

**World Changers podcast. Episode 5**  
**TikTok killed the tick box**

**Elle Bradley-Cox 00:08**

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. In the past year, video has become the most influential global communication medium, thanks in no small part to the meteoric rise of TikTok. Leaders and brands that relied on carefully copywritten statements and artfully curated PR stunts are now being challenged to show more of an authentic voice on camera to prove they really practice what they preach. So, what does this mean for communication teams? My colleague Russ Norton chose this theme as his World Changer for our 2022 report. Later in this episode, we chat with Max Mukhin, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion business partner Deliveroo. But, before that, Russ and I got together with our colleague, senior consultant William Carnegie to explore how TikTok killed the tick box. Russ, Will, welcome to World Changers - thank you for joining me. Now, I hate to pigeonhole, but Russ, you are an avid TikTok fan. Please tell us all why.

**Russ Norton 01:17**

Well, before I get into that, just in case there is anyone who has not been outside for the last few years. TikTok is a social media platform owned by Chinese mega Corp ByteDance. It has got over a billion users now. It is the fastest growing social media platform out there. It is rapidly monetizing itself. And it comprises of shortform video and it's very, very simple. It started off with one minute videos, expanded to three minute videos recently, and is trialing even longer videos and quickly chomping away at YouTube's heels. I love it because it's short, and I've got the attention span of a newborn puppy. It's very satisfying, there's lots and lots of endorphins released with every single thumb scroll. I like the fact that you get many and varied little glimpses into other people's lives. It's someone talking directly to you most of the time rather than something very scripted or prepared or someone filming someone else. And finally, it's got an incredibly clever algorithm. So, by the things that you look at, the things that you look at more than once, the things that you like, the things that you comment on, it will serve more of those. So, if you spend the time and you invest in following the right people and topics that you are genuinely interested in, it will serve up more and more of that. So, it's very, very self satisfying.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 02:44**

I do want to pick up on your point about endorphins because I think I'm a TikTok sceptic. I don't use the platform because I personally - and this may be completely false - feel like it's a place for hot takes and outrage. I'm interested that you're finding joy on there - tell me more about that.

**Russ Norton 03:02**

I think it does offer that platform, but so does Facebook, so does Instagram, so does Twitter. Those also give people a voice and they will use it to share their voice. But I think we as users of social media, as citizens of the digital age, are responsible for managing our bubbles, our spheres of influence. That comes down to blocking the voices that you disagree with, that comes down to following people that you do agree with. But it's also about challenging yourself to follow topics that do make you feel uncomfortable, that push you out of your comfort zone. There's a difference between hate speech and people just being ghastly, and people with different points of view. And sometimes there's just joy in going: "I see why that individual has that perspective due to their circumstances. It's not my place to disagree with them. It's my place to listen and move on."

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 04:02

Will, have you got any thoughts before I move on?

**Will Carnegie** 04:06

Yes, I'm a bit of a novice when it comes to TikTok, pretty much like you. I felt fundamentally too old for it, so I've had a bit of a baptism of fire in the last year because my 12 year old child is quite interested in that sort of thing. He's getting a lot from his peers all talking about it and sending him videos. I thought my duty as a responsible parent was to get on board. And I think I had the same sort of epiphany that you realise there's an enormous amount of content that's pouring in from every angle. It's not all going to be people doing dances and being silly. There's going to be some substance to it, even if that substance has a silly quality to it. I think the beauty of a lot of this content is that it's not corporate, it's not po faced, there's always an element of humour to it. And there's a vast variety of things that you can choose from. I don't think it's ageist. There's obviously a large demographic of Zoomers, and Gen Z on there, without a doubt, but there's also every other age bracket being featured. So, I was pleasantly surprised and, in some instances, quite shocked by what was on there.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 05:39

It's funny because I do think that, certainly working in comms, if we're not careful, we can take ourselves really, really seriously. So, substance with silly sounds like a pretty decent principle.

**Russ Norton** 05:53

There is a fantastic drag queen by the name of Kyne, who is also an incredible mathematician. She, in full drag, explains mathematical formulae. Maths and numbers is something that I would never stop to care about. But because she explains it with such passion, and in such enormous wigs and fabulous outfits, I spent the time to understand about square roots and Pythagoras theorem and all of this kind of stuff. There's joy in the messenger as much as the message.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 06:25

Beautiful geekery! I like that. I'm interested in the crossover that you see with the platform and internal comms. Where are the opportunities?

