

Episode 4 – Emotion at Work in Purpose and Meaning at Work Chatting to Ben Fletcher @arrowmaker76

Phil: So before we start this episode with the Emotion at Work podcast I have a confession to make. When recording this episode I made the school boy error of leaving both my mobile phone on and next to the mic so what you have during the course of this podcast when I am speaking anyway, is the annoying do do do do do do of a mobile phone going off in the background. I have done everything I can to minimise the impact and to get rid of it as much as I can but it is there and I thought I would let you know at the beginning because if that sort of stuff really annoys you then you can turn off now, otherwise what you are about to hear is a really really fascinating interview about the role of emotion and purpose in the workplace. I am hoping the content is going to be that good that you will cut me some slack and accept my school boy error and I promise to have learnt from my mistakes, anyway, back to the podcast.

Phil: Hi this is the latest episode of the Emotion at Work podcast where we get geekily excited about the world of emotion, credibility, deception in the workplace. Thanks very much for listening and here comes tonight's episode.

Hi and welcome to this edition of the Emotion at Work podcast where we get very excited about interviewing lots of different people about how their view of the world of work and in particular the world of emotion and credibility and/or deception features on that and for today's episode I am delighted to have a guest who is here to talk to us primarily about the role that emotions and purpose can have in an organisation. So he is a Managing Director by profession but he is a Finance Director by training which is something that we are going to pick up and explore as we go through, but also somebody who is really passionate about building organisations with a purpose at the heart of it, so for today's podcast I would like to welcome along Ben Fletcher. Hiya Ben.

Ben: Hi Phil how are you?

Phil: Very well thank you and you?

Ben: Yeah great, looking forward to our session.

Phil: Wonderful, me to, me to. So what I thought would be really useful to help us out with, just to help out the listener in particular, so start by telling us a bit about you and where purpose comes from for you, where that began?

Ben: Yeah, sure a little bit about my background. I've had a business career for the best part of twenty years after graduating armed with a history degree and the majority of that time and certainly the first fourteen, fifteen years were spent as you've alluded to as a Finance guy in two different companies doing all sorts of different roles and then I made the move into general management most recently as Managing Director of Boots opticians and I've been lucky, I think, to work for companies that are very much lead by their values and in a way being able to take that for granted and when I got to a position where I was Senior Leader for the finance function within an organisation I was very keen to make sure that we had a clear set of values through which we were

going to lead the function that went really well with what the broader company was doing and as part of that dialogue I was challenged by a couple of members of my immediate team to go one stage further and really define what the purpose was. If I am honest at the time I wasn't 100% clear what they meant and I can see however that it was something they felt very passionately about and thought it would be of value and so on that basis I was really open minded about learning more and seeing what this can add, so we went through a process that these couple of team members lead with some external support and to really see if we could define a purpose for the finance function and it was just incredibly valuable and I think took us to a different level and in a way allowed, certainly me and I think the broader team to articulate a role that we all felt was there but had never really been able to verbalise and that was... "The job of an outstanding finance function is to create the future of their company and understand the defining of that purpose," I think really helped transform our sense of ourselves and also give us something we could take out of what was a three hundred strong finance team and say this is our role and this is the role that we define in terms of being a really positive contribution to the broader business...

Phil: I was just about to say I find that really fascinating because if I think about...I am quite lucky, I get to speak at conferences and listen to people talk about lots of different topics and there's this almost this stereotypical version of a finance leader or even a finance function that is quite stoic, quite straight laced, very numbers driven and some of the... what you are talking about there in terms of creating something that allowed you to clearly define what the function was about in a way that transformed the way that the function looked at its self that sounds like a very non-typical financy thing really.

Ben: I think that's right in some ways. I have been lucky in that I had seen and been part of particularly in the first part of my career a finance function that did play that broad role and was excepted for playing the broad role, but without ever having to articulate it and it was almost an organisational aspect that was taken for granted and I learnt that that wasn't normal and in a way finance puts its self in a box and the organisation around it is sometimes happy to have it in a box and what this allowed us to do was to be able to say we are a lot more than an accounting and reporting function. It doesn't say that we are not that because if you are in the job of creating the future of your company, actually really good governance is part of that. An iron grip on what is going on is definitely part of that. Great planning is part of that. Real expertise in tax, treasury, accounting, accounts payable, all of these things are absolutely necessary. Certainly our experience was first of all it helped us really honour that expertise and secondly give it a roll and to say to the organisation at large you've got permission in a way. If you're the accounts payable clerk or the accounts receivable clerk or the treasury accountant, nobody is going to know that role better than you. There's therefore an expectation because what we have now said we stand for, that you are going to take that expertise and bring it to bear in a way that moves us on.

