

Episode 13 – Pause and Reflection from Phil Willcox

Phil: Hello and welcome to the special edition of the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition. This episode is a pausing for breath and a reflective episode. Over the course of the last six months I have produced 12 episodes where I have interviewed different practioners, researchers or those that are interested in the fields of emotion, credibility and deception in the workplace but we have explored a whole host of different themes. I will come back to those as we go. On average we have had a podcast out every two weeks and bear in mind our podcasts are quite long form so I think the shortest I've managed is a 40 minute one and episode 12 has been an hour and 40 minutes, which I think is our longest by far. So we have done a lot of stuff and we have covered a lot of ground and I guess I wanted to take some time to just pause and reflect on all of that stuff and all of those episodes but also how the experience has been for me over the course of that time as well.

Also to the keen eared listener, over the last few episodes, I started mentioning it in episode nine, which was the neuroscience one, I have been struggling with some health stuff and that's to do with an injury I sustained at Christmas last year and to fix said injury needs me taking a substantial amount of time off work. So I am going to be taking a couple of months off in a couple of months away and I worked hard to make sure that while I am away the podcast series continues. When you are listening to this, I will already have been off for a number of weeks and I have still got some weeks to go. What you'll hear over the next three episodes of the Emotion at Work podcast will be a re-broadcast. So I am going to re-broadcast some of my favourite episodes that we have covered so far and I am going to focus on the earlier episodes from the podcast because what I have seen is the amount of people engaging with the podcast has increased massively over the last two months. Over the last eight weeks I have nearly doubled in the daily downloads of the podcast. I want to make sure the earlier episodes that have got some absolute corkers in there, that they are getting some really quality airtime as well so we are going to re-broadcast some of the earlier episodes but also I am going to add some reflection from me today.

Between when you are listening to this which will be on 16th November or thereabouts, so between now and the end of the year we will re-broadcast some of the earlier episodes and then I am hoping to come back in early 2018 and I will let you know later on in this episode who we have got lined up for next year. We have got some really, really great guests lined up to start us off next year which is really good too.

So I was looking back over the series of podcasts that we have done so far and I just loved every second of the conversations that I have had and I think that is part of the reason I am still going. That I have thoroughly enjoyed and loved every podcast interview I have done so far. The learning I have had from the guests that we've had on, from the conversations that have taken place and then the impact on my own personal practise has been noticeable and I thought it might be helpful to go back and look through that really. If I take us all the way to episode two, even though it is called episode two, this is the first proper episode. Episode one was me setting the context as to why I wanted to do the podcast and all of the reasons I said in the first episode still hold true. If I think about episode two, this was where I had a long chat with Sarah Jayne-Lennie and we talked about



her role as a Detective Inspector at Greater Manchester Police and then the emotion rules that govern the regulation and expression of emotion in that setting, in that law enforcement environment and she talked about how the credible emotion is anger. Any other emotion is not credible, so fear is not credible as an example. Anger is the dominantly credible emotion and that got me really thinking about what is the dominant credible emotion in other workplaces that I engage with. So that could be other workplaces that I engage with as a customer, so when I go into stores, or when I go into offices or when I go into places. What seems to be the dominant credible way to go about your work? And I found that it really varies and that there are some where it appears to be one thing but I think it's actually another. There is one workplace in particular where the common narrative is around positivity and the importance on focusing on the customer and the customer experience, but actually what I experience is the almost relentlessness of that focus creates an environment of a mixture of fear and suppression, because I pick up lots of signals of fear around if the customer isn't having a good experience or if a customer isn't having an amazing experience that I as an individual who might be interacting with that customer is going to be disciplined or chastised or challenged or told off because the customer isn't having the experience. For me I find that a really interesting way that an organisation where it is wholly appropriate and accurate to put the customer at the heart of what they do actually has created a culture of incessant pressure and fear and my experience of interacting with the senior leaders within that organisation is that they have very little or no awareness that that is the case. I find that really hard to work with. So I find it really hard to work with as someone, so this is not a client of mine, this is an organisation that I know well but isn't a client of mine so I don't have a role in trying to make it better. So it's not like they have brought me in to say Phil can you help make this better and I'm finding it really hard to work with as an individual who kind of knows this stuff because I see it, I can hear it, I can feel it when I'm in the organisation, but it's not my place to do anything about that and I am really struggling with it because I can see the fear and the anxiety and the trepidation that is just prevalent within the people that interact with customers but I have no role in doing anything with or about that and I find that really hard and it takes me back to this episode with SJ Lennie where we talked about the importance of de-pacting as a researcher would call it where people have to suppress the emotions that they are experiencing to such an extent that they then have to create and act in a way that is very different to how they are feeling and then the burnout that goes with that. I find it exhausting and I don't even work there so how it must be for people that work there is just amazing and I really worry about the future health and wellbeing for the people that work in that environment and it has got me thinking how do I help and what can I do to help. I don't have the answers to those questions yet, something that I am working with. I am using that to take us into a sedgeway into episode three.