**Russ Norton** 06:35

Do I think internal communicators should be out there setting up a channel on TikTok for their senior leaders or for their internal brands? No, I really don't. But I do think there are so many lessons to learn

from the content formats, from the power of the messenger, the brevity and the variety that's on there. It's a masterclass in what makes consuming content addictive. And as I said, it's never purely the content of the message, it's how it's delivered. That's why I think it's really essential that we as communicators are following this and seeing best practice and not being afraid to trial this stuff. TikTok itself is amazing, as a publishing platform. But you can also just use it as a content creation platform. You don't need to publish your videos to the platform of TikTok. You can just use it to record short sharp videos, edit them, add captions, and generate video content with what's in the in the palm of your hand.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 07:44

Very nice! And vertical video seems to be the way that people are engaging, right?

**Russ Norton** 07:49

Who knew after all these years! How many video briefs have we sent out with "film in landscape" in big giant letters? And now, if someone films in landscape you're like, "what era are you from? What a dinosaur filming in landscape!"

**Will Carnegie** 08:09

How embarrassing! The key thing is to look at all those classic execution styles that you come up on, on TikTok and say, "okay, how can I apply that to my content?" As you say, brevity. Nice little quick, agile pieces of content. And the fact that there's all this peer generated content - more and more you're going to see that in comms. We should be asking our people to feedback to our people.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 08:47

It's really interesting. I've done some video briefs of leaders before. I've had to get on the phone with them beforehand and say, "look, this, this is how to do a TikTok" and I feel like "who am I to tell you how to do it?" But, is there anything that you would say to a leader filming themselves, just to get into the zone of that vertical video shift? What's some of the advice you'd give?

**Russ Norton** 09:16

For me, ultimately - forgive my French. Apologies podcast community. You've got to know your shit. You have to be able to talk with confidence. Because when your camera is there and you're looking immediately at yourself, if you're reading a script, then your eyes are moving and you instantly come across as inauthentic. The very best creators are researched. They know their topic, they've translated it into their own language. They're speaking their own words and they're passionate. It's not about "dear senior leader x y z, please will you read this statement for us into the camera?" It's "tell us about topic x what what do you think?" You might not have all the answers and that's okay. You might not know the full ins and outs, that's okay. Just tell us what you think. And that's what's going to resonate with your audience.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 10:07

Couldn't agree more. Will, what about you?

**Will Carnegie** 10:11

Yes, research, research research! People don't appreciate how much effort goes into creating this content. This is a full time job for these people. They are absolutely devoted to it. They are planning, they're plotting out, but they're saying it to make it look off the cuff and just "right, I'm doing the show right here." Practice and absolutely put yourself out of your comfort zone. We're all used to doing virtual things, we're all used to talking over Zoom. take your phone, walk around the house, gesture to the ceiling, be a bit more dramatic about it. I think people need to practice these sorts of things and need to get out of what they're used to doing because they think, "Oh, I know how to talk to a screen." In a way, you have to relearn a lot of this sort of thing to become a little more authentic and a little more informal. And just to break down the barriers so that this isn't someone looking rather awkward in front of their phone. trying to get down with their kids.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 11:22

Haha! That really tickled me. Thank you for making the point about movement as well, because I think that's so important. Somebody who can power walk in the park while they're delivering a message to the phone or you can just move around their house, adds some pace to it. There's nothing worse than watching those videos where people are sat in their chairs looking really stilted and awkward. There's a way to sit and there's a way to move, right?

**Russ Norton** 11:53

There's also that glimpse of humanity as a senior leader. If the reality of your senior leadership team is that they're going to film their Tiktok whilst being chauffeured around Central London, it's probably not the kind of movement you're looking for. Whereas if you know they take that two minute opportunity while they're on the school run, or while they're making a cup of tea, that they're like "I'm just taking a quick break - I had a fantastic conversation with a group of colleagues just now thought I'd share with you three big takeaways. See you later, I'm off to finish this brew." Delightful! It just shows that those senior leaders are not necessarily vulnerable, but they are humans. They're humans just like me and you and they care about this stuff.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 12:32

I do really want to talk about the risks. But in just thinking about this question, I'm thinking of an example that I saw last night from Joe Lycett, who parodied Catherine Zeta Jones, eating a salad for lunch. Basically, she was doing exactly what you said. She was talking to the camera and she was bringing out olive oil, prestige olive oil and beautiful balsamic vinegar, but just talking to the camera. But if you're not really careful, you can get taken the piss out of by your people. So you've got to find a way to do it that is truly you and not a way that feels falsified or put on for camera. You really have to watch that. What are the other risks?