What I think it also did was in many finance functions there's a debate about business partnering. There's a business partnering part of the function. That is the way they articulate it and then there's the other parts of the finance function and I always personally detested the term "business partnering" and what defining and overarching a purpose did was actually eliminate the need for all the different terms. The job of everyone in the finance function was to help create the future of the company, if that meant that you were imbedded with the trading team or the brand team then your

job was to bring brilliant financial analysis. If you were in a shared services and your job was to help us move our processes forward in a way that allowed us to be more efficient in how we managed our cash or close the books quicker or run a better planning process. So it allowed everyone to take part in the same terms. I think that is important when you are looking to build a culture.

Phil: And what did that do or what did you notice in terms of how that affected the way that people felt about working in that finance function.

Ben: I think it opened up a sense of possibility and I think it also helped bring the function more into the main stream of the business. We had a positive, active constructive role to play and could do more than provide other people within the business with a set of numbers and I think it therefore helped functional pride.

Phil: And one of the distinctions you made earlier which I find really interesting was the creating that sense of purpose that an outstanding finance function creates value for the company, it wasn't at the exclusion of the recognition of the expertise that those different aspects of the business bring and one of the things I get really fascinated about, when it comes to the workplace in particular is the identity, or identities that both people take for themselves but also that the organisation allows them to take. I can image having not worked in finance but worked in HR and when I listen to you speak I hear some similarities between how a finance function maybe viewed and structured and how a HR function maybe viewed and structured but that idea of still continuing to value my expertise but actually re-working my identity to be somebody that creates value for the company. How did you find those within the function responded and worked with that? Is that something they ran towards and wanted to really grasp hold of or did some people struggle with that? How did that work?

Ben: I think that's a really good question. I think whenever you define with real clarity what you stand for it's never the case that 100% of the organisation turn around and say, yes I get it and I want to go there.

Phil: Okay, yeah.

Ben: My experience on the finance one specifically was that actually a lot of people approached it with curiosity which is in a way all that was needed. For some people it definitely pushed them well out of their comfort zone, however, if you have enough people who can understand it, be supportive of it, be willing to come with it then you don't need a majority, you need a critical mass and I think stuff started to happen which gave it momentum and therefore you need those early adopters, you need the people that are going to come with you and you need to support those colleagues because they are the ones who will help make it happen and persuade others and I think also it is so important to understand that an organisation can only respond to what you do. It doesn't really respond to what you say. Therefore it is not enough to say it and saying it is important but you have to back that up with tangible action that says we'll we said we were this as a consequence of that we've made the following decision and we're implementing it this way. That in the end that positive tangible action is what gives it credibility.

Phil: And in terms of that particular thing that you just said there around an organisation can only respond to what you do, what you say is important, when you use the word organisation were you talking about the finance function as an organisation or were you thinking about the wider business or both?

Ben: Both, both and I think it is an organisation truth generally, whether you're leading a function or a company and if I think about the finance function example the evidencing bit, the first off two finance colleagues so that they can believe it and secondly for the organisation to feel it. What we didn't do is go round telling the rest of the organisation how lucky they were to have a finance function. It was there to create the future company with them. We didn't so much do that but more sort of evidence it through the work.

Phil: Okay so you didn't go shouting from the rooftops.

Ben: No.

Phil: We are here to create the future for you type stuff [laughs].

Ben: No, no definitely not.

Phil: And when you started to change the way that the finance function interfaced with the rest of the business. I'd like to play with that a little bit, only because again something you mentioned just now around credibility, it is the thing that you do and the consistency which you do them then that will affect your credibility. One of my personal mantras I suppose is that your credibility is never yours to exclusively own so what I mean by that is your credibility, aspects of it will always reside with other people because others, whether they be individuals or departments or people within or outside an organisation can limit your credibility without your involvement. So they can bad mouth you, they can set the rumour mill going, they can do it overtly or covertly I suppose in a way, so when you were changing what you did which in a way was renegotiating the way the finance function worked with the rest of the organisation how did the wider business...how did they respond to that? I ask that similar question about the people within finance, what about the wider business? Was there a similar response from them?