Episode three was the special edition from the CIPD's L&D show that took place in London this year and here I interviewed Peter Cheese the Chief Exec of the CIPD and had a really interesting three way conversation with Barbra Thompson and Jo Cook. One of the things that still sticks with me in this interaction is the conversation with Jo and Barbra where we talked about the different personas that people may have. So we have talked about the different personas that people can have online. Barbra on Twitter is @CaribThompson and I remember her talking about how she has different social media channels, so like different versions of her. So she has different versions of Barbra that she puts out to the world in different ways across different social media channels and I remember being fascinated with this at the time but my interest in it has gone even further now where I'm

starting to think even more about what different social media channels do I use for what purpose. So interestingly as an example this podcast is the only channel on which I have spoken about my health stuff in a public way so I haven't put anything on Facebook, I haven't put anything on Twitter, I haven't put anything on Instagram about it and it's interesting that I reflect on, well why is that? I think it is because of the personal connection that I have with both you as my listeners and my audience but also with my guests that I get on the podcast as well because it is a more personal interaction and a more depth of detail of conversation that I am having with this individual and I don't think it is strategic but it might be, that sharing of more personal information, especially at the start of the podcast which is where I tend to do it. I wonder if I am doing that at some level to get more sharing back from the person that I am interacting with. I don't like glossing over the how are you question. So if you've listen to a number of the episodes you will know that I talk about the how are you question as a social lubricant and Jessica Roblow in episode ten I think talked about Harvey Saks work in terms of the paper, "Everyone Must Lie," in response to the how are you question and I don't like doing that. When somebody asks me at the start of the podcast, "How are you doing?" I don't want to share everything because even in this episode I haven't told you what's really going on and what's wrong, I've just told you that I'm unwell but I find it interesting when I reflect on why have I chosen this media to share that information where I have not shared it elsewhere. That interplay of what parts of what aspects of myself do I share across different social media platforms and channels and why, is a really interesting one for me to think about. I have been more discerning with what I share, where I share it and how I share it. I have been much more thoughtful about what I'm doing and why I am doing it and where all that sort of stuff is coming from as a result of the conversation that Barbra and Jo had at the L&D show in May.

That brings us onto episode four where I had the wonderful opportunity to chat with Ben Fletcher, so he is at @arrowmaker76 on Twitter and we talked about the role of purpose and meaning in the workplace and I will be honest, I could talk to Ben forever really. I would love to hear him talk about his passion for purpose and his drive for wanting people to have genuine meaning in their work and I'm incredibly proud of the work that we did at Boots Opticians together. I've taken that on in both my personal life in terms of my own personal purpose but I have also taken that on to really start to play with the notion of purpose with other clients as well both on an individual perspective and at an organisational level. So helping individuals think about their personal purpose, what do they stand for, what are their values, what are their beliefs and those sorts of things and I find it a hugely rewarding thing to do and I am yet to have someone tell me that it's a process that they see little value in. So I am working with a group of individuals at the moment on a talent programme. We've spent, over social tools, so using slack as a channel, we have already started a discussion about, no that's a lie, we started it in a face to face discussion and then we continued it over slack exploring what is someone's purpose? What is their why? What is there reason for being? I am two thirds of the way through Grit which is a book by Angela Duckworth where she talks about the importance of passion and perseverance and playing with all of those notions. I find it a hugely rewarding thing both for me personally but also for working with other people and it's often taking individuals into a way of thinking, in a way that they have not experienced before and I really enjoy that and I enjoy seeing other people grappling with what are tricky and difficult and challenging questions, but once grappled with, what individuals share are the hugely beneficial results of grappling with those things. It's very much a thing that I want to continue and build on. So then we go onto episode five. I talked with Georgie Nightingall or the keen listener or the long-time listener will know that her practise of

