

World Changers Podcast

Season 3, Episode 10

All fired up

Elle Bradley-Cox – 00:12

Welcome to World Changers, a podcast exploring the trends making an enduring mark on our world of work, and how business leaders, HR teams and internal communicators can stay one step ahead.

Extreme weather events around the globe this year have hammered home the real impacts of climate change. I mean, some people have only just woken up to what the rest of us have been banging on about for decades. Companies that don't address sustainability and bring their employees along on the journey invite risk.

It's a privilege to be environmentally conscious, and broadly speaking, climate engagement tends to increase with education and income, but the emergency we're facing needs more people at the table. Just as diversity supercharges business performance, addressing our impact on the planet demands new ideas, smarter decision-making and the ability to solve problems quickly. How can we create an equal playing field so we can tackle this crisis together?

In this episode, I sit down with consultant and sustainability champion Harry Grout to talk about a fairer climate transition, and how small behavioural shifts can create big positive change. But first, we had a few questions for our SA colleagues.

Every day we're bombarded by messages – from countries, companies and communities – of grand green commitments and sky-high sustainability strategies. But when we're faced with so much noise, it can be hard for anything to cut through. So we asked the team what was the last sustainability comms campaign that has stuck in your head?

Uxue Iñurritegi – 01:38

Hi, my name is Uxue and I'm the newest addition to the project management team here at scarlettabbott. Last week, I really liked the UKTV's announcement, that they will use £1 million worth of its own airtime across all its channels to encourage viewers to make more sustainable lifestyle choices.

I think it's a very effective comms campaign, as it shows UKTV's commitment to sustainability. And I hope it will bring meaningful conversations with the help of some myth-busting which will ideally then impact leadership decisions across all the businesses as well.

Kate Went – 02:09

Hi, I'm Kate Went, marketing manager at scarlettabbott. Thinking about sustainability campaigns that have stuck in my head – apart from Apple's Mother Nature campaign, which I love – I keep coming back to a company called Rapanui. And it's not because of their advertising. It's just because of the way they are as a company.

So they are a clothing company, they are based in the UK, they are on a mission to kind of go against the grain of fast fashion and to be circular in design. So everything they produce is made to order to stop waste and as it sort of becomes no longer needed as clothing does eventually they encourage you to send it back, where it becomes reprocessed and respond into new organic yarn that's then used for more clothing going forward. So everything is kind of recycled and brought back.

The factories that they use are solar-powered. They are very much about kind of giving back into the environment, planting new trees, reducing carbon footprints, looking at everything they can do across their supply chain to make it more sustainable. And I just really like their whole ethos.

I think that what they're on a mission to do is a great example of what other companies should be doing. And I just love how they tell their story and how they've kind of evolved their journey over the years. Plus they make a great product and a fairly priced product. And I think that they are really sort of setting a trend that other companies could learn from.

Olivia Clancy – 03:49

Hi, my name's Olivia and I'm a post-production assistant at scarlettabbott. The last sustainability campaign that made a lasting impression on me was the 'What's next?' Patagonia advert. With sustainability being a popular topic of conversation for many companies, and rightly so, it's always nice to see what a well-established company like Patagonia, who has a clear dedication to sustainability, decides to put there.

They were among the first to use recycled materials in their products, supporting grassroots environmental organisations and advocating for corporate responsibility. Their self-imposed Earth tax of 1% for the planet actively supports environmental non-profits. The documentary-style advertising showcasing real people and real issues works so well. It's not just commercial, it's a story. It effectively communicates the urgency of environmental challenges while instilling a sense of hope and potential for change.

It's not just about showing off their products. It's about presenting their values and issues that they care about. They're not just telling you what they stand for. They're showing you and that's incredibly impactful. Purpose over profit and collaboration over competition, it's like they're saying, "This is who we are, and this is what we believe in." The campaign doesn't solely focus on highlighting the gravity of environmental challenges it emphasises the vast possibilities for positive change. A business that walks the talk and talks about it more to influence others.

Charlie Feasby – 05:07

Hi, I'm Charlie Feasby and I'm an editorial assistant.