Ben: Yes, I think that is true. Whenever behaviour changes my experience has been that it does prompt a reaction and sometimes that reaction is very positive and that was certainly part of our experience and sometimes it was a bit, "Oh, what is going on here then" it was a bit different and I think where we were most successful in having a different approach welcomed was when we had done a good job of understanding how we could bring this new idea to bear in a way that made a really tangible positive difference to the other party. So if I was to reflect on it there were some parts of the business that we really understood where we could make a tangible difference for the better and we set about doing that and by being effective in that and delivering it we made a difference. Where we had less good understanding, in some ways less good relationships we weren't able to identify the quick wins that helped secure the support of others and that was definitely a good learning for all of us.

Phil: So we talked a lot about your experience of working within that particular finance function and you mentioned earlier on that it was almost, you felt like it was something that you had previously but you'd almost taken for granted and it was only then when you joined a new organisation that you were like, oh that sort of stuff is not here. So for you as an individual how was that transition, going from an organisation where it was there but you didn't know it was there to it then not being present?

Ben: I think when you change context, especially when you change for the first time it's always a surprise and of course you look back and think intelligently, logically, I could have been better prepared for that but I think sometimes you don't know what you take for granted until you experience something different and know amount of logic can explain that and so when you first land in a different organisation I think it is quite disorientating for a period of time. There are tools, approached, techniques that stood me in very good stead and when I reapplied them in a different environment they didn't work. So you are left with this head scratching moment where you go, well that's something that I have learnt to do really well and now it doesn't seem to be having the same impact. I think also it is easy to underestimate, when you move from an organisation that you have grown up in, how many relationships you have by accident, because you have grown up in it, because you've been know, because you know others and you know how it works, there's an awful lot of shared history.

Phil: Yes.

Ben: And shared context and shared appreciation and when you then arrive in a new organisation there is none of that and I under estimated how important that was and moving from an organisation where I was well known, well understood, you would never for example have to explain that you were well intentioned.

Phil: Okay yeah [laughs].

Ben: Intent was understood and accepted and proven. When you arrive on day one in a new organisation everyone questions, "Who are you?" and you start to do things and actually you don't have a track record that provides confidence and credibility and a shared understanding. That is so important therefore to invest that time upfront and I would have done that different I think with the benefit of hindsight.

Phil: Yeah and when I think about that kind of transition from moving from a company that you have grown up to somewhere else I've seen it happen a few different ways. As well as your example I also am familiar with occasions where individuals will use it as a chance to shake free of some shackles that may have been there in a previous organisation. In another one, I was never allowed to do this, I was never allowed to do that, so that background, so that previous context and the background and experience meant that I couldn't do any of these things before but now I am in a new organisation working with new people I can renegotiate what I do. I can renegotiate what I am known for because I am not bringing any of that history or that back story with me. It is something that I can create as I go.

Ben: I think that is right and I've heard other people consciously do that. It was never my approach if I am honest. However, different organisational contexts give you an opportunity to test different skills to push the boundaries and there are opportunities to do things differently. There are opportunities to see things done in a different way and to understand, well actually how far can I actually push this skill or push this approach. Oh hang on a minute, this thing that I used to have probably quite a high degree of latitude on in a prior organisation I don't in a new one. Does that bother me or not and so I think inevitably by putting yourself in a different context you get to know more about yourself and what it is you enjoy and don't enjoy.

Phil: So I think that gives a good opportunity to link across to the next change in context for you then which you mentioned earlier was then moving from finance across into more general management aspect. So tell us about that transition then? Sorry that was a really big broad question that has loads of stuff in it.

Ben: [Laughs] well it was exciting actually. It was something that I was keen to do, so I was grateful to be able to do it. I was excited, a little bit daunted, no matter how commercially orientated you are as the Finance Director it is just different, being a Managing Director. The breadth of things that you are dealing with, the immediacy of them. They are very different and I was relishing that whilst at the same time not entirely sure whether I would be any good at it or not. Well I had not done it before and I was leading an organisation where previously I had not been known. So there are a number of things going on but I think I also definitely felt resolved in a way that there were some things that I believed were important and I was going to do them almost no matter what in a way. Saw this as actually a really great learning opportunity more than anything else. This view of how to run organisations that I had thought really hard about and had an opportunity to test those in a different context. Would they work, would they not? I was quite excited about that.

Phil: Of that list of things that you wanted to try out and play with, where did purpose sit on that list?

