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Candid Comms
Transcript.
Season Six. Episode Five.



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Transcript. Season Six Episode Five. March 2024

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[00:00:00] You're listening to the Candid Comms podcast with Rachel Miller. Tune in for practical advice and inspirational ideas to help you focus on all things internal communication related.

Hello and welcome to the show. On today's episode, you and I are going to be talking about all things book related because my brand new book, Internal Communication Strategy Design. Develop and transform your organisational communication is being published by Kogan Page in 2024. I first shared the news back in May 2023 with attendees of All Things IC Live, which was 85 in-house internal communicators.

We'd gathered together in London for a day of masterminding and learning about all things internal comms related. And it was a supersized Masterclass of mastermind to mark All Things IC's - my business's [00:01:00] 10th birthday. A All Things IC live I announced that I had been offered a book deal and it was happening.

I was already started to write actually at that point in time that was in May, 2023. So through this episode, I'm going to walk you through the process, and to share what you can expect, what's in the book, and how you can get hold of it. So thank you so much to everyone who's asked me lots and lots of questions.

I thought I would create this episode as a source of truth, as a place that I can point people towards. So I'm going to rewind slightly to March 2023, where I received a message via LinkedIn from the senior commissioning editor at Kogan Page, who are a publisher. And they've been publishing a number of internal comms books over recent years, which is brilliant to see.

That includes Influential Internal Communication by my friend Jenni Field, and it includes Influential Building a culture of [00:02:00] inclusivity by Priya Bates and Advita Patel, and they've got a number of books in their portfolio, including Liam FitzPatrick and Sue Dewhurst's successful employee communications books.

I'll link to all of these in the show notes so you can get hold of them. And there's also a series on crisis communication by Amanda Coleman as well. So Kogan Page have really started to build their portfolio of internal communication books. Which is long overdue. Frankly, I'm really pleased that they've stepped into this space and I've trying to encourage people to share their thoughts on all things, internal communication related.

So I received a message in March, 2023 from the senior commissioning editor who asked me, she'd been checking out my profile. She'd looked at my website and she asked me whether I'd considered writing a book. Now comes friends. Many of us who work in internal communication, I think it's fair to say, are [00:03:00] writers at heart.

And that's certainly true for me. I had considered writing a book. It's something that I've wanted to do for years, but the time had never felt right. There's always been something that has stopped me doing it. So when I received that message, I was looking at the work that I was doing, and I was
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looking at my business plans, and I was looking at my home situation with my family, I've got three young children, and I was really honest with myself, which was, there is never going to be a perfect time for me to be able to write a book.

If I want to do this So, I had a conversation, we arranged to speak a couple of weeks later, once my diary allowed, and then we had a conversation. And it was great, I really enjoyed it actually. And we were talking about the current portfolio that they have, and I was asked whether there's a particular topic that sits really well with [00:04:00] me.

So, I would potentially enjoy writing about and I realised from looking at the books that were on the market that there was a gap when it came to creating an internal communication strategy. It was mentioned in quite a few of those books that I've just talked about, but it wasn't covered in any great depth.

I realised that I would have found that really helpful when I was working in house. If I knew there was a book I could turn to, to help me write an internal communication strategy. And or help me think about working strategically as an internal communicator. I would have found that incredibly helpful.

Through the conversation we had, I then had to put a proposal together, which was what is the book that you would write? And that was quite a lengthy process. It was a long document. It took me, it probably only took me about two hours to do, but there was a lot in there. I had to put a lot in there and it was the structure of the book.

Now, I have a framework called The [00:05:00] MILLER Framework that I developed a number of years ago, and it's the backbone of internal communication strategies, and it covers mindset, insight, logistics, leadership, evaluation, and revision. And it also happens to spell my surname, as luck would have it! So when I was having the conversation with her, I realised that actually, that framework would make a really beautiful structure for a book.

It would enable me to write against all of those topics in, in quite some depth. To write a book for a professional audience, a part of their portfolio at Kogan Page is 80,000 words. Which is a big number. So, I pulled together the proposal, I walked through what I thought the stages of the book could be, like the chapters of the book could be, how I'd put it all together and the types of case studies that I'd try and find and expert views and conversations that I had had already with clients and comms [00:06:00] friends over the last 10 years of my consulting practice that I'd not been able to share before.