changing up conversation by asking different questions and moving on from the transactional, “So what do you do” question has been hugely beneficial and again what I have started to do is to take some of the questions that she shared with me both in that podcast and afterwards and take them out to use in bigger broader life. I am really enjoying changing up the types of interactions that I have with people in coffee shops. I know that is something that Georgie talks about as well but just changing that interaction from, “Can I have a white tea and this sandwich please or a white tea and a porridge with honey and banana please” and just changing up that transactional ritual conversation to be something different and I am finding I get a lot more richness and joy from my day. I get to know people a little bit better. I get to build a more interesting connection and discussion with other people and I find it really enjoyable and so taking those questions both into my personal life and into my professional life I found to be really, really useful. I hope the questions she shared both in that podcast and also that I have used since, I hope they are helpful for you.

Then we go to episode six where we went in quite a different direction. This was our first soiree down the deception and forensics route where Doctor Sam Lana from Manchester Met University came along and talked to us about forensic linguistics and how forensic linguistics can help us in what we do and the bit that really stuck for me in that was the use of formulaic language, so Sam introduced us to this term formulaic language where we look at language from a chunks point of view. So rather than thinking about creating individual words we combine words together to create chunks of words and where I get really interested is listening to that formulaic language with the clients that I interact with and what are the phrases or the sayings that appear to be formulaic. So what are the sort of stock phrases. I have taken on a level to go what does that mean? That’s not true, what does that tell me or what can that tell me about this organisation? So, if I think about one of my clients that I am working with at the moment they say the customer is everything and that’s a formulaic phrase that gets trotted out on a regular basis. In meetings, in discussions I will hear the phrase the customer is everything and I find that fascinating. Whilst there are other values within that organisation that talks about colleagues and employees those other formulaic phrases that are there within the organisation don’t get talked about anywhere near as much as the customer is everything, so that tells me where the focus really is. So even though there are other values that talk about colleagues and employees, actually the way that those formulaic phrases are used and the frequency at which they’re used indicates to me that the customer is paramount in everything that that organisation does. Now for me that is not a bad thing, that is just a thing and what that also tells me though is it gives me potential indicators of where I need to frame my work. So the work that I am doing with that client, how I need to frame it so it has the most resonance with the client but also it tells me where the focus and the attention is within the organisation. So the focus and the attention appears as though it will be on the customer over the colleague or employee. It is something that I am continuing to observe to see how does that play out then in interaction but also in performance and in the way that performance is managed and communicated. So that is one I’m continuing to watch that was triggered by Sam and I am linking that into episode seven where I talked with Khurshed Dehnugara and Claire Genkai Breeze. We talked about a few things, we talked about vulnerability, we talked about being flawed but willing, but one of the bits that really stuck out for me was this idea of a near enemy. When I then think back to my previous example of the customer is everything, what’s the near enemy of that? So the near enemy of that is we’ve become blind to everything else. So it is all very well having a focus on the customer but the near enemy of that is becoming blind to anything else. So we then become blind to other issues or other people or

other situations or other things that aren't the customer and if we become blind to that, what does that mean about the way that we interact with other people? For me the really interesting thing is about how does the formulaic language and what could that indicate for me about the culture and then what's the near enemy of that because having a really strong customer focus can be a massively beneficial thing for an organisation. At the same time the near enemy of that is we ignore everything else at the expense of the customer and that for me is an interesting quandary to go into.

