



**World Changers podcast.
Season 3, Episode 1
Harnessing the power of your workplace rebels.**

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. First came the Great Resignation. Then the Great Re-evaluation. If we're facing into and living through a Great Recession, what comes next? A Great Rebellion? Naming workplace shifts and people dynamics has become trendy, but it overlooks the fact that it's individual desires and wishes driving this change. And, it's your workplace rebels leading the charge. This got us thinking about our own rebellious moments. So, we asked team scarlettabbott, a right little bunch of workplace rebels: 'Tell us one of your memorable push backs, whether it's from SA or elsewhere. And, did they lead to change or just frustration?'

Lu McKay 00:56

So, the first one that probably comes to mind is a few years ago now. I basically put a business case together for me to work four days rather than five days a week. It wasn't for childcare reasons, or anything specific like that. It was just very much around getting a better work life balance. It's since paved the way for other folks to work in a more flexible way.

Harry Grout 01:17

A time when I last push back against being at work? I just joined a very large engineering consultancy. We'd been tasked a sustainability lead that we needed to go external with sustainability, with climate change, because this was back in 2019, when it was really ramping up. They've just announced that Cop26 was going to be in Glasgow, so it was a really amazing opportunity to get some market penetration there and really get the positioning in. But when we were looking at and reviewing everything, we realised that we weren't in a place to talk externally, because we hadn't sorted everything out internally. We didn't have messaging aligned. We had pockets of excellence and pockets of no activity. I found, when I was trying to break down what it was - just climate change and how to tackle it - was far too complex. And our definition and our action towards it was non-existent. So, I pushed back and said, "Look, we're not ready to go back to do that yet. We need to sort out ourselves internally, we need to upskill our people, educate our people, get everyone aligned to

what tackling climate change and sustainability means for us," It could have been a very difficult conversation, we had the pressure on to deliver on that. But it formed such strong foundations, even now still being used, and being the way to actually help people have conversations internally and with their clients as well. So that was a great outcome for that. And it was right to have that strategic pause at that moment to say, "No, we need to do this instead", so what you want to do is successful.

Kate Went 02:54

A number of years ago, I worked in a professional services organisation. One of the things that my team was tasked with was doing more in the internal comms space for the firm. And we were particularly passionate about mental health as a team. But at the time it wasn't something that the firm championed. It was definitely seen as taboo. It was a stigma to talk about. So we really pushed back against that. And we aimed to weave in lots of campaigns supporting mental health, signposting the right kinds of resources, and just making it the norm to talk about. We really championed it and pushed back against an old attitude and hopefully drove some positive change.

Jeremy Petty 03:39

The one that springs to mind was actually an RFP opportunity. We as an organisation were approached by a very large retailer with a specific brief in mind as you would normally receive through a kind of request for proposal. And having looked at it in some detail, we decided to disrupt that process by declining the opportunity. I rang the client to explain why, and we'd worked with them previously. So we knew it was a bold move to turn the turn the opportunity down as it was a big opportunity in terms of value. It led to a really interesting conversation with the client, because we had several reasons in terms of the brief, not being fulsome enough. We turned it down on that basis. And actually, they then asked us and a couple of guys from the teams come down to London and talk it through in a bit more detail. It led to a really great conversation, not just with the client, but with their senior stakeholders as well, to our rationale and what we would do differently even from a briefing point of view. They actually revised the brief and recirculated it to ourselves and a couple of other agencies. I think as soon as they did that, we knew we're in prime position to win it. So I think it's disruption more than rebellion. But having the confidence to trust your instincts and have a respectful conversation with a client about an opportunity and pushback completely changed the dynamic in terms of how they see us as their partner rather than as a supplier that could fulfil a service for them. And it led to a fantastic relationship for the next two, three years afterwards.

Shelley Briggs 05:08

In my role, I've always done either ops management or general manager, HR. So I've always been the one that is trying to either implement change or I'm the one that has always had the push back or the rebellious done to me. They don't want to do it, they stamp their feet and they just don't want to do what you're asking them to. And I think for me what I've found over the years is that it's very much about it communication, they don't understand why you're asking them to do what you want to do. And giving them that knowledge, giving them that understanding of why you want them to do what you want them to do, and giving them ownership of it, making sure that they're involved from the very beginning. And given that ownership. Almost like it's their idea. Then they're not then thinking "I don't want to do this, I'm not doing it at all" and just coming up against you. It's working with them and saying, "This is why I wanted to do this. What's your thoughts on that? Do you think you could do that? Have you

thought about that? Do you think you could have come up with a better idea? Why don't you work with your team, come up with an idea and present it to me?"