And I realised that this book could be an incredible opportunity to shine a light on all that brilliant hard work that's taking place inside organisations. And I think that's why it enabled me to write that structure pretty succinctly and pretty quickly, actually, because I could just imagine it. I could picture it.

All those conversations and pieces of work and projects that I know have been happening inside organisations that have never had the opportunity to be seen and to shine. And I got super excited and I hyper focused and put that document together. I sent it off back to the

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commissioning editor who came back to me with a number of clarifications, things that she wanted me to expand more on.

Which I was very happy to do, and then I sent it back to her, and she said the next stage was that there was going to be a discussion internally, I can't remember the name of the group, I think it was their [00:07:00] editorial board perhaps, which was whether they would give the book the go ahead, whether they thought that it was the right fit for them.

So then I had this period of waiting, which I think was about two weeks from memory. So I submitted the proposal and then I was waiting for the board to meet and to see whether it would get the red light or the green light to go ahead. And I was so thrilled when I got an email that told me you've got the green light, go, go, go, start writing.

So I got told that your book is, is going to be published by Kogan Page. And originally the date was May, 2024. And at this point in time, it was April. So then that gave me a really clear mandate and a really clear timeframe that said, right. You're going to write the book that you said you're going to write.

It's going to be 80,000 words and you've got some deadlines. So the way that it worked was I had to submit chapters. I think it was three chapters at a time, [00:08:00] three months apart from memory. So I remember the, the publishing deadline was really robust, it was very clear, so I knew that I had to submit chapters by certain dates and that momentum was really helpful for me.

So in terms of how I wrote the book, I wrote in order, I wrote from intro, through to the end chapter. In hindsight, and you know this is the Candid Comms podcast, so I'm going to be candid with you. In hindsight, I wouldn't have written it that way. I would have written the intro last because it's really hard to write an intro about a book you've not written yet.

In the intro, you're saying, In chapter blah blah blah, I discussed ABC and you've not written it. So, in hindsight, it probably would have been better for me to write the intro last. I did review the intro when I got to the end of the book. I did look back. And I think I did a good job, actually, if I can be honest and be [00:09:00] bold to say that.

I did a good job in talking about what would be in the book. And I think it's because I had a really clear vision. The structure that I'd created as part of that proposal was my blueprint. I knew what I was going to build. I knew what I was going to create. So actually, even though I hadn't actually written the rest of the book when I wrote the intro talking about the rest of the book, it was totally fine.

It was okay. I did a good job. In terms of how I wrote, so I had the structure. And I would love to tell you, Comms friends, that I had oodles of time and I went on one week, two week writing retreats. That's not the case. At all. The reality is, very shortly after signing the contract, my nanny, who was looking after my three children after school, um, decided to resign and decided to leave us after four years of being with my family. And for reasons we decided between ourselves, we decided not to replace her.

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Therefore, [00:10:00] suddenly, I'm being very candid with you, suddenly, I had this 80,000 word deadline ahead of me, and I had no childcare. And the impact of that meant, I have three young children, who at that point in time were, my daughter was 10, and my boys were 8, I have twin boys, they were 8.

And the impact of that meant I had to start working part time had to radically change all of my working hours to enable me to be in mummy mode to pick my children up after school from their primary school. And that was a very big change for me, for my team at All Things IC where I suddenly had to stop work at half two, three o'clock every day, which had a, had a big impact on everything actually in 2023.

I had to prioritise my family and that was the right thing to do. I also had a book to write, so there were no week-long writing retreats anywhere. It was a lot of [00:11:00] hard work writing all times of the day and night, being at my desk at four o'clock in the morning, still being there very, very late at night.

And I thoroughly enjoyed the writing process. I think because I had a very clear vision in my head of what I was going to write, that it just unlocked, I don't really know how to describe it, just as a backdrop to, in the background of all of this, my family and I, and this is something that I've spoken about in season six of Candid Comms, my family and I were being assessed for neurodivergence, so amongst all of the writing and the working part time and the trying to redress and rebalance with, with childcare, we were discovering all of these things about ourselves and in terms of the way that we work and the way we think.

So I decided to try and harness what I'd learned about myself in particular through understanding that I have ADHD. And I know that I can hyper focus. [00:12:00] I've never had a phrase for it. But even now, recording these podcasts, I sit in a studio and I hyper focus and I batch record and I can record five or six episodes in an afternoon and I go into absolute hyper focus and I realised that it could be really helpful to try and harness this to write the book.

