

Episode #: 05

Episode Title: What's changed in change?

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Intro

Louise Everett (00:11)

Welcome to ClarityMatters.

Welcome to ClarityMatters, the podcast where we cut through noise, complexity and overwhelm to help leaders think, communicate and lead clearly. Change in the workplace is no longer a project with a start and end date. It has become the operating system of modern organisations - rewriting what it means to lead, communicate, and sustain performance over time. When strategies, structures, and priorities are in constant flux, the old model of 'communicate the change, then return to business as usual' just doesn't hold. In the newly released 2026 Gallagher Employee

Communications report, change management communication was the top-ranked skill for communications teams. And yet, 61% of teams report that they still don't have a defined change communications approach built into their strategy. That's a significant gap. The systems supporting change communications haven't evolved, forcing teams to react to change rather than shaping it and driving adoption.

The result is that communication becomes reactive. Messages feel fragmented and employees experience change as something being done to them, rather than something they understand and can move with. In this episode, we're talking about what it really takes to lead when the ground keeps shifting - when you're navigating constant change yourself while trying to provide clarity and direction for everyone else.

Not the theory. The reality. The pressure. The ambiguity. And how to avoid burning out your best people in the process. So my guest today is Eleanor Tweddell. Eleanor refers to herself as a 'corporate escapee', having spent over two decades working in corporate roles for brands like Costa Coffee, Virgin Atlantic, Vodafone and Whitbread before building a portfolio career focused on helping people navigate change.

She's the founder of Another Door, which supports individuals through career transitions and helps organisations handle change in more human, constructive ways. Eleanor now works as a coach, speaker, and change partner for leaders and teams.

And she's also the author of *Why Losing Your Job Could Be the Best Thing That Ever Happened to You*, and a new book *Another Door Opens*.

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If you're responsible for leading others through constant flux, or you're simply tired of the same old change playbook, this conversation is for you. Eleanor, welcome to ClarityMatters. It's such a pleasure to have you.

Eleanor (02:46)

Thank you so much for having me and that introduction. It's always so awkward, isn't it? Listening to somebody introduce yourself.

Louise Everett (01:30)

It's wonderful, you've done so much. And you remember that when it's played back to you.

Main conversation

Louise Everett (03:00)

Your work sits right at the intersection of personal and organisational change. So I know we're going to hear some really rich perspectives in our conversation today. So let's jump straight in. Change is now ever present in most organisations. From what you're seeing, what's different about leading in change now?

Eleanor (03:26)

Oh I mean, where do we start, Louise? Where do we start? Maybe I'll just pick up on how I sort of started to zoom in on this space of change because, as you explained, I've been in comms, in-house comms, for 21 years. So head of comms for all kinds of different brands and industries. And then when I was made redundant myself, and I decided to go alone and escape corporate life,

I just did the easy thing at first and got a contract doing more comms. Then I started to get really interested in problem solving because I realised if I wanted to start alone and really grow a business, it has to be solving people's problems. And that's where my fascinating kind of intrigue with change really hit me. Even though, as you said, like we've all done this.

There's not really any change in change to a degree, but there's everything that's changed. You know, it's that kind of weird position we're in. So when I started to freelance, I was still going into organisations on a contract and helping them through change and being the comms person. But I was just seeing the same conversations. People getting stressed and people getting angsty. What we kind of get brought into, and I'm sure you do as well, Louise, is: a CEO who's frustrated that the change message isn't getting through to people. And so it's like more comms, more comms. So that's kind of where it all started back in the day. Like the comms isn't getting through. Let's fire out more comms, this just isn't working. So that's probably where I would start with answering that question, because my intrigue sat with the question of how can we do this better? This is just a repeat. And you know, I've been in this for 25 years, so why are we still repeating this? So I started getting into behavioural change, human dynamics,

like what really happens when change comes our way. And I started mapping out what I heard and saw. So I kind of put the theories to one side because they've always been there. We've all got all the beautiful methodologies. I've even got Kotter's book on my desk, look, I'm sure you know it. Why I'm not sure, I don't know.