Elle Bradley-Cox 06:23

Rebellion is something lead behavioural scientists Lindsey Kohler knows all about. After all, understanding what motivates people is kind of her thing. I sat down with Lindsey to chat about workplace rebels. Lindsay, welcome to World Changers.

Lindsay Kohler 06:35

Thank you, Elle. Lovely to be here.

Elle Bradley-Cox 06:37

So, we went out to our community to ask them about their moments of workplace rebellion. And we heard a wide range of stories. From the marketing consultant who pushed back against sexism at a major record label, to a Canada-based internal comms pro who enforced a policy change that helped colleagues better protect their time. Very juicy stuff. But what kinds of stories of rebellion have you come across when talking to folks from different organisations?

Lindsay Kohler 07:00

I think the the key thing to remember here is that rebellion can come in all shapes and sizes. The stories that you just shared are examples of larger acts of rebellion with equally large impacts. But rebellion can really show up in smaller, quieter ways, such as voicing an unpopular opinion, telling leaders something they don't want to hear, standing your ground with a colleague who's maybe a bit of a bully or dominates the conversation. Those are all little acts of rebellion, where you're saying, "No, I don't like this. This isn't right. And I'm going to use my voice."

Elle Bradley-Cox 07:46

And you don't have to raise your voice to do that. I've seen you do it so well with people. It's absolutely implicit, what you mean. But you don't lose your cool and it's a really, really good way of doing it. I'm forever watching out for Lindsay's takes. So, should we be worried about any rebels in a workplace?

Lindsay Kohler 08:12

No, quite the opposite! I think that true rebels in the workplace act on good faith, and they're coming with a desire to make things better. I think that they're often the best place within your organisation to identify what needs to change and what isn't working. They're the ones that have that passion to see those changes through. I think about it in our own team. We're working really hard on our own ESG strategy. It's something that, as a small business, is really important. We have someone in the company who's so passionate about it, that he's been the one that's been pushing us and it's been the needed push to say, "yeah, we're going to get our ducks in a row, this stuff matters." It's that that voice that's passionate, that really provides the momentum and the wind in the sails to make change. I think the really important thing to hone in on with your rebels is the intent behind the dissent. That's what I think really distinguishes between an innovator and then someone who's just an agitator. There's a really big difference. There's this idea with rebels. I mean, it's a little bit of insubordination to some extent, but it's principled insubordination. There is something our guest expert, Marva, Bailer said in her

World Changers interview. She said that everyone wants a change agent but nobody wants a maverick. I think that's a really great way to sum up what we're looking for in that rebellious spirit.

Elle Bradley-Cox 09:54

I completely agree. And, you know, I think that sometimes people need to be listened to when they're really passionate about a cause. When they're not listened to, frustration can build and it makes them more of a thorn in your side because you didn't stop to give them the attention they needed in the first place.

Lindsay Kohler 10:11

Yeah, you do. That's why there's so much onus on listening better. So, if you're thinking through the practical applications: how can IC teams and HR people really leverage the power of their workplace rebels, I think you hit the nail on the head. It's about listening better, because that rebellious behaviour to your point, does often rise from frustration. There is something they didn't like, something they think could be better, they voiced it. It's also something that they can have a little bit of control over in a very uncertain environment. If you put your ear to the ground to listen to those voices, it's really going to help the teams be better placed to leverage the rebel ideas, and might be a force for positive change. If you let it go too long, that rebellious energy becomes disruptive and chaotic. And we don't want an army of anarchists running around.

Elle Bradley-Cox 11:07

Do you know, it's funny. I have an example of this in live client work where one of my clients has faced into somebody who has had an extreme amount of passion. They have felt that they've given him an extreme amount of attention, they've lost their patience. Maybe it's three months in, and that person is still chinning, because they've not quite got what they want. And you're right - understanding what they want is really key. I said to her, "I think he's a man who needs to be listened to". And she said, "but I have", and I was like, "by someone different". I think that sometimes all it takes is a different set of ears to help someone feel like they've been listened to. Sometimes that might be a consultant, there might be someone from an external organisation, who goes, "yeah, you are right, and here's the way we're going to help you get back in with this team" or whatever it might be. It's just a different set of ears.

Lindsay Kohler 12:00

It is, and it comes down to empathy. Empathy is a trait that you can get better at. I think, Elle, you have said that listening is not just an activity, it's an attitude. It's a mindset. We all just want to be heard and that's where 95% of our frustrations probably stem from, this feeling misunderstood, unimportant, a side thought in somebody's busy day. When someone shows up 12 minutes late to a meeting, and you're like, "is my time not important?" I think there's so much to just feeling heard and feeling seen. I think if we do that we can find the sweet spot and leverage the power of our workplace rebels.