I discovered an AI powered playlist and there is a caveat in the back of my book where I felt the need to declare I did not use AI at all to write any part of that book. Every single word I have written has come from the heart, it has come from my head, it's come from my notebooks or conversations with the expert views and contributors that I featured as part of the book.

But I realised that I needed to find a mechanism to get me to hyper focus. I find it very hard to switch off and I realised in 2023 I discovered brown noise. [00:13:00] You might have heard of white noise or maybe pink noise but there's brown noise and I use brown noise at night to kind of I, I describe it as closing the tabs in my brain, you know when you're shutting down a computer, I mean who does that, I don't ever do that, but when you're closing down a computer, you're meant to shut down all the tabs, I use brown noise at night when I'm in bed, I can't really describe it, but the, the noise that you get helps me settle my mind.

So I realised I needed the opposite to help me hyper focus. So this AI powered playlist was super helpful. And I trained my mind to associate it with writing. Whenever I put that playlist on, it was turning my brain. You're writing right at my desk. And I would sit there, put the playlist on and it was music that has no lyrics.

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There are no words, there are nothing to distract my brain because when I listen to music, or if I listen to a podcast while I'm trying to do something else, my brain wanders, my mind wanders, I lose my train of thought, [00:14:00] and I knew that I had a really, really strict deadline ahead of me and a lot of work to do.

So that was the environment that I created. I'd put on my AI powered playlist, whatever time of day or night I was sitting at my desk, and it would tell me it's time to write. And I also used that actually when I then was in editing mode with my publisher. I then, any time I needed to look at the manuscript, any time I needed to look at what I'd written, I'd put that playlist on and I'd be straight back into that mode.

And it's a really helpful thing. I think having habits and having repeatable things were really helpful for me when I was writing the book. I focused and trained my mind, this is the time to write. I gave myself permission to write and I put that playlist on and I actually really enjoyed it.

I thoroughly enjoyed the whole process. If we're connected on Instagram, I'm @RachelAllThingsIC on Instagram, you probably saw a little post it note that lived on my desk. Something that [00:15:00] helped me keep on track and keep motivated was breaking down that task into sizeable chunks. I had a spreadsheet on the go. Which was all of my chapters and I divided up 80,000 words between the chapters.

So I knew how to write to length. Because I realised that some of the topics like evaluation, so measurement for example, needs a lot of words actually. And I realised that I could write a lot about many of the topics. And what I didn't want to do, because I was writing sequentially, I was going through the book from the intro onwards.

I didn't want to get to the end of the book and the last two letters of the MILLER model of evaluation and revision and to have run out of words. So something that I did right at the start of the project was to get a spreadsheet, lay out the book in terms of the chapters with mindset, insights, logistics, leadership, evaluation, revision.

And then I did a final chapter, which is what happens inside. Is reflected outside, which is the [00:16:00] ethos of All Things IC, of my business, and that gave me the structure and then I just divided up 80,000 words between them and it enabled me to keep track and it enabled me when I sometimes I wrote something and I thought, Oh, actually, I think this needs to be in a different chapter.

Then that spreadsheet was my source of truth. However, what I found helpful visually, and I'm a visual thinker, what I found helpful to keep me motivated was having a little post-it note and I divided up the post it note into 5000 word increments. And after every 5000 words had been written, I crossed it off.

I can't tell you what a difference that made to me because I could see it visually. I had it. stuck on my computer and it was a visual reminder every single day how much I'd done and how much was left. I'm sure that lots of people have their own mechanisms. I ended up writing the book at a time

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when I didn't have the luxury of time to think [00:17:00] about it, if that makes sense, in terms of I didn't have time to then look into, what's the best way to write a book?

What do people recommend? I just had to crack on and do it. So rather than spend time looking at websites for authors and all these different things, I thought, I need to find a mechanism that works for me. So that's what I did. I used an AI powered playlist. I used a spreadsheet to divide up the book and to put in there ideas of what would go against each of the chapters.

And I also used my post it-note to help me keep on track and to tick off those, those numbers. As I got to the last 5000 words, it felt like such a momentous thing to tick off the final 5000. I actually wrote 1000, um, increments. So for, I did 5,000, 4,000, 3000, 2000, 1000. I'm done. I've finished. So that's what I did and all of those techniques worked for me.