Ben: Purpose was number one. I had become a real advocate based on the experience of bringing purpose to a function that it would be a real key enabler and very early on in my tenure I started to ask the question why are we here? This was considered a bit esoteric, a little bit left field but actually I had become more convinced it was important to answer it as I began to on-board into the organisation where an awful lot of great work was happening yet it wasn't clear why. So what was it that linked all of the work? What was it that provided the consistent acupoint and I felt getting absolutely clear on what the purpose of the organisation was would bring real clarity to that and a real understanding. Not even most importantly the people that work in the head office environment but most importantly for the thousands of colleagues who were on the frontline delivering a service to customers every day. One of the things I think that gets underestimated is decision making within organisations and certainly I have been part of organisational obsessiveness about decision making where we produce rafts of charts, policies, gantt diagrams, risky models, pace models whatever you will.

Phil: Raci models.

Ben: All of that and it ignores the real truth which in my experience, which is the most important decision is the one that it is the one being made closest to the customer. So you consume vast amounts of organisational energy defining out how the head office process is going to work, thousands of pages of policies and actually what really matters is when a customer stands in front of a colleague and has a question or a requirement or need, what is the response of the colleague and there are millions of those decisions being made every year right across the country without any reference to a policy document or a gannt chart and so it's so important for an organisation to determine what is the framework within which those questions are going to be answered and I felt that providing purpose, clarity would greatly assist the decision making, not only centrally, it helped there but for all of the colleagues down the country who are looking for a guide as to how to get it right because they all desperately wanted to, this would be a good answer.

Phil: Can I rewind us a little bit? We are talking about as an organisation, Boots Opticians and in a way part of me thinks surly it is easy to work out why an opticians business exists? We save peoples sight, or we fix people's eyes, all those sorts of things. You mentioned it being esoteric, how did those within the organisation, was it easy to get under that initial, "Well is obvious why we are here".

Ben: Actually it was because you are absolutely right. A wonderful organisation did an incredible job delivering a brilliant and much needed service to customers. At the same time there are a number of optical providers who would say well we are absolutely passionate about getting it right for our customers and patients and our first answer to the questions was grounded in care, so the response from the organisation was, "We do it because we care" and I didn't doubt for a moment that that was true. The question we then posed was, "Do we think anyone else in the industry would answer it any differently?" And we came to the conclusion that what draws people into the whole industry is the desire to care so simply saying we care or we care the most...

Phil: No we care more than you [laughs].

Ben: Was not a defining answer and wasn't an answer that allowed us to make better decisions and it wasn't an answer that allowed us to align the work and it wasn't an answer that allowed us to take risks and to innovate and I think if you get your purpose really clear it should allow you to do all of those things.

Phil: I agree, one of the things for me personally when I started working for you guys in Opticians the purpose resonated with me from two different perspectives. One from a personal value set point of view, absolutely, it sat with that but also in terms from an emotional engagement point of view in that what it set was a real clear goal and from my purposes, I am going to use my words of purpose and goal interchangeably in that by being really clear about, "This is why we are here" what that then allows people to do is to harness the energy and the power that goes with anger as an emotion and what I mean by that is anger as an emotion has involved because it helps us remove obstacles to goals so we have something we want to get to and something gets in the way. The same reason why a child has a toy they want to get to because something is in their way they will get frustrated to overcome it. If you are driving home and somebody cuts in front of you they're an obstruction to your goal therefore anger will come as a result and for me it was a wonderful example of how anger

can be used to really drive change in an organisation to say, we've got a really clear goal here and there are going to be a load of barriers in the way, a load of things stopping us acting in a purpose lead way, help us get rid of them. Help us overcome them, remove them, knock them down, whatever that maybe as a way to get people to emotionally engage with the purpose. Does that make sense?

Ben: I think it does but when you are really clear what you are aiming for and that is bought into it then provides a threshold, a threshold of acceptability and what definitely happened in my experience was colleagues began to turn around and say well we believe this, we take it seriously and if we are going to really mean it the following has to change. I think it did unleash some real positive dissatisfaction. Well we are not just going to stand for that anymore then are we and it moved the energy and what I mean by that is all organisations can sometimes get hung up as to and invest an awful lot of energy as to whether they are going to do something or not. There are a number of times when having been really clear on the purpose the debate wasn't whether we were going to do something or not, the purpose demanded we ought to. The energy then went into, this is a big daunting thing that we want to go and change here so how are we going to do that but it is much more effective putting the energy into saying, "How do we get this done" as opposed to, "Should we do it at all".

Phil: And so there is some strategic decisions that you are able to make that weren't necessarily expected but were easy?