**Russ Norton** 13:20

The ultimate risk is getting caught out and talking yourself into a corner. The the benefit of being unscripted is the authenticity, is the naturalistic nature of what you're saying and how you're saying it. But then, if you don't know your shit, then you're going get caught out. I guess ultimately, the topic of the World Changer was about diversity and inclusion communications. And I've found TikTok particularly powerful in these glimpses into the lives of people with disabilities, people of colour, people of different faiths. How does it feel to be them? Very, very raw emotion. Now, each of those videos

teaches me a little bit of something. A little bit of language, a little bit of empathy, a little bit of understanding. So, when I meet similar people, or when I'm having conversations about diversity and inclusion, I'm a tiny bit more informed than I was before. I still recognise I've got a lot to learn, but if your leaders are going to start trying to show up on camera, unscripted, to talk about topics, especially diversity and inclusion thrown into the mix also sustainability, it's a risk that if they can't talk about it confidently, with authenticity and without speaker notes, that it's going to feel really fake. Ultimately, in this world, where performative actions don't go down as well as they used to - Rainbow washing, greenwashing, all this corporate jargon around topics like diversity and inclusion and sustainability. As soon as you're on video without a script, people are going to see straight through you. You have to have to have to be prepared and be confident

**Elle Bradley-Cox 15:01**

I've definitely been the communicator working with a leader who was incredibly charismatic and really brought his personality to blog posts and videos that we used to do together. He had a really, really quirky personality and he didn't really tread any corporate line. He was brilliant, but also at the same time, he was such a risk. There were so many times I used to say "I just don't think you can say that. I really think we needed to edit that out. I want you to be yourself. I love you as yourself, but I just don't think you can say that!" You've got to tread that line haven't you?

**Russ Norton 15:35**

100%. But then the flip side of that is if a comms team edits the voice of their senior leaders too much, someone with a mobile phone, hitting record on a conversation, overhearing them at the canteen, making jokes and making inappropriate comments, that reputation is blown immediately, because the actual persona doesn't match the comms persona. We know working in consultancy on behalf of other organisations, very few senior leadership announcements are actually written by those senior leaders. So, this kind of new TikTok generation of content creation is going to really expose that. If there are leaders and influential people in your organisation who are incredibly natural, the risk is that they're going to become more powerful within your organisation than say, your chief financial officer or your chief risk officer. That's could be a problem.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 16:29**

Totally because personality wins

**Will Carnegie 16:30**

That's why an internal comms team needs to be taking these leaders aside and saying, "Look, we're going to give you a TikTok bootcamp." The thing I've discovered mostly is the number of corporate creators you're finding on Tik Tok, who are inside companies, reporting on their day to day experiences. Black people working within a particular environment that they're not used to, and how are they being treated. All gender, every single possible permutation is there and they're already reporting from inside these companies. So leaders need to be hearing from those people and need to be following what they're saying. There needs to be a lot more listening going on.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 17:19**

I agree. But I also think that leaders have a really powerful voice with their own experience. And so few of them are scared to be vulnerable. I interviewed a guy today who was just like, "I just don't talk about this, but I'm gay. And here's a really interesting story all about my personal life and my background" and he would have never come out with if I'd not said "talk to me about your childhood". And all of a sudden, we unpicked why he's the person he is today. He didn't know how powerful that was just sitting opposite him, I was really moved. And my God, if they can do that on video, that is an almighty tool!

**Russ Norton 18:00**

100 hundred per cent. I think in today's corporate world, which is so time bound, so pace bound, so delivery bound, we don't always make space for those conversations to go, "why am I approaching this the way that I am? What is it? What is it in me that I'm bringing to this table? Why is it that I feel a certain way to the situation? Or what's the lens through which I viewed this, and therefore, where's the decision that I'm making coming from?" That context is classic Simon Sinek's 'Start With Why' Tell me the context. Tell me the background to this statement, this decision, this reasoning, and all of a sudden, I can relate so much more. I think that does just take a little bit of investment in time and sharing the full 360 view of of a scenario.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 18:55**

I think that's some of the best practice. What are the challenges to that? What's the barrier that stopped that guy from being more open about his sexual orientation in the workplace? What gets in the way?