What catches attention? What makes headlines? While there are many quiet and confident sustainability comms campaigns from companies tackling food waste, public transport and the move to all-electric vehicles, they're often drowned out on my newsfeed by one radical political movement – Just Stop Oil.

Whenever they make an appearance, whether it be blocking motorways, climbing bridges or painting hotel doors at energy forms with their signature shade of orange, it's breaking news. Only a couple of weeks ago, Greta Thunberg was on our front pages again after being arrested at just such a protest.

This civil resistance, as they described it, puts me in two minds. Blocking a motorway for example impacts the people just trying to make their way to work or visit family and friends. It's protesting at the expense of other ordinary people. But no matter your opinion on their actions, it does get people talking about the climate crisis. Would less radical actions really make headlines?

Apple's new Mother Nature sustainability video was a big hit, but it wasn't front-page news. I wonder though, do these stunts turn people off making the necessary changes to our daily lives that tackling the climate crisis needs? Is bad press good for our sustainability goals? They say all press is good press, but not when it turns those people who should be with you against you.

It's a big question that I don't have the answer to. But in the meantime, it seems Just Stop Oil will continue to make headlines and the less radical campaigns featuring fun celebrity cameos will be added to the recycling bin of history.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 06:53

Consultant Harry Grout is a fully accredited carbon-literate human. What does that mean? We'll have to ask him. But I do know he is super passionate about the people part of the sustainability equation. So let's get into it. Harry, welcome to World Changers.

Harry Grout – 07:07

Thank you, hello!

Elle Bradley-Cox – 07:08

Let's start with carbon literacy, then. Just tell me what that actually means and why you are it.

Harry Grout – 07:14

Carbon literacy is an education initiative set up by the carbon literacy project or organisation and it's all about levelling up anybody, from professionals to individuals, their understanding of what climate change is and what we need to do to combat it. And it's focusing on carbon, but it encapsulates all the things in terms of like greenhouse gases as well. So for mine, it was a two-day course to talk about the science-based things that make up what's affecting our climate. And then from then it's then specified into your particular sectors. So the aim from that from when you become carbon literate, is that you commit to making a change in your sector, in your industry in your community, and whether from an individual personal level to as part of a group. And that's what carbon literacy is.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 08:05

Thank you so much. I guess that's one of the ways you're trying to, I suppose, equal and level the playing field around carbon, which is, I know, what we wrote this World Changers about. Like, what an equal and fair playing field means. I know, it's something you're really passionate about. I suppose why is that so important? Why do we need that levelling up?

Harry Grout – 08:25

It's incredibly important. Because if you think from where compensation happened. Like if we go back all the way to pre COP26, or back in 2019/2020, sustainability, climate change was being talk about by scientists. It's all about the chemicals and all the jargon around it. And it was just very much a part of that small sector of people, you know, who were educated enough to talk about it. But what was happening then is it wasn't spreading out into the problems we're having today. You know, we're seeing all these great storms and storms, you know, storm Babet that's happening.

So why it's important that we level up to everybody. And we've seen it from when COP26 happened is that is not going to be solved by scientists. It's not going to be solved by governments. It's going to be solved by people. It's going to be solved by communities. People are passionate about where they live and the things that they are literally around them. They're the ones who are going to find the solutions. And that's what levelling up, in my view in terms of when we talk about internal communications, it's like we need to level up everybody to a position where they are empowered, empowered with the knowledge and the understanding and the drive to actually create change in their own little local world.

Because there's small actions that everybody does to be a bit more sustainable here, to reduce carbon here, to support communities over there. All those little things will add up to one big change. But you can't get there until everybody needs to level up to that understanding of what they can do for themselves personally and as a team.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 09:51

Ah and so is that where roadmaps come in?

Harry Grout – 09:55

Yes, it is. Roadmaps are really important because they set the tone, they set the direction. But they also ... They have a role in to making the complex, simple. Sustainability is huge, you know, it's environment is people that society is animals its plant is things you can't even see. And it's also the things like in terms of like, you know, the gender pay gap and diversity and inclusion is like is essentially, life, is what sustainability is.