Episode eight was about listener questions so I had questions from a few different people from Annette Hill (@familyhrguru), Ross Garner (@RossGarnerGP), Patrick Mullarkey (@mentormullarkey) and Sarah Taylor and it's Sarah Taylor's one that sticks out at me and she is one of the guests that we have got to come in the future. I have been pondering a lot on the balance between self-acceptance and self-improvement was her question. I gave my response at the time but it is something that I have continued to think about in terms of excepting myself and what I am, who I am, what I do, how I do it and how does that, because I have a real strong reflective practise aspect to me, so I don't journal in a traditional sense. I do audio recording of my reflections and I listen back to them and that gives me cues and clues around self-improvement and things that I want to do. I also know that I can be really hard on myself in terms of things that I have done, ways that I have done it, ways that I have gone about it, things that I have achieved or succeeded or not and I am wondering at what point do I need to just except myself as I am and to what extent do I need to continue to improve and it's an ongoing thing that I am grappling with. One of the things that I have decided to except is that I ask lots of questions and can I ask better questions and episode 11 of the podcast was about clean language and that got me interested in different types of questions and questions to ask. I'm excepting that my ability to craft a question is already high and sometimes that question may or may not need crafting and my awareness of when it does and doesn't need crafting is high, so I am okay with that as an area that I have been practising and working on a lot over a number of years and I am going to accept that that's okay now. There are other things that I want to continue to work on. It has been a really interesting one to decide what am I going to except that I am good at. Do I think I am the best questioner in the world ever...no, do I think there are still things that I could learn about questioning...yes. Is that something I want to continue to actively pursue at this moment in time...no. Will I come back to it later in the future...maybe, I don't know but for now I'm accepting that that is where it is.

Episode nine was Emotion at Work in Neuro Science where I had a really fab chat with Matt Wall where we talked about myths, misconceptions and issues of methodology when it comes to neuro science and the thing that continues to stick with me from the discussion with Matt is, "Does it matter if the wider population don't know what's happening in the brain when something happens?" So we were talking about happiness and the different chemical releases that go with that. Does it matter if people don't know that? So we can ask people if they are happy, does it matter if we know or measure what's happening within them when they do it if they report that they are happy? And part of me says yes and part of me says no, because people lie. Somebody might self-report as being happy but there could be different contextual and societal pressures that are influencing that self-reporting as happy. Would it be beneficial to quantify or qualify that with other data and other stimulus? Maybe it would but is it worth it is the bit I keep coming back to. So whilst it may be useful and interesting to get that wider data to challenge or support it does it matter? So when people walk out of a shop or when they go through an airport where they have

got those rating things where you have got to hit a face that is angry, sad, okay, a bit happier, really big smiling emoji, are the airports or the stores also reviewing the CCTV footage to find out if they were genuine smiles depicted during the course of that visit to the store that supports or reinforces the rating that they gave as they left or did they just take the rating as it is excepting the fact that children will press buttons that don't necessarily correlate, that teenagers might go in and press the sad button loads and loads and loads of times because it's funny. That they just accept that those things will happen and they've got ways and means of aggregating it without getting all the other stuff that sits behind it. So it's an ongoing one for me to work and debate with because my initial thinking is, it might be interesting for me as an emotion credibility and deception practitioner and researcher. So it might be really useful for me to know what's going on behind the scenes but does everybody else need to know that and I guess that's the challenge. And it's a challenge for me in the design work that I do for the learning that I organise both digitally and face to face so I can analyse interaction down to the really specific turn taking aspect but does everybody else need to know that level or that depth of knowledge or can they just ask me to come in and help them where they need to. It's an interesting one to think about.

Thinking of interaction that takes us onto episode ten where I talked to Dr Jessica Robles about Emotion at Work in everyday talk and I loved this conversation. It was great fun talking about the different things that happen in interaction and the way that individuals speak with each other and the one thing that I have been thinking about more and more, one thing we talked about at the end of the podcast which was about children and crying. So nothing really to do with my work at all, at least not directly thinking about do children leave gaps in crying for adults or careers to come in and support them and I have been looking at them in my four year old because he's the one that cries the most and he definitely does but I think a lot of his crying is strategic crying as opposed to genuine. I'm more interested in when he has injured himself and those cries than I am with his cries of disappointment that he is not getting sweets today or something equivalent to that and what I am noticing in those cries where he has injured himself is initially there will be a number of wails while he's busy assessing the wound that he has got on his knee or his arm or wherever it might be but then he will leave spaces for me to come in and interject. I am really looking forward to seeing how her research progresses.