**Russ Norton 19:08**

I think there's two things. There's fear of repercussion, fear of offence, fear of crossing a line, fear of sharing too much, fear of if this has the completely wrong unintended consequence. I suppose the opposite of fear is the lack of confidence and just how to articulate yourself. I find, as a gay man in the workplace, for 99% of my year, my sexual orientation has got absolutely nothing to do with the work that I do. It's only very rarely that all of a sudden, I'm going "Oh, hang on. No, this is this is my story. My experiences to get to where I am is what's informing this moment right here right now". And at that point, it feels appropriate to share. But, by the same token, I think that's because we work in a very inclusive environment where I don't need to out myself, and honestly, I can just be who I am. So I think there's that balance between the confidence in articulating your story in a way that's relevant and the lack of the fear of what happens if this isn't received well,

**Will Carnegie 20:18**

That goes hand in hand with empowerment. Your leaders, your team leads, your line managers, your teammates, all of them are supporting you, all of them are absolutely behind you and vocally. So you're going to feel a lot less worried about being yourself. So, if you're seeing that actively, being engaged with by your leaders, and being fed back to you, suddenly that fear that we have, which goes way beyond just work environments, their entire lives they've had to deal with this. It's an enormous step to take. And if you've been given that platform and that support to do so, it's going to go a long way.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 21:06**

I do feel like as well, in order to get all of this stuff to happen, we can't ignore our role is a trusted adviser. So it's safe for them to make those mistakes in front of us, it's safe, for us to give them that

feedback and to work with us so that they can come and say, "I'm feeling really not okay about doing this, talk me through it, what do I need to do" and just be there for them.

**Russ Norton** 21:31

100% and I think we as a generation are in a really interesting space, where this future generation of workers is coming into the organisation with entirely different expectations, entirely different educational backgrounds, entirely different demographics around them. They're used to a different way of life. One senior leaders, let's face it, are still predominantly white, predominantly straight, predominantly male, humans at the top of very large organisations. We, as a comms team, have to bridge those two audiences and help that younger generation find connection or relevance with that senior leadership, and help that senior leadership understand the needs, wants and desires of that next generation coming in. It puts a lot of pressure on us as a comms team to be fluent in both worlds. I think that comes back to the point that Will was making earlier about listening. What is it ultimately that they want to achieve? How do we help them do that? And what is it that they want to hear from those people (I'm pointing - apologies to anyone who's listening!) What is it that the the next generation want to hear from the senior leadership team? And how can we enable them to do that?

**Will Carnegie** 22:44

That's just the thing about TikTok. That immediate feedback loop. You have your peers and you have people commenting immediately saying "Yeah, this is what I think" and carrying on that conversation. We need to bring those together closer to bridge the distance between them so that that dialogue can happen a lot quicker.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 23:11

I just don't think there's a better example of that feedback loop than the Johnny Depp and Amber Heart trial at the moment, right? Because everything that's happening, every micro segment of that trial playing out in the live stream is being captured, snipped, reformulated. The feedback loop's right there, whatever side you sit on. It's a really powerful example to share with leaders I think, of how everything can be taken out of context.

**Russ Norton** 23:44

And fascinating as well, that you'll reinforce your own algorithm, depending on whose side you're on. You will click the videos or you'll click the articles that agree with your preformed conception. It's a fantastic case study on breaking the filter bubble as well. To seek out the truly independent perspectives, and even to observe a court case scenario where all they can present is evidence. But then all this opinion that's around it, and you'll cluster to the opinions that you agree with, despite the fact that these people's jobs is just to present evidence. I think is fascinating and a strong learning opportunity for why you need to break your own filter bubble and really curate your feeds.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 24:28

Another strong case study about how people can rise to fame from this even though they're just a lawyer trying to present evidence, they can be sensationalised by people!

**Will Carnegie** 24:43



Even a brand can. It's a very bold brand who actually got onto this bus, but someone did regarding the makeup which seems like a very slippery slope to engage in something so controversial.

**Russ Norton 24:59**

At the other end of the spectrum, you've got Butterkist popcorn hanging outside in the wake of the Wagatha Christie trial going, "Oh, this is this is essential watching". I mean, kudos to that comms team, because that's genius. I don't know of anything else positive is going to come out of that case study. But it's worth it for the chuckle.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 25:20**

Absolutely. So all I've heard today is authenticity, feedback loop, being brave, being a trusted adviser to senior leaders. Any other hot takes to share before I close this out?