And how do you start to communicate that to your staff? Because even from a business leader you must be like, I don't know, where would you start? So what roadmaps do is they go right, it helps you focus on your more immediate things that you can have an impact on. And then you can use those roadmaps to translate that to your people to your employees. Where they fall short is they're not, sometimes they can be not very action orientated. They're very much like, we're going to be carbon neutral by 2030. Brilliant, what are the milestones we're going to do to get there?

Elle Bradley-Cox – 10:57

I like that and I like your phrasing, like sustainability is life, because I think that just means it's something that everybody can get their head around. But you're right, the topics underneath it are pretty broad as it is. And there's loads and loads of nuance, like people spend their life, their career studying something as complicated as diversity and inclusion – how to get it right. And they learn and learn and learn. And I guess, how do you make sure that you've set definable and realistic goals in your roadmap to make sure that actually we hold people to account?

Harry Grout – 11:27

It sounds daft, but it's like co-create, that's what it comes down to is, as leaders of a business, you set the direction and the strategy. But if you actually want to make it actionable, and can actually be achieved, you need to go to the front line. All the way and everybody from the top to the bottom, they need to be involved in that co-creation, because they're the ones who can see actually, is something actually possible? And actually, you can push them to go, Well, why can't it be possible?

So that's why what's really key to help you can make it feel like it's actually like can this actually be done. Bring people along. I'm quite a big believer in everyone is a solutionist. Because that's what we need at this in terms of sustainability at the moment. There's been a lot of talk. And arguably, if you're a business, you can go well, is a roadmap right for me? Do we need to have a sustainability roadmap? People fall into which because everyone's done it. Everyone needs to put a map together. But is it a map? Actually, is it just not more definable solutions that we need to achieve?

Like? What are these questions that we need to solve? Rather than saying we're going to be carbon neutral by 2030, is it more like how are we going to be carbon neutral by 2030? And then you can bring people along that journey and co-create the solutions and just try and if it works, and spread out further, if it doesn't try, why not take those lessons and maybe try again?

Elle Bradley-Cox – 12:43

Well I promise, I promise that businesses have these people in their organisations as well. Like I, I worked with a massive professional services clients and I'm often kind of nosing around as a bit of paternalist in their business, trying to find the people. And I have been so impressed at the number of people who have been interested in sustainability as a topic.

When they, I suppose been impressive about it, the leaders of that business have gone, "Oh, they've got a real nice and a passion for this and actually, it might help us work with our clients better, fulfil our purpose and do something different." So they've seconded various people. So they might have seconded them to a task force in the government. Or they might have seconded them to like a large festival or something like that, that pulls focus and attention on this topic – brings and convenes the right people in the room.

I guess to all businesses, don't be surprised that there are many people in your organisation are willing to do it if you give him a chance. And if you give them almost like that permission, set out the

goals for them as well, what are they going to achieve on their secondment? What are they going to do as part of their role? Bit like you, Harry, you know, you're our sustainability champion, right?

Harry Grout – 13:47

Yeah, do you know it's absolutely right. It's all about setting that clear contract up front. You know, it's like we might have as leaders, we've set where we want to go. But there's a get-give here like, we this is where we want to go, we want you to come with us once you need for us to help you do that, and setting up that contract.

And you're right, it is that permission, because some people might have great ideas. And maybe there's on the front line, like what is in place to, for someone who's got an idea to bring that to the table, you know, how do you do that in a safe way that people just go, well, I've got a great idea, but identified to be my manager about it. Am I going out of place to do this? How do you create that safe space? And that's what the role I think with internal comms, you can help do that.

Historically, internal comms support sustainability. When the role of internal communicators shouldn't just be that fun or to push stuff out. It should be there to collaborate with them to share best practice to challenge them, then to challenge others because that's where that role is really, really key. And that's where leaders of the business just see the value in internal comms because sustainability will drive a higher commerciality.

We see it in loads of other businesses and other industries, but internal comms as a particular role to help achieve that in the future as well. If you leave it just as sustainability along you won't get there. There needs to be a, as you say, like a task force even internally, like, how are we going to get there in terms of sustainability to get the right people in the right room to help drive that change?

