



## Transcript for S10 E8 Communication is competitive advantage with Jennifer Sertl

Cat Barnard (00:40)

Welcome to a bonus episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jennifer Sproul and Dom Walters. You might, as listeners, remember that some time back we had a brilliant guest onto the podcast, Celine Schillinger, who wrote a book called Dare to Unlead, which has gone on to win various business book awards, came and chatted with us about the new world of work. And as she launched that book, she also undertook to interview an elite range of thinkers who had shaped her beliefs about the world of work. And I listened with avid interest to the entire set of podcasts that she produced. And one guest in particular had stood out for me and I was eager to learn more. So I started covertly digitally tracking, I think, in the first instance, our guest today, Jennifer Sertl. Jennifer is a US -based strategy consultant and an internationally recognised influencer in social media and she works at the forefront of leadership development and is dedicated to strengthening strategic skills and helping leaders become more resilient, responsive and reflective in the face of our fast transforming work environments. A decade or so ago, she co -authored a book which has really piqued my interest called Strategy Leadership and the Soul. And what really struck me about the book as I was reading it was that it was one of the closest things that I've come across that really pulled out the requirement for authentic embodied leadership and leadership communication for the future of work.

Cat Barnard (02:51)

So on that basis, I wanted to invite her to come and chat with us today. I know that many of you who are listening have got the remit of leadership communication under your scope of work as internal communicators. So hopefully what we're going to talk about today is going to resonate and give you lots and lots of food for thought. So without further ado, I would like to welcome Jennifer onto the podcast. Thank you very much for being so gracious and giving us your time today, Jennifer.

Jennifer Sertl (03:23)

It's a pleasure to be here and it's also a pleasure to have been referenced from Celine's wonderful work. We actually both met because we were curated by a gentleman named Peter Van who was doing Swift and Innoribe, which is an internal innovation strategy for Swift Bank. And so the idea of being collected in this network and that this network expands is really fantastic and lovely. So thank you.



Cat Barnard (03:50)

And I think there's something lovely and poignant about that as well, because one of the things that we talk about a lot at the IoIC is the criticality of community and human social networks. And so the fact that in this instance, the human social network has actually brought us together just goes to show how powerful it is to nurture and curate these deeply personal networks, professional networks. So I'm not going to really be able to do justice to your book, Jennifer. So what I would love to kick off with is if you could tell us a little bit about it and tell us what you were noticing that inspired you to write *Strategy, Leadership and the Soul*.

Jennifer Sertl (04:35)

So when we first met, I think our conversation was really about communication as a competitive advantage. And I really want to go back to that. My journey was a typical HR journey. And I had been with a couple of companies with over 1,000 employees. And I was doing the HR thing. And in the process, I realised that I wasn't able to do the work I authentically wanted to do. And in 2000 after the Y2K thing or whatever, I had the benefit of having a gentleman named David White, who is a well-known corporate poet, come to Rochester and I was gifted a ticket. And the statement he said was, that really kind of rocked my world like a thunderbolt, was, many people think that you do, you have a conversation to get work done, but the conversation is the work. And in that, I really have been looking at how does language and conversation, how does it shift perspective? How does it shift how it is that we communicate and how is it that shifts the idea of even branding and leadership? And in the process, they ended up coming up with a leadership model that was based on the lighthouse, where if you're really clear on who you are and what you care about, the way in which you act in the world will allow you like a beacon to have people kind of find you. So the beacon of me ended up attracting Koby Huberman, who was my co-author, and we didn't set out to write a book. We set out, this is how long ago it was, that we were on Skype, not Zoom, and we were just having conversations and what we didn't want is to be covered by taking notes while we were in flow. And over the course of six months, we said, well, why don't we transcribe our conversations and see what we have?