Ben: I think there were. I think that we were able to quickly get agreement to a different approach to learning and development in terms of where it sat in the priority or with the business because there was a recognition that the purpose was delivered to our customers through our colleagues and it therefore reprioritised where that investment came and I think that was perhaps another good example of we knew that that decision needed to be made even when we didn't know what all of the content would be. So we made it, we ring fenced money as it were and then allowed the content to be shaped subsequent to that so we played a very enabling role and we took decisions such as the one to encourage all colleagues to volunteer more. We wouldn't of made that decision I think as quickly and as boldly as we did without having been really clear on the purpose and instead of trying to work out what the policy on volunteering was, which we probably would have done in the past, we took an approach to say, do you know what, we have got loads of great people in the company. Let's just get them to work it out and so we just evolved all of that decision making. The idea that sat in the Midlands we could effectively guide a monitor the volunteering in Yeovil is, your just kidding yourself. Far better to encourage the local team there to take accountability for the decisions they want to make and where they want to volunteer and how they want to do it because the answer there is going to be different to the one in Glasgow. So you may as well let people work it out locally.

Phil: So as we were talking it out there I was conscious that you and I both have a shared understanding as to what the purpose was for Opticians but our listeners probably don't so it might be useful to share that in terms of...because we keep talking about that it has set a benchmark, that it has set a standard and expectation but those that are listening probably don't know what that was. Could you just articulate what the purpose was for us?

Ben: Yeah sure so the statement was, “We commit to enrich the lives of every person. We are a health lead optician yet care about a whole lot more” and I think the things about it was those words meant something to the organisation. They don’t mean a great deal when you hear them cold for the first time and I think the key attributes of it were we commit so a real sense that everyone needs to be in on this, that we all need to take part, whatever our role is, we all need to be doing what that words suggests which is being all in for it. I think the other aspects of it which is really important which is for every person and that challenged us to think differently about accessibility, how accessible we were and where we open for every person and that was a really good discussion for us to have and a good understanding for us to have and to say we are really concerned with the health aspects of this and we are going to innovate in a way that allows us to advance health in its broadest sense, not just, if you like, clinical health but a broader idea of wellbeing and that’s really what guided our work.

Phil: And linking that back to the lack of policy around the volunteering aspect, I guess that when it came to Yeovil, Glasgow, you make those calls locally, you make those decisions about how you want to...how much time was it for volunteering?

Ben: Two days a year.

Phil: So how you use those two days in Yeovil is up to you, how Glasgow you used them but the need for monitoring which is what you said wasn’t there, almost because the purpose itself would allow that to happen because if in Yeovil or in Glasgow the store manager or the area manager or whoever it is was saying, actually no don’t do your volunteering now, even though you have said you are going to do it today, you can’t do it today because we are really busy, actually the purpose itself would allow the self-regulation or the self-monitoring of that to make sure that is was being honoured and I don’t mean that as in the purpose was being honoured, not necessarily the time.

Ben: Yeah I think for me it was very much the sense of they knew it best. The idea that we can work out what the best form of volunteering was, the best type of volunteering. I just found that really difficult. We all did, we found it difficult to get our heads round. We just knew that if we let our people get on with it, that would be encouraging the right behaviour.

Phil: Good okay. So earlier on we talked about you as an individual and for want of a better phrase that change of identity of moving from one organisation to another realising that there are those aspects that you have in place that you maybe took for granted that weren’t in place when you moved. Then we talked about using purpose as a way to renegotiate the identity of a finance function to one that creates the future for a company or an organisation and then you took that across a whole company. Boots opticians is a discreet part of the wider Boots organisation. So how did you find taking that and then it applying across the whole organisation rather than in a function? How did the business respond and work with that?

Ben: So it was definitely a different scale of challenge. I think my learning would be this is where what you say actually does make a difference because it is vital I think, that in order to just get the words entrenched they have to be repeated ad hominem. I think there is a saying that Propaganda

is the art of repetition and I just made sure that in everything that I did we repeated it all the time so it seeped into the organisation as a language. That's really important. What I found was really helpful as well was to encourage as much direct dialogue as possible so in every organisation, certainly every large organisation there is an element of Chinese whispers, so things get lost or miscommunicated or what you hear on the frontline is definitely not what you started out with so the role as such things as podcasts, recordings, telephone conferences, video messages can play in ensuring the message is heard directly, I think is really important. Keeping it simple is really important and in that articulating, linking and making those links really explicit. So an articulation along the lines of we are undertaking activity A because it links to our purpose, this way is really important to help provide that context and I think then really encouraging the people who are really trying to live it and who are trying to make decisions both locally and nationally that help bring it to life and celebrating that and celebrating the journey I think is really important. And if anything out of all of that, I would do more celebrating.