**Russ Norton 25:33**

I think be mindful of that risk of getting caught out. As much as it's an opportunity to jump on that bus and follow that bandwagon. It absolutely is being mindful that your people are effectively journalists, and potentially activist journalists. They are empowered with a microphone and a camera in their pocket that's on them almost almost any time. So the levels of water tightness that you have to have as a senior leader, as a line manager, as a colleague. In some ways it's good because it's holding people who demonstrate poor behaviour in the workplace to account and it's giving people that authority to prove these situations. Hopefully, we will start to see that weeded out in the workplace. But it is a risk for senior leaders that if they don't truly believe these topics that we're asking them to talk about, they will eventually get heard saying that and that could be brand damaging.

**Will Carnegie 26:33**

Yes, absolutely. And leaders are people too! A lot of this is alien and completely new to them. It's something that they have seen their children doing. It's something they've read about. They need to lean on their teams and their teams need to be there for them. internal comms teams are absolutely prepared to help them get over the line. They don't have to be experts, they don't have to be spending 25 minutes a day or something like that. They just need to get over the fear themselves. I think a lot of people will find it difficult to actually just admit, "this is alien to me, and I'm feeling out of touch."

**Russ Norton 27:18**

On that final topic, I would say there is a valued skill set in content creation. I don't think we value writing, we value the ability to craft a message. I don't know if we as corporates, or even agencies, value video production content creation as a full time job and a skill set to have in the team. I would predict that over the next year or so that will be the next job title that's really in high demand. "Come on board and be a video creator for internal purposes."

**Elle Bradley-Cox 27:53**

The company's doing that right now are the disruptors, right? They're leading the pack. Thank you both so much. I think we've agreed that TikTok has killed the tick box. Thanks for joining me and we'll see you again soon. When it comes to diversity and inclusion, authenticity is a watchword for Max Mukhin. Experience and engagement leader at Nationwide until recently, Max has now changed roles, taking a



position as diversity, equity and inclusion business partner at Deliveroo. Passionate about the people experience and a true champion of belonging, culture and inclusivity, Max is helping to build a more equitable and inclusive workplace. I caught up with him to talk about his work in this space, his views on how D&I is changing and the role that we, as communicators, play in driving this important work. Max, welcome to World Changers.

**Max Mukhin** 28:58

It's really good to be here, thank you for having me!

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 29:02

I'm so pleased to have you because I know we've got so much to talk about. I wanted to start with the fact I've noticed a rapid trend in job titles containing the words 'diversity' and 'inclusion' on the increase. What do you think's behind the drive of this trend?

**Max Mukhin** 29:18

Well, firstly, thank God we're seeing this trend! I think companies are finally realising that D&I is here to stay. It's no longer a tick box exercise or an afterthought. The way I usually explain it is in two ways. First of all, people are realising the consequences of not addressing D&I. But then also realising the benefits of actually embedding it and addressing it. So, let's start with the consequences first. I think we've seen a lot of businesses recently being burned by not addressing D&I issues, or just getting it wrong. Employees are much more likely now to speak out. We've seen a wave of discrimination lawsuits, expensive settlements, especially since, Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movements. We had some examples recently of Tesla being accused of racial discrimination, fashion brands like Gucci using blackface on its products and in their stores. Lots of stuff has been happening, and people are actually calling the companies out. So, there's obviously consequences of not addressing it. I think leaders can no longer pay lip service to employees and just apologise, they actually have to back the words by deeds. So that's the consequences. But then, if we look at the benefits, the business case for D&I is finally starting to sink in. It's a real competitive advantage to have a more diverse workforce and inclusive environment. Not only do you attract the best talent, that best talent can then create more innovative products, services and campaigns that attract more diverse consumers. A great example seen in the last few years was Gillette. Traditionally very male cosmetic products, they use much more diverse people in their campaigns. And that's how they attracted new customers and really redefined masculinity. So ultimately, the money talks, hence the business case is working.