Jennifer Sertl (06:25)

And literally the book wrote itself. Everything we talked about ended up in a bucket strategy, leadership, and then the soul. And the hard part about the time that we released it is that we didn't yet have the words decentralised and distributed, right? We learned that. It's interesting how technology teaches us language that allows us to better understand how we connect. It's a little bit of a paradox, but had I had the opportunity to understand that I think that the book would have been called *Distributed and Decentralised Leadership, Strategy, Leadership and the Soul*. And the other thing I want to say about it is that I think



we're closer to being able to use the word soul in business. At that time, I had wished many times that we had said the word passion. But the truth of the matter is that every cohesive group of people have an affinity. And the more they can actually care for and codify that affinity, the more they can actually grow authentically and actually get customers that are based on the way you serve actually helps their competitive advantage. And we could go way deep on that, but is that a good framework for today?

Cat Barnard (07:33)

Yeah, definitely. And I think what's really interesting about it is that, so forgive me, it was 2013 that the book was published first, was it?

Jen Sertl (07:43)

It was actually, yeah, 2010 it was first published.

Cat Barnard (07:45)

2010. So 14 years ago, and I don't think any of us would have anticipated the twists and turns that the world has taken since then. But I think that now, you know, the word soul does resonate more deeply because, unfortunately the world seems in many corners to be pretty soulless. And so I think there is a vibe that people are looking for a deeper level of connection from not only the people that they socialise with, sort of, you know, in their professional communities. So obviously you have your family and then you have your close social network then you might perhaps have your wider social network and your professional community, and then all of the businesses and brands that you interact with in the course of your daily life and work. And I think right across all of those things, COVID has changed us. And I always say that it created, it was the catalyst for kind of an existential awakening that perhaps caused us to introspect more deeply and ponder, the meaning of life and what actually really matters. And so I think now, we're still in the fallout, the post - COVID fallout, where a lot of what we think and feel is still not massively articulated. You know, it was reasonably clear that our political leaders wanted us to revert to extreme capitalism quite promptly and get the economy back on track. But there's a kind of nascent sense of things not being as they ought to be. And for me, I think that, you know, as I traverse the world, I sense that there is an unspoken need for more soulful nurturing of ourselves in life and at work. So I'm really attuned to the word soul. It really chimes for me.



Jen Sertl (09:51)

Yeah, and so for those listening, right now I'm working with Circle Optics, which is a camera system company, and we took time to codify our behavioural brand. So I would say that, you know, what will transcend the audiences is that a behavioural brand is the soul of the company. And this particular soul of Circle Optics is based on innovation, know-how, and synergy.

And we went through a process by which we interviewed all of the engineers and asked them the best projects that they had worked on and why. And we also talked about why would you want to be part of this particular camera company. And in the process, it ended up ending up with those three words, innovation, know-how, and synergy. And then there's a behavioural model underneath. Each has three descriptors in order for us to hire, in order for us to do peer reviews, and it's also informing our social media strategy. So if you think about we as humans have a DNA strand that's based on all these amino acids that a company can create a DNA strand simply by codifying what are the three themes or go to market strategies that you believe will allow you to have the most health. And then you can go forward. Some are based on premium strategy. Some are based on innovation. Some are based on on really interoperability. Right. Which is fine. But, how a person goes to market doesn't change. The product or service that they have will change, right? If Kodak, because it's kind of ironic, I'm actually speaking to you from Rochester, New York. Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch & Lomb were conglomerates and arguably one of the first global companies that created global infrastructure for business, for better or for worse, I must add. But Kodak's initial, George Eastman's initial premise is that he wanted people to be able to take photographs easier. And if he had stayed with the idea of an easier image, the most likely the company would have ended up with Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat. But unfortunately, people forget the original premise. And anyway, so that's kind of my word is that technical companies can codify DNA and help them understand the soul of the people working within them. Is that too much?