It's been on my desk for about two weeks. I'm not sure why, "Leading change" by John Kotter, which right now is actually pretty useless because it's still there. Yeah, you could do a book snap, you know, with these methodologies that have been there for a long time. They're really established, and yet somehow, we still can't do it. So that's where my sort of fascination started.

What I think has massively changed isn't so much how humans change. It's our understanding of change and what it is. And my whole message is - we change every single day. Every single day as humans, we have either micro change come our way, or we have macro change come our way. And it's just part of evolving and growing as a human.

But it's how we acknowledge it. So I think what's changed is our understanding of what changes, how it's part of daily life. And the moment it becomes a biggie, is the moment that we acknowledge it. So even on your way to work today for people listening, maybe you got that beautiful moment where the road was closed. Like your usual commute.

Road closed. What happens in that micro moment is change. You know that moment of, oh my goodness, I'm going to be late for work. But you can escalate to a catastrophic, amazing moment if you allow, where your whole world has just collapsed because the road's closed. Or you can just breathe it out and go, okay, just reroute or maybe go home or let's find a different route.

That's a moment of change, micro change, and it impacts us. It's how we acknowledge it, it's how we receive it. So that is really where my work is now. It's around how we receive change rather than just this kind of process, maybe 'project' thing, that we think it has been in the past.

Louise Everett (07:47)

And it was, when we first started out in our careers, and we've seen that through our communications work. It was a project, wasn't it? It was a change project, we've got a transformation project. And now it is that ever-present piece. So it's just giving it that attention. And it's also so deeply rooted in human emotion, human feelings, you know. It didn't feel so much that it was so human back then, and it was - this is the process, and this is what we need to follow and flow through. So what you've described is just really getting back to that human-centric focus.

Eleanor (08:28)

Yeah. And the bit about that is, I kind of blog about things like this. Every single week, we've all just got questions and explorations. One of the things that came up for me was the theme of compliance. So I think there was a moment in time in the workplace, where we were kind of brought in in the productivity space, and that's what we were there to do. And we were

given a contract to deliver, and there was compliance around that. So change was really like, oh, we're changing something. Comply. Done.

But if you think about the evolution of employee engagement and then employee experience, you know, we've moved away from the utility of productivity being 'You're a resource. You do as you're told. Done'. When we started to talk about engagement and people saying, oh yeah, but we need people to be happy and fulfilled, and we need them to connect with what they're doing and have a say, and therefore produce more - because that was the theory - that kind of opened up a different way that change then sits, because people now can say, well, hang on a minute, I'm not engaged in this change. And you've told me that you want me to be connected with this, and I'm not anymore. So actually, that's where the rulebook changed.

We did it, or we didn't. But, you know, the sentiment of employee engagement did it. And so I think that's to be recognised, or it should be kind of recognised as the moment. That's what's different. We're not in a compliance space. We've told people we want you to be engaged and speak up. So they are.

Louise Everett (10:05)

And that's massively different, isn't it. Articulating it in that way, it is obvious, but I haven't really thought about it in that way before. So the emergence and the sort of focus on employee engagement has really then changed how we approach change because everyone has more of a voice. Everyone, we have to take more things into consideration, rather than the sort of the old command and control 'we say, you do' approach, which of course doesn't work at all in industry today.

Eleanor (10:37)

Yeah.

Louise Everett (10:38)

That's fascinating.

Eleanor (10:39)

So why are we now confused when we're telling people our new beautiful vision, they're arguing and the leadership are like, well, why are they arguing? Well, because you keep telling people that their voice is important.

Louise Everett (10:38)

Very true, very true. I've got about almost 100 questions I could ask. But I'm going to move to my next one. So when change is continuous like it is now, and of course, not occasional like it very much used to be, how does communication need to adapt to that?

Eleanor (11:10)

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I was working with a team a couple of months ago, a leadership team, and really, it was a training programme. They just wanted me to come in and help train their leaders to do better comms. And that's kind of where it started. And then the organisation changed and something happened, and suddenly they were like, oh, could you now develop a little bit more of a conversation around this moment? Because there's a lot of uncertainty. And actually, that was a really interesting one for me to dig around, because

I was kind of just going through my process, what I do, you know, Louise, this is our default and then we shapeshift it into what the client needs. And what I was thinking was actually the very first thing comms people need to do is step back, think about what is it that we're actually trying to achieve and how aligned are we in the strategy.