**Max Mukhin** 29:48

Exactly. And it's interesting when you say "money talks", because I think perhaps there's been an assumption or stereotype, in the past, that certain groups of people won't want to spend money on themselves, but might for personal care products. Like, have they got a body? They're probably going to want to use something on it! I don't know where these kinds of deep rooted and deeply troubling assumptions come from. But I think you're right, I think employees are starting to see the groundswell of change by the big movements, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter and really swell with it.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 31:24

Obviously, there's big entrenched systematic and cultural issues that really need to be addressed. And I think, as companies mature on the journey - where it started with "Oh, it's a compliance thing, it's an HR thing, we just kind of have to do it." they are maturing now. They realise how big some of these issues are and what it really takes to shift the dial. That's why they're hiring more dedicated D&I professionals like myself.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 32:33

It must be music to your ears. You talked about the competitive advantage, but actually even just how you feel in an organisation when you see other people reflected around you. I noticed it myself with accent bias because of my northern accent. If you don't fit in. That's the smallest example I can possibly think - it's not even about anything, that that's hugely important to me. But if I think of that as one tiny little example, versus is something like your skin colour, that you can't change your gender, that you can't change, these are big, rooted fundamental issues. If I feel like an outsider at work, I'm not going to do my best work for you.

**Max Mukhin** 33:16

It's so like, fundamental. The way you talk, it's who you are, right? It's how you express how you experience the world, how people experience who you are. If you are becoming self-conscious of your accent, that must be really troubling to you.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 33:34

Yeah, it's a good job in the Northern accent comes with a relative amount of charm.

**Max Mukhin** 33:40

Yeah, you should make the most of it.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 33:50

Is just recruiting a D&I person enough? What's it really going take to drive some more meaningful change?

**Max Mukhin** 33:57

Good question. The short answer is it's not enough to just hire and D&I person because that's a tick box. Also, the role of a diversity and inclusion team is to help you identify issues and opportunities and set that strategic direction and where your organisation needs to go. Ultimately, our role as diversity and inclusion professionals is to make diversity and inclusion everyone else's problem. Even if you don't realise it yet, it will be your problem. We can create some initiatives or create a strategy, but ultimately it's up to the business and HR teams to actually deliver on their strategy. And when I say business, I mean leaders, people managers, those who are making those hiring, development and progression decisions. The way we experience culture in the organisation is very much dependent on our managers. They can either make it or break it, so really focusing on the leaders and the managers is important. But of course, it's a lot to ask of managers to suddenly become diversity and inclusion experts. That's just unfair. They're busy, they've got their day jobs, they've got their deadlines. That's why we need to also create the right infrastructure that really supports and enables them to plot the right hiring decisions and to create an inclusive culture. What we mean by infrastructure? We need to

make sure that the recruitment support is right around them. And that's where the recruitment team really helps you set some recruitment targets. And we need to help them have the opportunities to learn and equip themselves with the right skills and knowledge. Like how to be an inclusive leader, unconscious bias, microaggressions. All those things are very important, but managers by themselves are not just going to learn it. So that's why we need the teams within the sphere of HR, whether it's recruitment, learning and development or leadership. Some of the things I just mentioned are very much top down. To create inclusive culture just doesn't lie with the managers and leaders. You need to allow it to emerge, bottom up, naturally. Every organisation is full of wonderfully diverse people and that's a real strength of any organisation. So really, they need these people to have a voice and to be able to build that inclusive culture together with you. That's why Employee Resource Groups are so important. There's been such an increase in organisation. I think almost every single Fortune500 has employee resource groups these days. For those listeners who don't know what employee resource groups are, basically, its employees who have shared characteristics or allies who come together to support each other to think about development opportunities and really drive change within the organisation. Those are the real change makers and influence of your organisation. I think really fostering them is key. Back in my previous organisation at Nationwide, I was leading our LGBTQ+ ERG, and we did some fantastic work. We really influenced the change of the company, we pushed name badges with gender pronouns in our branches, we ran a menopause campaign, and really educated people about what it is and what it means for employees. So, really creating that inclusive culture is not just on leaders and managers, but actually creating the right environment from the bottom up.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 37:52**

I think that grassroots approach has to work hand in hand. I'll give you a really good example. I worked with another really large organisation. So this might not work in small ones, but they have a large LGBTQ network. And underneath, they have separate communities for each of those characteristics. They have the gay community, the trans community, the non binary community, the lesbian community. However, I was talking to one of the community leads the other day and she said, actually, I've managed to influence a little bit change there myself. She said, I think the word 'lesbian' is really over fetishized I don't like it, don't self identify - I identify as gay woman, and I know a lot of people in my community do. And she said, so I've been able to push for of change and we've changed the name of our community to 'the lesbian and gay women community', and it's so minor, but it makes us all feel like we actually show up and belong to this and the people within the communities are very much members of that group and our community externally. And then the larger LGBTQ network above is for them also, and allies. So it's like they've got a safe space where they can talk to each other about shared issues relating to that particular characteristic underneath, but then they come together to push for progress and change as part of a larger network, which seems to work well for this organisation.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 39:14**