Elle Bradley-Cox 12:54

You've just made me think, actually, with the "12 minutes late to a meeting". I'm very curious about your own miniature acts of rebellion. Whether that's something that you've done in the past, or something you really want to ascribe meaning to this year. Are you a rebel at heart?

Lindsay Kohler 13:13

So I've been thinking about this. I thought, "God for this year, actually thought I might try toeing the line a bit more!" But, we know how long that that'll last! I think it'll be a bit more 'acting first and asking for forgiveness later', especially with the kind of the role that I have. Sometimes you just have to make decisions and move quickly. Follow your gut and just get things done. I'm not saying be reckless - there's a very big difference between taking well thought out risks or making informed decisions and just being reckless. It's not at all what I'm advocating. But I do think some more of that, 'do first and ask forgiveness later if things didn't quite land the way you'd hoped' is probably going to be one of my ethos for this year. What about you, Elle? What are your acts of rebellion on the horizon?

Elle Bradley-Cox 14:14

I've been very rebellious in the past. I rebelled myself out of a job! And it was all with the right intent and permissions up front in that we were literally told we had to be disruptive and experimental with this news trial that we were doing for six months and proved that we could do different formats and treatments. We really chucked the rulebook out, tried all kinds of different experimental formats and harnessed the power of people's opinion in the organisation. You know when somebody says one thing, but what they actually mean is another? Well, I took them to their word, and I did everything I possibly could to do completely different forms of comms and it was landing. But I think it was just a bit too forward for its time. It's interesting, isn't it. It's such a weird act of rebellion, just doing your job differently and experimenting.

Lindsay Kohler 15:18

And where's the line of rebellion? I think it comes down to risk. They said, "do something different" and you did and you rebelled yourself out of a job. Where they might have meant, "Oh, could you use blue instead of purple", that risk preference is so interesting - what somebody considers an act of rebellion. It continues to change from person to person, organisation to organisation, and that's where I think people would do well to trust their instincts, follow their passions, but always go back to what's the intent? Am I trying to make things better? Or am I just barking up the wrong tree, because I didn't get my bone?

Elle Bradley-Cox 15:59

Totally. But you know, thinking about that risk attitude that you were just talking about. It's made me more cautious when taking risks because of the kind of ultimate risk that I took last time, right? So my act of rebellion this year is to rebel against that mindset and to be more courageous and more curious than ever before. If you can call that an act of rebellion. It's an act of rebellion against old beliefs and bad behaviours from a previous 'fingers burned' moment. I was talking to Russ, my manager here at work, and he was just like, "Be more courageous. Get that lippy on. Fight the power!"

Lindsay Kohler 16:44

Well, if you need if you need a cheerleader, or backup or sidekick in your acts of rebellion, I think you know who in the business to go to?

Elle Bradley-Cox 16:53

I definitely do. Thanks so much for sharing with me. Your take on rebellion is such an interesting topic, isn't it? And I think for some risk averse leaders reading this report, they might be like, "Wow, is this going to be anarchy in the streets?" And no, absolutely not. It's more like considered thoughtful, interesting rebellion. To me anyway.

Lindsay Kohler 17:13

Yeah, that's exactly it.

Elle Bradley-Cox 17:16

Well, thanks for your time, Lindsay, really appreciate it. See you soon.

Lindsay Kohler 17:19

Sounds great. Bye.

Elle Bradley-Cox 17:27

Since the start of the year is always a time for forward planning and resolutions, we also asked: What will be your big act of rebellion this year?

Jeremy Petty 17:34

So, I think for me this year, is this rebellion or not I don't know, but saying no more is going to be, probably not rebellion but probably the biggest challenge that I've got to see through this year. So changing how I work, and what I commit to I have to revolutionise. I think maybe it's going to feel like rebellion for me, because it's going to be upsetting people, potentially. But I think that's where I have to get to this year.

Shelley Briggs 18:00

You know what? I will probably be to be a little bit selfish and do things that I want to do. If it works for me, it works for me. Being a little bit selfish and making sure that's what I want, and I'm not just being a yes person.

Lu McKay 18:16

I don't think I've got a specific act of rebellion in mind. But I'm not afraid to push boundaries. As long as you do it with the right intentions, the right stakeholder management, there's no reason that you can't change the way things are currently working.

Elle Bradley-Cox 18:30

If you want to dig a little deeper into workplace rebels and how to harness their attitude and ambitions, do join us later this month for our webinar, where you can put your questions to our expert panel, including our Inside Voice guest Marva Bailer, who has more than 20 years experience as a purpose driven executive, and a fascinating perspective on workplace rebels.

Elle Bradley-Cox 18:48

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 Twitter [@scarlettabbott](#) or drop us an email at [Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk](mailto>Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk). We'll see you next time for another dive into World Changers 2023.

Elle Bradley-Cox 19:04

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