Elle Bradley-Cox – 15:12

And of course, that's the that's the enthusiasts and kind of people who are passionate about this, but it must have a leader sponsor, it must.

Harry Grout – 15:20

Yes, I think it does. I would counter that and say it needs multiple leaders. I think if you just say it's just one person like saying, oh, this one person is responsible for achieving sustainability in this business. Like no, like, it's not it's everybody's responsibility. If that one person is responsible for all of it, I don't think it's right.

I think, yes, you need the high level support. And that's the CEO, it's the person right at the top, because they're the ones who are ultimately accountable for everything in that business to then share that accountability for all sustainability to one sponsor, I don't feel it's right. I don't think it's fair if you're talking about like a fair future. So actually, I think it needs to be spread out across multiple senior leaders. And is it ... or people influenced to help drive the change or where that impact is.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 16:06

Like it. Okay, how can we motivate our businesses? What can they do from today or tomorrow, maybe, to kind of push people into action, lead the way make some changes?

Harry Grout – 16:15

I think, for me, it's all about making it local. There was a great podcast on the BBC, quite a few years ago. They talked about sort of the communication challenge with sustainability and climate change, specifically. It was all about – and even some of the films of that time so got 'The Day After Tomorrow – but like the polar ice caps. And it was about polar bears, and you know, it's all things very, very psychologically very far away. And what that meant is because these things were literally far away, the problem was far away in the future.

Like, I'm never going to see a polar bear in the wild. I'm never going to see a polar icecap. So for me, that is actually quite a long distance away to my energy and investment into trying to solve it, I don't need to do it just yet. I can do it ages away.

What we need to do as businesses is stop focusing on a global challenge, it's many, many local challenges. Storm Babet hit the UK, but it didn't hit everywhere in the UK. It's about what's on your doorstep, what's happening to your neighbours, and go, how can we make change?

Take Currys, for example, part of their initiative to tackle, well, to be more sustainable and to tackle climate change is, yes, they're looking at doing lots of recycling of products. You know, you can take any, any kind of technology to a store and get a five-pound voucher, and they will recycle that responsibly. That's a great part of it, but they're also trying to solve the digital poverty in the UK. So there are people out there who can't afford a mobile phone, because they live in poverty. So they are deprived of access to the world.

And yes currently UK-wide but they're like this is one part that we can have an impact. They're helping to raise funds, to do more in communities to give people better access to take them out of that. They can't take them out of poverty, but they might be to help them out of digital poverty. And that's one way that they are trying to make a positive impact to society.

And that will have a knock-on effect on sustainability as well. So start to look at what you can do locally and challenge people to live like right, your remote work and you work from home. So from what can you do locally? Probably not a lot from a corporate level or from like an office level. But what's happening in your in your own world? And how can the business support you do that? Is it making sure that you've got a green energy tariff at home if you're working from home for your energy use? Or is it giving you more volunteering days to help out on a local charity close to your home because that's contributing to better sustainability.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 18:31

I love that. And I like how hyper-relevant you can make it for people because, as we know, relevance is everything. And you can tie that back into your brand, your supply chain, what works for you, whether you're a service provider, you know. You can just make it so relevant for your people, which I think like you say it's the key. Right?

Harry Grout – 18:49

Absolutely.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 18:50

Good stuff. Harry, thanks so much for joining me today – really illuminating. Take care of yourself.

Harry Grout – 18:54

Thanks very much, Elle. Thanks for having me along.

Elle Bradley-Cox – 19:00

If you want to explore this topic a little more do join us later this month for our webinar, where you can put your questions to our expert panel. We'll share the details in the show notes and on our social channels. Want to continue the conversation in the meantime? Do come and chat to us over on X, formally Twitter, @scarlettabbott, or drop us an email at hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk.

This episode marks the end of our World Changers 2023 podcast series. Thank you so much for listening over the past few months, and we look forward to seeing you again next year as we dive into World Changers 2024. Exciting!

World Changers is a podcast by employee engagement consultancy scarlettabbott, hosted by Elle Bradley-Cox. Find out more at [scarlettabbott.co.uk](https://www.scarlettabbott.co.uk).