Jen Sproul (12:09)

No, not at all. It's not too much. And I think that Cat's alluded to it, but at IoIC, we have been sort of championing and championing human communication, human connection, human need. It's the pinnacle of everything that creates that structure or that environment for things to flourish, for the human to flourish, for the organisation to flourish. And I think like Cat, the word soul really resonates and I think like we said, soul is something that we're seeing more out there and I think somebody said to me a while ago as well is that they see communication as something that helps create hope and belief and I think that when you have an environment where more of that uncertainty is around you to come back to that centre that gives you a soul, that gives you a hope and a belief really gets to it and certainly



at IoIC we've been doing some research clearly within the UK, but really about leadership communication and how important that is and actually fundamentally how internal communication when done well generates greater leadership trust and it generates that better connection. And I think one of the things then we try to understand, well, okay, so we know communicating well is really important for leaders to connect, to build trust, to create relationships, to create connections.

And as we've alluded, that human side is coming out more and more so. But I think that where we are now in this sort of, you know, perhaps more continued uncertainty, drive back towards capitalism, getting the economy up and up and coming, is that then what does that feel like now? What, because that feels differently from before. And I know you talk a lot about authenticity and it's a word we talk about a lot, authentic leadership. It's that thing that brings us together, that thing that gives that hope, that gives that connection. So what I was going to ask is really for you what is authentic leadership in this modern time and then why do you think that is going to be so important in communication?

Jennifer Sertl (14:11)

First and foremost, I love that the fly on the wall actually wants to be a fly on the wall in this conversation, so that's kind of cool. Again, I blame Descartes, the idea that things are binary. The hardest part, I'm in a very capitalistic community and a capitalistic culture, and some might argue that the United States is a corporation versus a nation.

Jennifer Sertl (14:34)

It seems like people care more about function than essence right and as an existential philosopher I just want to bring essence into the conversation. The problem with all the conversations around AI is very similar to when you teach a manufacturing company to do lean manufacturing for the first time is the first feeling is that I'm obsolescent. If the system is proficient, what value do I offer? If AI is so effective, I may not feel that I have value. And so to me, the identity crisis that we're having is that we haven't valued our essence. And so function is being taken away and we're stuck with not knowing how we add value. The way I tackle it with people that I work with is I ask them, if in fact you were entrusted to some core values, could they be a shield? And, I happen to love Game of Thrones and Brienne of Tarth is always kind of my model, is that I ask a person, please name three themes that you've been entrusted to, right? For me, the three themes are resilience, responsiveness and reflection. And they become my filter. And then when I ask that question, many people look at me and like a deer in the headlights. I don't know what you mean. I'm not an existential philosopher. Make this concrete for me. And I say, okay, fine. I can. The number 18 is a divine number. How do I know that? Because there's 18 holes in a golf course, 18



shots in a whiskey bottle. And in many traditions, it actually means life. And then the moon, you know, I just look at all these cycles that happens in 18 months. So I use the number elite 18. I have a person tell me, who are 18 people that you would like to meet or have met or even if they're dead you have read their books and you say wouldn't it be cool to have a cocktail party with them. If I get a list of a person's elite 18 and then have them name one word or a phrase as to why they're on that list it becomes really easy and again the collective unconscious wants to be articulated.

Jen Sertl (16:38)

The collective unconscious wants us to recognise patterns, right? So the way in which I've honoured that quest for collective unconscious is ask a person, please give me your 18, your lead 18, and let's look at the pattern and it will tell you what you care about. Because we only revere people that have a quality in us that either is expressed or could be expressed that we care about, even if it's envy, even if it's rage.

My cause is to say, your function will change over time. Let's make sure you're skilled and are brave and learning, but who you are and what you care about usually stays the same from really around 12 years old forward. Now, everyone said, Jennifer create an Elite 18 app. Let's do this. And I'm like, I never do it in a group and I never invite you to share your lead 18 with other people because we gamify everything and this is a really soul work. This is such deep work. It illuminates you to you. And again, we are mirrors. The reason, regardless of your religious beliefs, the Madonna and the baby, you know, looking at Christ, that is so symbolic and touches us because we are not anyone unless we're seen.