I love that. I do think that's so important to look across different intersections, not only where you find differences, but where you find commonalities. Like you say, where you find common shared problems. It won't have escaped anybody's attention that we're releasing this podcast in June, and that is Pride month, and we will see many brands changing their logo to rainbow colours. I would be really interested in your thoughts on this. Is it something that you encourage?

**Max Mukhin 39:14**

Oh, yeah, it's so important. Obviously there is power in numbers and that's why those communities come together. Like with BAME networks as well. It's like when you talk about race and ethnicity there's so many ethnicities. You can't possibly capture the unique experiences of each different group and community so it's very important to create those those spaces, as you said, but also when there is power in numbers that actually do come together and advocate for change. What I see more and more happening and try to advocate in every organisation I work for is to forget "this is just a race issue or this is just a gender issues" and start looking for those common problems, common things that actually unite because the more you come together, the more you can actually create that structural change, while also not forgetting the nuances of each individual group.

**Max Mukhin 40:36**

Well, first of all, I believe there's never enough rainbows! Especially if it's the inclusive Pride rainbow. Personally, I love seeing it, because it makes me feel very seen and included as a man who identifies as gay, especially as I come from Russia, where such things would never be possible. Displaying a pride flag would be a crime. Even though I've lived in the UK for 30 years, and Amsterdam still, whenever I do see it, I get very excited. In some countries, it's very much an act of defiance to change your your logo, because it means a lot. And it means a lot for a lot of employees to be seen. However, if you're a company in the West, and you change it, be prepared to be scrutinised. There's a lot of pinkwashing happening, obviously. So be prepared to show what you have you actually done for the LGBTQ+ community, whether for your employees or for your consumers.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 41:40**

And that just comes right back to your point about authenticity, doesn't it? You've got to put your money where your mouth is, and don't just roll out the rainbow flag. I really appreciate your viewpoint, actually, because I think I can be cynical sometimes because I expect companies to do it. I sort of think, "Oh, what are you really doing?" But actually, I really respect your opinion about how, in some countries, it's a sign of defiance or alliance.

**Max Mukhin 42:08**

A lot of tourists from across the world, a lot of foreigners, come to the UK to London during the Pride Month, right? A lot of them come from countries where being LGBTQ+ is illegal or there's some sort of consequences for it. So, even seeing that, there must be some sort of impact and I remember as a young gay boy from Russia, coming to London for a summer holiday, being able to see that I was like, "Oh, wow, that I feel seen". So even though it's just changing your logo to rainbow flag and it's superficial to some people it will make a difference. But, as I said, be prepared to be scrutinised. Show me the tangible things you've done for the community? For example, are your products inclusive of trans or non binary customers? Have you got equitable policies and processes that support your employees, like parental leave for everyone? Have you campaigned to actually improve LGBTQ+ rights recently? Have you campaigned to ban conversion therapy in the UK? Have you donated money to any charities? Have you got gender neutral toilets? I mean, the list goes on. Most importantly, are you doing those things outside of the Pride month? Because we always see a big splash of activity around Pride, but then it kind of dies down. So, are you constantly talking about those things? I often, for example,

refer to Stonewall's Workplace Quality Index, just to check if the company is actually as inclusive as it's claiming to be.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 44:01

I like that quality index purely because it gives you a benchmark, doesn't it? And actually, there's a lot of evidencing that you have to do. It is definitely not a tick box exercise. You've talked a little bit about how organisations show up as authentic allies to the LGBTQ+ community. I'm interested in your view on how leaders can do this, because I work with a lot of different clients. And it is rare, still, sadly, to see people at the top openly, visibly out. So, I think that there's clearly a piece of work to be done there in making it feel safe enough for leaders to come out and rise to the top as the person that they truly are. But I'm also interested in your view on allies in general in the leadership population.