Phil: [Laughs] I guess there were some challenges along the way as well I would imagine?

Ben: Of course ranging from...I think the challenges include...the big one is the cultural change that comes with it. You could have complete alignment at the top of an organisation and then it needs to somehow get through the organisation and in particular if you have a middle manager who doesn't really agree with it or leads in a different way then that definitely becomes a challenge. Because you have been explicit about the whole organisation it becomes very noticed and challenged. Things such as no organisation can do everything all of the time and so there are some things, which, for example, the employee forum would turn around and say, "Well look, we think we ought to deal with this because if we don't it is not very purpose lead and part of my job would be to say well you are absolutely right and right now we can't do it because we have got our hands full with this other set of priorities and the conclusion is they trump that and that could be quite difficult because everyone's perspective is different. If you're sat in one part of the country or having one particular experience doing your role, your view of what needs to be done will be relevant to your context. Somebody else's will be relevant to theirs and they don't always align as neatly and purposely as you like. So helping explain why those decisions have been made. Why priorities are being called is very important.

Phil: I can imagine making the transition from looking at being really clear about purpose within a function within finance to then moving that across a whole organisation by the services it provides is inherently one that is about people and caring and at the same time there's a very real commercial aspect to that. How about that balance between commerciality and living in a purpose lead way? How did those two things come together?

Ben: This is a question that gets asked a hell of a lot. I think in relation to purpose lead leadership in a sense that the two are incompatible and that is simply not my experience. I will try and explain why. My experience is if you are really clear on the purpose and it genuinely drives the work that you do, first of all there is the enormous benefit of organisation alignment and anyone who has been in and worked in organisations that aren't aligned, right across my career you know how much time, energy and effort is wasted through misalignment and I won't be so bold as to say that purpose and clarity eliminates all of that but it eliminates a hell of a lot of it. The second is if you know what you

are all working against it allows you to innovate and I think there was innovation acceleration as a consequence of being clear, which in turn translates through to and very definitely it has a commercial impact but also means you can really align your partners. No company exists on its own, it works with other companies and other organisations. You can align your partners to that and create mutual value and I think that is also really important and in an organisation where it is about delivering brilliantly for every customer who turns up particularly in a world where as the millennials come into the workforce. Their expectations change significantly. If you are articulating a purpose that speaks to your colleagues and part of the feedback you are getting, which we did was, you've reminded me of why I got into this in the first place, you start to retain great people. Attract great people, tame people who in turn deliver a better service with more expertise and as a consequence there is higher customer satisfaction and that also has a commercial benefit. I think there is also a soft value in a way in an organisation hearing year after year the same thing and the same anchor point driving all the work. If you are in an organisations that chops and changes each year, the start of each year you move the articulation or you change the goal post, or you come up with a new mantra it is hard to go with all of that and what actually happens is you have a collection of legacy mantras that then everybody just picks the one that they prefer that they have heard overtime. If you stick to one, you start to really, get the organisation behind it and I think that really also has a benefit in organisational confidence. Now what is definitely true in my experience at least is that some of the decisions you make because you are purpose lead do not have an immediate return. You're making them for a different reason. That doesn't mean you go soft soap, that doesn't mean you put stuff off. What it does mean is and certainly the way that I looked at it was there needs to be longevity here. So some of the decisions, volunteering would be a good example, did it pay back immediately, no. Did it pay back, definitely but you have got...I think one of the things in having a purpose does is it challenges you to look a little bit over the horizon.

Phil: And I think that is a real challenge both in life and in organisational life in terms of the...because information and data and experiences can be very momentary. There can be something happening on the other side of the world right now and I could find out what it is by doing a quick Google search or by doing a quick interrogation of what is trending on Twitter so the fact that things of the moment are often really close in terms of consciousness, that being able to then look up from that and then see into the future is a task that I think is often overlooked in terms of both individual personal practise but also then organisational practise and performance as well.

Ben: I think that's true and there is no easy answer to that.

Phil: I agree.

Ben: I think having a purpose really helps, but I think it is really incumbent on whoever sat in the Managing Director or equivalent role. Part of their job is to do that because actually nobody else probably will.

Phil: And I think for me that's an inherently and I am biased in the way that I interpret it, but for me that is an inherently emotional thing in terms of the way that individuals are able to work with the emotive aspects of whether that be fear of how the business is performing right now. That can be frustration with how the business can be performing right now. That could be fear of the future,

what could be around the corner and it would be interesting to see whether you agree or disagree because I am happy if you do either of those two things but for me it is inherently an emotive aspect of working as a Managing Director to be able to work with both of those aspects at the same time.