Jen Sertl (17:57)

And what do companies want? Companies want to be seen. They don't know who they are. They want to do things for other people instead of saying, who are we as a group of people? Who are we as a culture? And then to the individual, who am I? What am I entrusted to? So the leaders that are clear on who they are and what they're entrusted to are powerful and not forceful. You know, that wonderful work from David Hawkins, Power versus Force. There's a big difference. Power.

Power is quantum. We're in quantum. We understand quantum. It is energy. We are all frequencies. And this particular practice is one of many that allows us to claim the vibration that we admire in ourselves and hopefully others.



Jen Sproul (18:43)

Jennifer, I love that. I'm hearing so much more conversational things that I'm talking about where we used to, the dialogue has always been about the organisation, but there's much been a shift about recognising who we are. And I like that you to you and where that connection, I think we're working on that harder to make those decisions and the direction that we're going in. And I think that just to go back to your first point as well about AI and what that means, and what we're finding as well is that, if you don't have trust or that doesn't exist or there isn't that connection, AI is not going to help create that soul, that connection, that passion and that's something that binds us and we need to feel belief in where we're going and I love the idea of that and I'm trying to think now of who my elite 18 are. I'm not going to say it because those are the rules. I'm very aware. But I think that as a society there's a working population. We are much more introspective of ourselves, of understanding ourselves better. And it's interesting to see how perhaps the leadership community are doing that too, to create that soul, that connection, that something. And as you say, communication is an energy, it's a flow, it's a vibration, it's felt, isn't it? So I find that really fascinating, thank you. And Dom is chomping probably at the bit to ask some kind of leadership communication question.

Dom (20:03)

I am. I'm fascinated, Jennifer, and love what you've been saying. But here's a thought about this. I'd welcome your help with something. And it may be something some of our listeners may be thinking as well. So I do a lot of work with leadership teams. And I'm sure like you, I need to go into a group of leaders who are looking at me quite cynically. And for some of them, not all, but for some of them, the very word communication itself is dangerously emotional.

So I suspect if I started to talk with someone about claiming your vibrations and some of the things about existentialism and about essence and function, I wouldn't get very far, even though I know it's what they need to do and I know it's important. So it'd be useful, really helpful to get your take, Jennifer, on how you start to have those conversations with leaders whose heads are full of production figures and engineering techniques and profit and loss statements. So firstly, how do you start to have that conversation? How do you get them interested in what are wonderful things, but may not be immediately top of their list of priorities. And I guess that also then leads probably to what does exceptional leadership communication look like? So how do we have that conversation about exceptional leadership communication? Sorry, lots of questions there. Let's start with how you have the conversation.



Jen Sertl (21:11)

Thank you for including me in this conversation. And I think that all I'm offering are perspectives. And I think that we're still all trying to figure it out. When I facilitate this group of people, I have them first start by telling me the best person they've ever worked for and why. I always use the words that are named in a group because I just want to use references that are exposed in the moment. And often times what has happened most recently in the team, there's a recent company that's been acquired actually by a British company and they were a mom and pop and now have to be an acquisition company. And there's a lot of pressure for us to change our business model. And there's a lot of fear. And this team is an engineering team and many would freak out if I mentioned existentialism. They think that's probably I don't want to, it's not relevant. Would be the kindest way I could say it. So we talk about how I noticed someone in the room mentioned engagement. What do you mean by engagement? Engagement is a really safe engineering word that then it turned into there was feedback, there was a connection. There was ownership, right? And so I think as facilitators, I think, you know, it used to be we would use the leadership practices inventory, we would use the coaching, like there's models and models and models. And I think where we as facilitators have to be braver is just say, the room will inform you. Your job is to hear and codify what's in the room and allow them to see the connections. It's almost, and I know you've probably heard this analogy before, but we in Rochester just had a solar eclipse. So we were on the pathway to totality. So I'm sure my head right now is feeling very much like that, is that the bravery of us as consultants is really to trust. And our job is to actually see all the stars in the room and then make the constellation, was the point I was going to say. Does this answer your question?