There's no right or wrong way to writing a book, I don't think. [00:18:00] These are the things that worked for me. If you are embarking on writing a book, brilliant, good on you. Find the things that work for you. Because when you're sat, wherever you're sat, writing that book at whatever time of day or night, you need to be in a good state where you can concentrate and you can focus.

I found it really hard to wind out of those times. So let me give you an example. In August, I went to France with my family. And on the Saturday before we went, we were going on the Monday, on the Saturday before we went I had a deadline and I knew that I wanted to submit, and I knew that I had to submit my chapters to my publisher, so I did, I hit that deadline and I made sure I hit every single deadline.

I either did it on the day and a couple of times. I did it a few days before, which feels really amazing. If you're able to do that, it's little things that keep you motivated. So I submitted on the Saturday and [00:19:00] then on the Monday we were going to be flying. I'm going to go to France.

On the Sunday my brain was so wired up still. I was so in the zone still, no amount of brown noise would calm my brain. And I knew that the chapter that I had to write next was the evaluation chapter. I'd written little bits. Probably another tip to share actually, if you are writing a book. As I was going through, if I was writing something, sometimes a thought would pop into my head and I would feel really motivated to write something that I knew would be in a later chapter.

So I just did that. If I ever felt compelled to write something about evaluation while I was working on an Insights chapter, I let myself do that. I never actually, when I got to the next batch of chapters, like I'd done chapter 1, 2, 3, when I then opened up the Word documents, I had individual Word documents for each chapter.

When I opened up chapters 4.5 and 6 in that second tranche, that second lot [00:20:00] of submission, They weren't empty. They already had lots of thoughts in them. They already had lots of expert views, because I found I was so absorbed into the book as I was writing it. I had such a clear picture in my head of what would go into each chapter.

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If I felt compelled to write about evaluation, I just did it. So on that Sunday, I knew that when I came back from holiday, I would be writing the evaluation and revision chapters and evaluation comms, friends, as we know, is measurement and it's a really chunky topic.

Because my brain was still really, really fizzing, I said to my husband, I know we should be packing today, but I'm completely in the zone and I really want to write today. And he said, Do it. Go for it. So he and the children were packing for our holiday and I sat at my desk and I wrote for 10 hours straight. I was there really early in the morning and I wrote for 10 hours and I wrote the majority of that evaluation chapter.

I [00:21:00] had some bits already that were in that Word document but most of it, thousands and thousands of words I wrote on that day. It was so ready to come out. I was so ready to write about it because I'd got in that momentum from the previous three chapters. I don't know what best practice is, or good practice is, or what you should do as a writer, but for me, that worked.

The fact that I allowed myself to not force my brain to try and wind down, but I just leant into it and thought, you know what, let's just go. Let's just write. I'm in the mood. I want to carry on. I'm gonna do it. And I am really glad that I did. Because I imagined that while I was on holiday in France, that I would be writing.

I had all of these ideas in my head that I'd, I'd write under palm trees. I had all these amazing ideas. And the reality was I didn't write a single word while I was on holiday. And actually, that was the best thing I could have done for myself. I needed [00:22:00] that mental break from writing. I gave myself, it was a couple of weeks, I had a couple of weeks off.

And it meant when I then came back to my desk, Sat down ready to write after my holiday and the final deadline was looming. Oh my goodness, I can't tell you the relief when I opened up that evaluation Word document and all of that writing that I'd done on that Sunday was there waiting for me. And of course I then was shaping it and refining it and adding to it and taking away and all of those good things.

But that advice is something that I would encourage you to consider if you're writing and you feel that momentum. Go with it. Absolutely go with it. I think some of the best writing that I did in the book came on that Sunday and I think it's because the pressure of the deadline was off from the previous chapters and I was writing for the pure enjoyment of writing about internal comms measurement and I'm very aware how much of a geek that makes me sound and I fully embrace that comms [00:23:00] friends.

That was definitely the right book for me to write. So that's what I did. I just embraced it.

I'm going to share with you how the publishers describe the book. So they say, Kogan Page say, getting internal communication right starts with having a clear strategy. Internal Communication Strategy is your all in one guide to designing, developing and delivering an effective internal communication strategy that will inspire and motivate your employees.