**Max Mukhin** 44:55

Well, I think no group can really progress without having allies. A fellowship is absolutely key and I think that is why it's one of the biggest trends also happening in organisations - focusing more on allyship. And to answer your question on how leaders can come authentically as allies? I think there are various ways you can show allyship to the group. I think the simplest one is just educating yourself. Big organisations, especially, these Employee Resource Groups, always put on events, or educational things are constantly happening. Are you as a leader attending those and also actually visually showing that you're willing to learn and listen? The other way is, are you as a leader sponsoring, for example, someone like you? Is there any talent in your organisation, which is underrepresented talent, that you want to sponsor? When I say sponsor, it's not just mentoring, when you're giving some advice. It's helping to open doors for them. That's another way. I think maybe the last thing I would say is are you speaking up for things that you see in your organisation? Have you ever seen that anyone in your meeting said something and you helped to bring to the attention that this is not what you should say? I think it's visibly speaking up, as well. I think it's key for leaders. I can go on forever on things I want to see from leaders, but I think this is what I would personally wouldn't advise to leaders to do more of.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 46:46

I think I would also say maybe there's something around vulnerability. And whether that's vulnerability, because you're a member of the community or vulnerability because you know somebody who is, or vulnerability because you know absolutely nothing, and feeling psychologically safe enough to say, "you know, what, I know nothing. But here's what I'm doing about it". And I love the idea of reverse mentoring schemes where members of the LGBTQ+ community or any marginalised community work with a leader to help educate them a little bit, and okay, it is a dedicated portion of time, but it's not a lot of work, really, because it's a lot of listening.

**Max Mukhin** 47:24

I agree. And I think what you just said about being vulnerable and making it really authentic is key. But how do you do it? How can a leader actually connect on a personal level to the topic, because very often leaders are doing it, because they realise it's really important, I'm scared to get things wrong. And then it becomes a tick box thing and it's not authentic. Leaders need to spend some time in this uncomfortable place. And I'm sure like all of us, even if you're from a majority group, at some point in your life, you either felt excluded, for whatever reason, or you've been in contact with someone who

has been excluded, whether it's your family member, or your friend. All this connecting to that feeling and once you have a personal connection to the topic of diversity and inclusion, then you can show up authentically for others and actually be a role model in this space.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 48:29

Love that. Use some of your privilege for good. So, last question, Max. And I'm sad because I've really enjoyed talking to you. But I'm thinking about the people making the biggest impact in the world of work right now. Who would you nominate as your 2022? World Changer?

**Max Mukhin** 48:49

Does it have to be world of work? Can I just say the world?

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 48:52

You can say it world. I'm happy to accept the world.

**Max Mukhin** 48:54

It says World Changer, you know. Maybe because I've just seen too much Ru Paul's Drag Race recently, but I honestly do think that RuPaul is a real World Changer.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 49:09

Please tell me, if our audience doesn't know, who RuPaul is. Let's just lay it out. What what are they doing?

**Max Mukhin** 49:14

So RuPaul is the absolute drag queen legend. He started doing drag, I think, back in the 70s. He's been doing over for 50 years now and started a very successful show, 13 or 14 years ago, called RuPaul's Drag Race. And it's become a sensation. I think what they've managed to do is actually make drag very mainstream in the best possible way. Then it's also always a very beautiful message of inclusion and the fact that now drag queens are invited to corporate parties or I've had many colleagues who have openly been drag queens at work. I think that's phenomenal. You wouldn't have had that 10 years ago. I attribute a lot of it to the hard work that RuPaul has done over the last 50 years.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 50:18

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, attitudes are changing. It's a slow burn, isn't it? But attitudes are changing.

**Max Mukhin** 50:24

Yeah. in some countries it's changing so fast. As I said, as a little boy, coming from Russia, the fact that I can talk about things like this and do the things that I do I find such a privilege and it's a slow burner, but it's when it actually works and you see change. It's just a privilege to do this work.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 50:52

I can see it on your face, Max. It just fills your heart right up. How gorgeous. Well, I've really enjoyed having you. Thank you so much for your time and your expertise. And I know that our listeners will have got loads out of it. Have a great day.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 51:14

Huge thanks to Max Mukhin. If you want to explore a more authentic approach in your internal comms, do join us later this month for a webinar where you can put your questions to our expert panel. We'll share the details in the session notes on our social channels. Want to continue the conversation in the meantime? Do come and chat to us over on Twitter @scarlettabbott or drop us an email at Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk and we'll see you next time for another dive into World Changes 2022.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 51:42

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