Dom (23:10)

It does because I think what you've highlighted is, and forgive me, these are my words, but it's about helping demystify it, I think, because we can provide a framework. We know what works, but we have to make sure that it's understood in the language of a manager or a leader who's got other things on their minds. And I think what I took from that, we need to help managers and leaders define what they mean by something so they understand what it means and how it benefits them. And what I particularly love is the use of examples. So you've said about the 18 people that you think you'd most like to get together because that's real. That reflects people's real experience. And I sometimes think when we stand up in front of a group of leaders and talk about communication, they can nod us to death because they know politically it's the right thing to talk about. But actually, when you start to break it down and say, we've all experienced this stuff. We've all been led by leaders who have been good communicators and probably those that aren't. We've all had experiences of good communication ourselves and not.





I think the more we can lead on that, the more we can get them to think about that and relate it, the better. And I think having a framework that can do that is really helpful. So yes, sorry, that's a very long way of saying, yes, I think you did answer the question, Jennifer.

Jen Sertl (24:17)

You know, the thing I'd like to offer is that many of the times I've been brought in as a consultant, the truth is that I'm brought in to solve a problem where the leaders aren't really modelling the way, if you know what I mean. And I think the hardest part is that you feel a bit of a fraud coming in and talking about a leadership model where everyone knows the leadership that's being modelled is not right. So when you do this approach, you really get a sense of the language that's allowed in that particular culture.

And you're also saying that it's iterative and we're all practicing. And the idea, and Pele, I love Pele has this amazing quote in his base, everything is practice, right? Is that we can begin to have the conversation around, in the sphere of engagement or whichever, you know, what are you practicing? And I don't know about your culture, but our culture is that we're afraid to fail in public.

And how are we to learn if we're entering a world that has never been with tools that are emerging? We need to be brave, but we're afraid to be clumsy. I mean, I haven't figured this one out. There's a real question for you all. How do we help people be safe practising and being clumsy in public? How do we save face for one another? And how do we foster respect in the midst you know, we're all little foals trying to learn how to walk.

Dom (25:40)

Yes, and I think it's a very difficult one to answer. When I've seen progress towards that is when leaders have been able to share their own experiences. And when they've been able to say, to use your analogy, I've stumbled a few times when I first started to walk and here's what I've learned. And then turning it around and start saying, here are the things that helped me find my feet. And here are the things other people did around me to help me to progress as well. So I think that's my experience. It'd be interesting to take, get your experience of that.



Jen Sertl (26:08)

Well first of all, I'm kind of stuck on the fact of what a beautiful book, *Finding Your Feet*, with a little picture of a foal and the leadership. And I would say, that's your words, those are your language, that's your book to write. You know what I love about it too, is there's innocence. Like, we have lost on so many levels, believe me, that's a different programme. We're innocent, right?

Jen Sertl (26:30)

We don't expect a fault to be a stallion. So anyway, there's something there that's really beautiful. And this is actually like in the world, like I hear something and then I'm like, wow, that'd be cool. That'd be cool. The threshold of the leaders' courage and vulnerability is the threshold of the company. And the reason this is so important is our ability to listen. At one point, we would have customer surveys and it'd be asynchronous. But we're designing products for customers that it's live, it's dialogue, it's based, they can see everything we're doing on social. So there's this real emergence of listening. And I was taught by Mickey Connolly, who had written a book called *Communication Catalyst*. And the thing that I heard from him was that the only way you know you've listened, Jennifer, is that you've learned something. The only true test of listening is learning, right? So the idea for leaders to listen and really understand that means they're learning and they don't have all the answers and that they're comfortable not knowing, but they're comfortable framing. Like the only thing I can say that this is so raw, this conversation, because I'm thinking the beauty of AI is the quality of our query. The beauty of leadership is the quality of the query and the innocence of the query, right? And the authenticity of the query. So it helps us all around.

Dom (27:55)

So Jennifer, I'm going to pass on to Cat in a second, but if I just pull a few things out of what you've just said, it sounds like some of the keys to exceptional leadership communication are not what we might expect. So it's less about being able to articulate brilliantly. It is more about, I think, curiosity. You said about sharing your own experiences, creating an environment where other people can do that, which means having a conversation. It goes back to what we've said earlier, I think.