Written by award winning communications professional, Rachel Miller. It's really weird to talk about yourself in third person. This book tackles the key topics facing the industry today, including
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communicating with neurodiverse employees, how to influence at C suite level. The effect of hybrid working and how to measure the impact and prove the value of internal communication.

In my words, this book honors the hard work of internal communicators. I've highlighted some outstanding examples of internal comms I've not been able to share before and it [00:24:00] celebrates the wonderful world of internal communication. This book is not a shiny, everything is perfect and brilliant.

It is raw. It's gritty. It's honest, and it reflects the reality of working as an internal communicator today. It features mistakes I've made, models I've developed, and it candidly addresses some of the biggest challenges that are facing internal communicators. Whether you're just starting out, or you've got decades of experience, you'll benefit from the stories, the theory, and reality that you'll find in this book.

I'm going to share some of the brilliant people that you'll find in this book with you. Some of the people that I've featured have been clients for years, and I've never been able to share their stories. Maybe we've been under non-disclosure agreements. Um, I've worked with so many amazing internal communicators, and it's been such a joy to have the opportunity to shine a light on the hard [00:25:00] work that they're doing, and finally have a chance for them to share their views, which is absolutely brilliant. There'll be lots of names that you recognise, I'm sure, and maybe some that you don't as well.

So I have a number of expert views dotted throughout the book across all of the chapters to bring lots of the theory to life. It was really important to me that I had an opportunity to not just outline what the theory is and what my recommendations are and perhaps some models in there.

But that reality, how do you turn all this into reality? So I've highlighted three organisations, for example, who've successfully used The MILLER Framework to write their internal communication strategy. So that's Cat Slatcher at the Met office, the meteorological office here in the UK. That's Naomi Jones from Mars Wrigley, that's Debbie Chapman from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home.

Cat, Naomi and Debbie very generously and kindly shared their experiences of using The MILLER Framework. They've shared some [00:26:00] excellent hints and tips and advice and guidance to help you think through how to work strategically, how to create an internal communication strategy.

I've also featured people like Jen Sproul, who's the chief executive of the Institute of Internal Communication. And it's, it's a who's who in the world of internal communication. And I'm so grateful for everyone who's given me permission to share their views and to amplify their voices from Dr. Kevin Ruck, Howard Kraiss and Mike Pounsford writing about listening. They've got an excellent book on listening that's just been published if you're interested in reading more about that topic.

From Dr. Leandro Herrero, who I've known for years, has written beautifully about organisational culture for me, which I'm so grateful for. Rochelle Raven at Hilton, Deborah Copeland at the BBC sharing the editorial strategy, sharing what they're doing inside their organisation to plan their internal communication.

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I've highlighted people like [00:27:00] Jill Spurr talking about accessibility and inclusivity inside her organisation. And I've also approached people who have helped shape my thinking in the world of internal communication. People like Victoria Mellor, one of the founders of Melcrum and Liam FitzPatrick. So this book is a celebration.

It's a, I found myself the other day describing it to a client as a love letter to the internal communication profession, which I think neatly and succinctly sums up this book for me.

It's the book I needed when I was in-house. I've written it to give you advice and guidance at your fingertips. It's designed to be a guide that you'll come back to time and time again when you are facing lots of the things that I've covered in this book.

I would love to know what you think of it. If you're listening to this episode and you've already got hold of it, please do leave a review on amazon. com. Please do get in touch with me. I'm Rachel Miller [00:28:00] on LinkedIn, you can find me @rachelallthingsic on Instagram, or why not send me a message hello@allthingsic.com.

Thank you if you have bought the book, or if you've gifted it to somebody else, or you're thinking about buying it, signed copies are available via my website, All Things IC. It's the only place where you can get hold of a special limited edition, which has got an additional foreword from me and it's got a slightly different cover as well.

And that's the place, www.allthingsic.com is the place to get hold of that special limited edition of the book. If not, you can find the book via your favorite bookstore in person or online.

I hope that you enjoy reading it. I've created it for the comms community to equip, empower and enable you and hopefully inspire you to transform your organisation's internal communication.

And I would love to know how you get on. Please do get in touch and [00:29:00] let me know what you think. I'm going to close this episode today in the manner that I close every episode of the Candid Comms podcast and in the way that I've closed the book in the final chapter. And that's to remember that what happens inside is reflected outside.

See you again soon.