Ben: I think that is right and definitely one of the things I learnt was that as the most senior person, the way you behave, what you value, the standards you set permeates out the whole organisation and you have to manage in a way your own emotions around what is going on. Of course there are times when you are frustrated, you want to bang your head against the wall. You have seen something maybe on a visit around the country and you think, “What on earth is going on here then” but there is such a responsibility for the way you respond to that will set the whole tone for the organisation. I can remember, I was reminded of this recently having a bad day in the office and my HR Director turned around and saying, you’re not allowed because if you are in a grump that has a big impact and she was right. She was right to call me out on it. I was always conscious of, if I was visiting a practise let’s say, there’s a real chance it might be my one and only visit to that part of the country for a long time, particularly if you are going to less accessible places and therefore the impact you have is so important for you to be thoughtful about that. What is going to be the most constructive, helpful, very clearly purpose lead thing that I can do here today? And that is really important.

Phil: I am so pleased that you framed it as constructive and purposeful because for me often I think that the narrative is that you are not allowed to show how you feel. So if you happen to walk into that practise that isn’t as you might like it to be, it is not about ignoring that over, actually I need to make sure that I leave everybody here being really happy, it is about how can I leave here having been very constructive and continue it to be lead in a purpose lead way.

Ben: I think that is spot on. What it’s not is happy clappy, if I put it like that. What it is is about going in and saying so, we have a shared goal. This is our shared ambition. What is going on here then? What is getting in your way? What’s proving difficult? What help do you need? What skills are required? What investment is required? And what are we committing to so that within a month, within two months by the time I come back next time what will we commit to have done? What do you need to commit to because I can allocate resources, what are you going to commit to because the start point is, we want this to be the best it could possibly be for the people that we are privileged to care for with wanting to be great. So what are we going to do? And of course that is a far more rewarding dialogue actually than when you’re taken to places that have been buffed, gleam and have been made to look super-duper and you think well actually I can’t help in the way that I am able to. If this is the vision that is presented to me because you think you ought to because I’m the Managing Director.

Phil: Yeah and I think that buff and that veneer applies to both people and places. So I think absolutely it can be on the places that you go to visit that they wear an extra bit of polish applied that morning but also I think it can apply to people within business in terms of the psychological or the metaphorical buffing that people may do to make that veneer more glossy but actually there is not the depth behind it.

Ben: Well I think that is an interesting point. I just think there is an enormous appetite for authentic leadership. I really do and I think there is a real acceptance actually from organisations at large that people aren't perfect but there isn't much acceptance anymore for people who aren't real and I can think of many engagements with colleagues over the years particularly with employee forum meetings where I had to put my hands up and say look we got this wrong. We got it wrong with good intent but we got it wrong, we understand that and we are going to put it right. And the honesty of the dialogue was hugely appreciated and there is a challenge because there are still people who definitely believe in what I would call senior management sheen.

Phil: [Laughs] I like that.

Ben: And I can think of a couple of hugely talented people who were very difficult to help because they couldn't admit to needing any help and certainly I struggled to find the trick that would get them to a point where they would say, do you know what, this is actually quite hard and to then open that dialogue out, but there was no doubt that the challenge to them of doing that was going to be a career limiter which is a shame because a lot of talent to go places but organisations, I don't think will respond to the best of their ability if provided with leadership they don't quite see being authentic. They may see it as being capable but there is an added level of emotional engagement when people really believe it is real.

Phil: I was running a session in York not too long ago and one of the quotes that seemed to resonate out for me was, "You can be authentic but depending on the context that you're in or the people that you work with, you can be authentic but you can lack credibility", likewise the other way can be true, you can be credible but you can severely lack authenticity and then what sits behind both of those things is your identity and who you are and that is made up by a number of different things and we have been playing with that today in terms of organisational identity, function identity, personal identity, so you almost have different aspects of that and you might foreground or background some of those more or less depending on who you are with and it depends what your concern is. Is your concern about credibility, is it about authenticity, how do I split those up if that makes sense.

Ben: I think that is very true.

Phil: Okay, alright, so I am conscious that we have been...I have really loved chatting today. It has been so much fun but I wanted to bring us to a close to wrap things up. So in terms of advice, I think we've had some practical advice as we have worked our way through, but in summary any advice that you would share with business leaders, HR practitioners or researchers or anyone that is listening to this podcast, any practical advice that you would want to share?