The core of good leadership communication is conversation. It's building that community and asking questions and being curious. I think that's fantastic.



Jen Sertl (28:27)

Yeah, and also I want to tie what you just said into what Jen had said is the idea of trust, right? We have forgotten to ask people to trust themselves. I trust myself, therefore I can ask these questions, right? So I just want to make sure that's included.

Cat Barnard (28:42)

I'm not sure where to begin. Gosh, that's got me thinking and lots of little fireworks going off. One of the things that I think is really interesting is that we have just come through a 20 or 30 year cycle where most people's professional education has skewed towards an MBA type of qualification. And maybe the renegade, maybe the rebel in me, I just think, gosh, that's another form of institutionalisation. The leadership frameworks are so codified that they remove the requirement for me to trust myself and my intuition. If I just follow the framework that I was taught in this very expensive executive education, then these things will happen. And so when I'm thinking about new leadership, the kind of leadership that we need to see us through this next phase of human evolution and all its associated uncertainties, I do see social leadership and the humility and ability to ask great questions and listen to learn, as you put it, as being the absolute linchpin. But unfortunately, I feel like we're at the outer breaches of extreme capitalism, where the education system has fed this notion that if only you get this executive qualification, then you will be jettisoned, you know, catapulted into the higher echelons of leadership where all your dreams will come true. So there's this kind of juxtaposition for me between leadership, authenticity and humility and the power, maybe the force and the status and the control and the expectation, I paid my dues, I did this qualification and now I am here and it's my job to have the answers. And if I don't have the answers, that somehow undermines my credibility to be here. I'm really intrigued by the reality that too few boards, too few executive teams are opening up the the challenges of the day to the floor to get that, to garner that collective intelligence and what are the psychological inhibitors? I can't say, I mean, it's just an observation that I have. I wonder whether executive education has stymied our belief in gut hunch. Like we just live in such a data -driven world that it's almost like we're discouraged from ever thinking that your gut hunch or your heartfelt belief is a viable reason for making a step forward. And the idea of Dom's little foal there has got me thinking as well. It's okay because none of us know. And actually the faster we can foster community with one another the more progress we'll make. I know I'm babbling, but I just think this whole thing is like, we're in uncharted territory. Where has it come from that leaders think that they can control the uncontrollable?



Jennifer Sertl (32:18)

I do agree that the Fortune 5000, Fortune 10,000, and the current MBA model, it will not sustain the four generations in the workplace today. My son is 17, and he has learned everything he wants to learn. There's so many free programmes on education that it's a pull versus push environment.

There's also so many startups and so many like unfortunately they say it's a small business 500 employees are fewer all the jobs that are being created are created for companies that have 30 to 60 employees so I think the world of work is really going through that there are for those of you that need a hierarchy there's a place for you and it will always be there for those of you that want a more distributed and decentralised strategy you can be on Fast Company's list of best places to work. We have access to so much education. We have access to so much community. You do not need an MBA to be successful in business. You need a computer, a connection, and probably LinkedIn is probably more valuable than your MBA. So I have a belief that it won't go away. And for those of you that are afraid it will go away and won't go away, Don't worry. But we have so many more opportunities to find the environment that will allow us to thrive. And it's on us. The reciprocal relationship is that I have clarity on who I am and the gift that I bring an environment and then the environment's got to provide for me a place to give that gift or distribute it. You know, whatever it is that you need. It is not a paternal work environment that we have anymore. It's really a reciprocal value environment. And some people do need a hierarchy and perform really well in a hierarchy. So it's okay.

