now, and I feel good that they've listened to me. And I think that's where we've got to help leaders, is that actually their role is pretty pivotal in this. So we use the phrase, you know, that leaders need to listen up so people can speak up.

But I think it's more a state of mind that says actually I recognize that I don't have all the answers and that if I can get, really tap into what people are thinking, I can make better decisions. And then it's much easier to help in the mechanics of how you're going to do that.

Jen (36:03)

Just to kind of round up with, I guess, sort of a final question, obviously, this, you know, our listeners, wherever you come from, you might be in a multitude of professions, but I do. But obviously, clearly, we're always talking about the role in the future of internal communication. I think there's a couple of things you just said, actually, that strike me for internal communicators. You talked about the mindset of leaders to listen, but I think there's a mindset of communicators to listen and how we adopt that. So we don't adopt a fully fledged broadcast comms mindset. And often at IoIC we talk about communication being multi -directional, multi -flow, multiple ways. It is far more complex and we see our role also evolving to be one that helps coach those leaders and coach those people into

that, as well as how we tap into that for our own, I guess, relationships, influence and all those things. So I think that the things you talk about leaders can also be taken into us as communicators. But with all that said, apart from they need to go away and buy the book, clearly, they need to buy the book. What one action do you think an internal communication professional should take from today's conversation? How can they take that forward and do something with it?

Howard Krais (37:11)

I think what's the worst question in, there's been in internal comms for as long as I've been in it, which is a long time now, which is, oh, should we have a seat at the table or whatever, you know, that question. And it's such a relevant question to me. I think the answer is, and you said it a bit there, Jen, it's about, you know, how do I have the ability and the influence to deliver change, I think is maybe one way of asking that question, one way to have influence and one way I think communicators can lay claim to space, which I think HR have vacated for lots of reasons, is to be seen as the voice of the audience, the voice of the employees. So when change is happening or when stuff has to be done to actually be able to say, we know because we talk to people how people are feeling, how they react, how this went last time. How this can go next time, that we've got all of these people over here who are not connected, who are, you know, the sort of non -wired people. So don't go that route because most of our employees aren't going to even see it, you know, that type of thing. But we know how they're thinking and we know how we can reach those people. That's how I think you get influence because you can offer practical and good solutions to business problems.

And for me, that's the answer really in terms of takeaways that the answer is the employees, you know, be that voice of the employee and work out how I can do that, not think I need to have a brilliant intranet or I need to have a brilliant sort of whatever newsletter and that's where I start from. Actually think about what are the employees, you know, what are employees thinking? How can I help them and influence them to change or to do whatever that, you know, we need them to do?

And if I can't do that, who's going to do that? You've got a great opportunity as a communicator. So that's where, for me, it comes back to listening as a communicator. Because it puts you in a hugely powerful position, influential position, when you can confidently say, this is how that's going to go down. But if we did it this way, then we're going to get a much better result.

Jen (39:20)

I love it. You've dropped some key words that we've been saying a lot there? Influence, listen, but also opportunity. And I think that one of the things that we're always trying to get across in this podcast and the future of internal communication, there are so many opportunities and representing through listening and that dialogue is where you can really influence. You can influence what goes on, but you can also alert and help create change and say these things aren't working and we need to adjust it. Because at the of the day, as I always say, we're in the business of human beings and they're

far more complex than any algorithm or system is ever going to change. So it's always going to take a human endeavour. Howard, thank you so much for coming on to talk to us today on the podcast. We're really grateful for your time, really fascinating episode. And like I said, where they can get the book on, is it Amazon or where is the best place if they want to go and purchase it? Is that the one?

Howard Krais (40:10)

It's on Amazon. Yeah, I mean, it's on, I think, all good booksellers, as they say. You can get it directly from Routledge, the publishers. There's different discounts around different people are offering. These things are not cheap and I recognise that. But yeah, hopefully it's a good read for people. It's the feedback we're getting is really good at the moment. And look, people have got, if talking about listening at the moment, as I said, it is a topic that seems to be of its time, you know, people want to reach out to me through LinkedIn or wherever, then I'm really happy to talk to more and more people about listening and it's clearly a subject I feel very passionate about.

Jen (40:44)

Brilliant. Thank you again, Howard. And let's keep listening and let's keep talking. Tune in for the next one, guys.