Episode 11 is about clean language. This is quite recent for me so this recording was October and we are now mid-November so there is more work for me to do in reading around the questions that Judy Rees talked about from David Grove's work where his studies began. So I need to do more reading around it and the bit that still sticks with me from this episode is the pressure I felt in the initial stages to do something in response to the questions that were being asked. I felt like I was being asked to orientate something somewhere I didn't really want to do it and I had a conversation on Twitter with somebody afterwards where we were pondering...so I pushed back and refused to answer the question and I refused to situate something physically. My physiology refused to situate it and we were discussing around is that something that others would do or would that pressure of wanting to answer the question be too much and they would give a response that might not necessarily be accurate or true. They are just giving a response because of that and it has got me thinking of the types of questions that I ask in the coaching sessions in the consultation work that I do. How much pressure am I putting on those people that I'm asking questions of in the interactions that I have and to what extent are they then complying because they feel they need to comply as

opposed to giving a genuine response. And there was a facilitation event that I was doing recently where I had five questions that built their way up in degrees of personalness, so question one, you will have heard me use before: What have you craved this week? And then that worked all the way up to question five where I stole a bit of world blue language and said, “What would you do with your career if you weren’t afraid”. And bear in mind all of these people worked in the same organisation nobody had, in their response to that question, nobody had been working in that organisation as part of it anymore. So all of them had left the organisation they were currently working in and gone on to do something different and my reflections afterwards were on the question. So the question of, “What would you do with your career if you weren’t afraid?” So part of it is to do with the meaning that we take, so we talked about meaning before in terms of how people can interpret one question, or one statement or one action in two very different ways. So was that interpreted as a complete freedom question? If I was able to do anything, with money no object and no other practical reality issues in the way, what would I do? I would do this and we had some real amazing responses, but was it a stretch too far I guess is my thought, is my question. Was it a step too far in terms of was it too abstract? Were the responses genuine that these are things that people actually seriously want to do or was this pipe dream type stuff. So one for me to think about in terms of where do I go with that or a similar question in the future.

And then finally episode twelve talking with Professor Dawn Archer which, the longest podcast to date, an hour and 40 minutes was just a joy to behold and there is so much in there that I have and will continue to reflect on, but it was only recorded recently. It was only recorded about a week or so ago from where I am now, so I haven’t done lots of processing with it. So I am going to leave episode twelve there and one I will come back to at a future date or time. And then when I pause and think, I will do the meta thing but I tend to do meta stuff as you all know by now, there is a lot of my own personal reflections in that just across those eleven episodes that have come so far. So I hope you’ve had similar occasions to reflect and that it’s given you the content that you’ve heard as we have worked our way through the last six months. I have also given you cause for thought and opportunities to pause and reflect. I hope me sharing some of my reflections has been both helpful and useful as well.

I want to do a pause and a movie edit into, “Still to come on the Emotion at Work podcast” so guests lined up then...I mentioned one earlier, Sarah Taylor, we’ve got an interview lined up with her, also professor Cary Cooper who is the president of the CIPD. He and I are talking about mental health. Also talking to an emotion and memory researcher. We are trying to get a date in the diary lined up so we can talk about the role between memory and learning because I think they are interesting distinctions to give. So some really interesting and exciting guests still to come.

So to pull this episode together, I just want to say thanks for listening. Thank you if you subscribe on I-tunes or Podbean or overcast or wherever you get your podcasts from. Thank you so much for listening to the Emotion at Work podcast. I thoroughly enjoy producing these podcasts and it is hugely beneficial for me to do so. If you have time and the inclination I would love you to give me a review on I-tunes if you are an Apple subscriber or review me wherever you get your podcast from. I would be very grateful and it’s always good to hear what you guys think of the content that we are putting out there to the big wide world.



Thanks for listening, enjoy the rebroadcast that come over the next few weeks and unless you hear from me before have a wonderful Christmas and a fantastic New Year and I will see you for the next new episode in 2018.

Thanks for listening.