Cat Barnard (34:04)

So it's a really interesting conversation that we're having, because I feel like we're talking about leadership communication in a way that goes way beyond tools, tactics and techniques to a more kind of authentic embodied sense and style of leadership and the kind of wraparound communication. What can internal communicators do to help both their leaders and their organisations become more authentic because, my sense is, and please forgive me if I'm misunderstanding, but it's almost like we're shifting away from the life hacks and the 10 ways to, and the kind of short lists of, you know, the tactics and the techniques towards being true to ourselves and finding ourselves. And that's a different conversation, particularly for internal communicators that genuinely want to serve their leaders. It's kind of going into an uncharted territory by itself. What advice could you give?



Jennifer Sertl (35:10)

You know, one it's a process and so it's super hard. Believe it or not, the answer might surprise you is that I would want internal communicators to really be clear on what is our go-to-market strategy? Is it based on premium? Is it based on interoperability? Is it based on synergy? Is it based on cost? Our ability to communicate is really understanding the structure of the business model.

And when you're clearing the structure of the business model, it allows you language that will actually help you codify from the inside out those things. And so, and I wished I'd said this, but Clay Shirky is a professor that's done a lot on the crowd and crowdsourcing and that sort of thing. He has this wonderful, wonderful quote that says, the issue is not information overload, it's filter failure. So your role in internal communication is to really be clear of the strategic filter of the company vision. And then you can reverse engineer, how does each employee participate in that? And what are our five prime customers? It's not that you know who they are. Finding out who they are helps you understand what is their business model. So that if you can understand the business model of your company as well as the five prime customers business model, that will allow you the language to codify what's valued in this particular ecosystem.

Cat Barnard (36:36)

Wow. And that for me just ties in again with some of the findings of the 2024 IC Index, which is that right across the board, and I think this was true last year as well, Jen, Dom correct me if I'm wrong, but we saw this feedback that said, you know, employees support their organisation's business strategy even when they don't necessarily understand what it is. And so for me, as I'm listening to this, I'm like, this is the work, isn't it? How do I as an internal communicator make sure that I understand our go-to-market strategy? I love what you said about take five customers and understand their market strategy, because immediately my mind goes to, well, that's systems thinking and systems of systems.

If you can, even however embryonically, if you can articulate those things, the story that you're telling to your internal audience immediately changes, because not only are you telling a story that is grounded in market reality, but you're also able to invite each and every internal, each internal stakeholder to think about how they add value. And this is another thing that we're noticing at the moment is that people get recruited into firms against a written scope of work, a statement of work, but often they arrive, the landscape changes, the scope of work changes, but the job scope of work, the documented scope of work doesn't get updated fast enough.



so that when change happens, people literally don't know how to deliver value because they don't know, they've not been told or they've not been able to have a shared conversation where they can agree what the new deliverables are. So this piece around understanding market context as an internal communicator, and again, Jen, Dom, I would invite your input. But that feels to me like a massive step forward away from content and channels.

Jen Sproul (39:03)

Yes, I think it does and I think for me as well I think that picking up as well and all the amazing things that Jennifer just said and it's kind of that finding our language, finding our rhythm, understanding our motivations, understanding our psychology, understanding our connection points, understanding what that what everything means as an emotion and I think that one of the tools that we're using more and more so but I think one of the ways that picking up on what Jennifer said that we could do more of is to humanise our audience rather than put them in some kind of functional system. So a great way can be using personas. Like Jennifer just said, take the go -to thing, take five people, give them a personality, give them an emotion, give them a picture. Who are they? What matters to them? What are they working on? What are their struggles? How are they motivated? And you start to then start to make all those connections, I think, in terms of, I've understood the language of the business, now I'm gonna put that into the language of the human to then put that into a point that makes a connection. And our research does show that we can create belief and understanding can be created separately. They don't actually have to go hand in hand, which is kind of an odd thing. You think you'd have to understand something to believe it. But what we're feeling is, and I think that comes down to authentic leadership, and what you're doing is you can, I believe you, are you giving me the hope I can feel that I'm with you? Don't quite understand me yet and what's going in around that.