Ben: So what helped me was having the support, certainly the thinking support of some people who got this and could therefore help me. So for anyone who wants to define purpose for their organisation, I would say this is definitely one of those things where I would encourage the accessing of some supportive talent. I think getting clear on what is your role in then taking that to the organisation. The MD might have one role, the HRD might have another role, others throughout the organisation will be different as well but what's the clarity around what your role is in it I think is

really important and I think particularly thinking through if as an organisation we lived this what's it going to be like in a year, three years, five years? On two aspects I think, one, what will we have done and hence what will we look like, would be one and secondly how will it have been? How will it feel? And I think the other things is and this is bananas, if you're absolutely serious about being a purpose lead organisation, ultimately you can't have people in it that don't believe and that is a journey because everyone responds to something different but you can't ultimately overtime, that's the hard bit and you need to make sure as a real priority, particularly if you are doing it, that every single person that you bring in is with the purpose from day one. That has got to be a hiring criteria.

Phil: So I want to ask you a couple of questions about any recommendations about books, videos or talks or anybody else that you think would be useful for us to seek out to interview for this podcast but before I do just to do a final wrap up for everything that we have talked about so far. Is there anything else that you are thinking, feeling or want to say about the topics that we have discussed so far?

Ben: I think the only thing that I would say is that I think it's really worth it. It's not always easy to bring and live purpose through an organisation but it is hugely, hugely rewarding because of the possibilities that it creates, the response it generates and I think also the confidence it generates. I think if you are really clear why an organisation is present and doing the work it is then it does allow an organisation to be confident.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you very much. Any books, videos, talks for people that are interested in finding out more, wanting to do more reading, they are curious to see what is out there. Any recommendations? What we will do is we will put links to these on the podcast as well.

Ben: I definitely found the Simon Sinek video really helpful.

Phil: Start with why one.

Ben: Start with why. When we brought it to the organisation we used the Ted talk of the loan nut dancing on the hill because we knew that for some people this would be a bit out there. One of the books that I most enjoyed reading was Connect by John Brown.

Phil: I have not read that one.

Ben: It's great in my view because what it does is it appeals I think to the audience that needs a logical and rational appeal as well as an emotional one because it uses great examples to articulate why purpose lead leadership is needed now in particular and I think it talks also to the idea of, what's the bank account of credibility that a company has with the public and how it is important to tend to that because in life, so long a business is conducted by humans, stuff will go wrong, absolute guaranteed. The question is what does the public know and believe about you through the type of organisation you are that allows you to deal with that and I think it is really important for people to wrap their heads around that.

Phil: Okay, thank you. That's one added to my reading list.

Ben: So I recommend that and then there are, I don't know, I wouldn't say there is one particular thing but I have personally found diving in and out of social media to be helpful. It is easy on Twitter in particular to put yourself in the way of people who can offer a perspective.

Phil: Okay wonderful, thank you. Is there any individual you think we should track down, anyone we should be approaching to say, "We'd love to hear your thoughts on emotion at work"?

Ben: So I think in terms of emotion at work I would recommend a lady called Jan Hills. I don't know if you know Jan, she is one of the partners at head, heart and brain and what they are really interested in and I have learnt from her is that almost like the neuroscience of leadership. Fascinating but one of the things that I really like is how the brain responds to things like threat and reward, social connection, mind-set and how you sustain through things like empathy, so I think she has got a really interesting perspective.

Phil: Wonderful, I will look Jan up then. Anyone else? I am happy with one.

Ben: I think she would offer something different.

Phil: Alright then Ben, so all that leads me to do is to say thank you very much for your time today, thank you for sharing your experiences, your advice, your guidance and your support as well. Any questions for me before we finish?

Ben: No so that is good, so you said you were going to mash these all up a little bit or you are going to publish them each in turn?

Phil: We are going to publish them each in turn, so we will do a dedicated podcast for each individual that we are interviewing as we go and we've got a combination of, we have got more recordings that are happening this week and into next week with again other business leaders but we have also got some geeky academic researchers, we have got a forensic linguist in the pipeline who is going to be talking to us a bit about language and how people's use of language and words can be used to work out who is saying what and we have also got another lady who is researching burnout and emotional burnout in the workplace. Her context is around the police force in particular but we have got a nice variety and a nice mix of people coming together.

Ben: Great.

Phil: Thank you very much for your time and contributing to the podcast series and we look forward to putting this out on the airways soon. Thank you very much.

Ben: Cheers Phil and enjoy the rest of the week.

Phil: Thanks Ben. Bye.