But I think there's a power dynamic in making sure we need understanding and how that feels personally. But I think that how belief and understanding can be rated differently by one person just shows that there perhaps isn't that cut through in terms of that language and that access point. But there is, I kind of get the person and the human that I'm the authentic person that I'm or the brand or the story that I'm going after. So I think that is there. I just wanted to go back a couple of steps as well when you were talking about education and everything else and I think one of the things I want to say as well and we know this with internal communicators and the members that we service. One of our own personal challenges, particularly leadership communication, is our own confidence to articulate ourselves in those environments. It feels because there is tradition of hierarchy and power and I don't want to get it wrong and I'm fearful and it isn't a psychologically safe environment.



Jen Sproul (41:24)

So what education and community, professional community can give you tools and guides to empower you and build that. I think confidence and bravery for me personally help feed each other. Then you need the environment for that to be something that can thrive. And I think we should be encouraging a lot more trial and error and learning mindsets because we're never going to move forward. But we need also with that bravery and confidence in ourselves as communicators that we bring is powerful but that's my rant for the day. Dom, I don't know about your rant.

Dom (41:55)

Very good rant. No, I think what I'll do is rather than have a rant is let's bring this into land because we've covered a huge amount of stuff. I mean, just looking back at what we've talked about, Jennifer, thank you. You've talked about the difference between power and force, which is a phrase I've heard before, but never really thought about it as much as I should have done around leadership communication. I think it's a really good framing of how leaders should be pitching their communication. You remind us about the importance of listening to learn, which again is something I think leaders need reminding about because they see communication as telling people what to do day in, day out because they've got 101 things on their list. And I think reminding them about learn to listen is very important. The whole thing around learning language is crucial, I think. Being able to, well, firstly, when we're as communicators talking with leaders, being able to speak the right language, but also getting the language right for the organisation. And I think that the idea about being your own personal lighthouse, which is about being sure about who you are, which means you emanate, it's not the right word, yeah, emanate the right rays of light which attracts people that you can work with effectively or attract you to an environment. I've also learned there are 18 shots in a bottle of whiskey, which I never knew. So that's also incredibly helpful. So taking all that together, Jennifer, for internal communicators listening to us, what's the one thing that you would like them to take away from the conversation we've had, please?

Jen Sertl (43:12)

I think it's so beautiful to feel heard and you've done a remarkable way of helping me feel heard. And you can even hear in my voice how meaningful that is. So thank you for that. And. You know, like I talked about in AI that like their fear is that that we don't have a



function. I just want every internal communicator hearing this programme to hear your essential.

You are a bridge between the vision and the execution of a successful enterprise. And that you're listening and making connections and building those mind maps and using systems thinking and helping. You might even be more strategic than the people you're serving. But I just want to leave with how essential you are. And that trust yourself, even if you can't articulate it in a group, have a journal where you're writing what you know to be true. You need to reinforce to yourself that you have it because your sense making gift relies on being heard as well. And so there's a difference between capturing what you know and then knowing the right timing. Those are separate. But I just want you to know how essential you are and how you know more than you give yourself credit and you need a place to capture that knowing and just never forget those things.

Cat Barnard (44:38)

Wow. And I think, obviously I know there will be listeners who weren't able to join us at the 2024 IoIC Festival, but what you've just so serendipitously articulated, Jennifer, is a strand that came out in all of the keynotes that we listened to, which is that we have to know ourselves, we have to know what we stand for, the values that are most cherished to us personally, and what we believe we are here to do on this planet for this fleeting time, what we're here to do, what our purpose is, but also, so at a cellular level, why am I here, kind of feeding those, perhaps those COVID existential conversations, but also what is the role of internal communication? And I love the fact that you have just shared with listeners that internal communication is a bridge between the vision and the execution of the organisational strategy. I mean, this is a leap forward that we've talked about extensively within the podcast and within the meetings that we have at IoIC HQ. And it's, I've long thought it, communication is the glue. It's the glue and what a lovely, lovely, lovely ending. And I'm so glad that you came and joined us. Thank you so, so much.

Jen Sertl (46:06)

It's been a lovely morning. Thank you so much.