And it sounds so obvious, but so many times comms gets disconnected from the business strategy. And even worse, if there's no business strategy because of change and uncertainty, then where's it going? What's it for? So the conversation with that leadership team was, no, we're not here to rally people behind the vision like Kotter. Maybe that's why I've got that book on my desk.

Maybe that's where it's come from, me exploring this. Because, you know, Kotter is all about create a sense of urgency, create a vision and rally people behind it. If there isn't that because there can't be, because there's uncertainty, then your role has to shift as a leader because you haven't got answers. You can't make promises. You can't rally and motivate people behind something.

So you as a leader have to change into this person who is more about listening space and reassurance. And so that's where that particular example went. But obviously it got me thinking about actually, yeah, we're in a moment where we shouldn't be trying to engage and inspire and motivate. No, we should be shifting very consciously. Our comms strategy is now about reassurance. Where we can, it should be about open to messy conversations.

That's what I kind of call it. That's what we did in the workshop. Like what does a messy conversation look like? Well, it's where you have no answers as a leader and you feel really vulnerable. That's what people want because they understand that. If they suspect that you're keeping things back or they think, well, you're not telling me all the answers here, you must know where the business is going.

You know, you keep saying you're going to take this action away and try and fix it. Well, you must know something. That's where trust erodes. So I think the comms job shifts significantly to help leaders to be actually better at holding space in uncertainty and not having answers and getting people to just converse in like, where are we at?

What's our priorities right now? What can we control? What can't we control? That I think is hugely important.

Louise Everett (14:11)

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Even if you're going through change and we've said change is kind of always present, is there a way to match up how to lead communications through change, while still also maintaining a strategy and the vision?

Eleanor (14:26)

Well, it depends if that still holds up, I guess. So in some change it still stands and in other change it's an uncertainty where that actually doesn't stand anymore. So like the example of M&A, so if someone gets taken over or a merger happens, you can almost rip up the kind of beautiful strategy deck and everything because you don't really know where it's going. Even when they say they've bought you as an entity, and this is why, you don't really know. So you're now in the unknown. So the strategy is we need to keep serving. It's very tactical. It shifts from a longer-term aspiration to tactics that say, okay, we need to keep serving our customers that we've got, because that's a known, we need to keep production going, because that's a known.

So you almost have to withdraw from this longer-term piece and go really short-term tactics to keep things going. And that demands a very different leader. It demands different comms, it's into operational comms. So you shouldn't be doing aspirational and inspirational stuff in these moments in time. But what this all means is the comms team have to be really closely connected into business strategy and where the leader's mind is to help shape that.

And I think sometimes there's a disconnect there. I've been fortunate, I've always worked for the CEO, but I can imagine if you're not, you could perhaps get a bit disconnected. But as a comms person, you should always just try and think like, is the strategy still true and standing up? Because if we keep pumping out comms that is disconnected, people know. They're not stupid. So it kind of actually does more harm than good. So I think comms has to shift and comms is not just comms anyway. It should be very much about learning. It should be very much about, you know, helping conversations, not always just having answers. So I think that's where the strategy shifts.

Louise Everett (16:27)

And that also encourages more connection as well. In large organisations it could be a separate team. So if you've got a separate change comms team to work very closely with the folks that have created all the corporate narrative, the strategy, the vision to make those adjustments, to ensure that it's moving and shifting in the direction that it needs to. And there isn't one that's continuing to bang the drum over here, and another that's saying, actually, hang on.

Eleanor (16:56)

That's exactly it. And how many times does that not happen? I mean, it's so obvious, but I do think that's the job of the human communicator to join the dots. That's what we do do. That

has to be your superpower as a communicator. To join dots, to go searching, to try and find that. Because if you're sitting in your silo, you're relying on the audience then to make the connection or disregard, and that's no good. AI is a tool, fine, we can use it. But really, the human element of connecting dots, understanding what the audience is going through, that's where we add value in these moments. We're very close to understanding what a human needs at that moment in time. And as you say, joining it up so it makes sense.

It's not coming from different angles and confusing people. I mean, the very simple tactic is how much broadcast have we got, like stuff we're just pumping out. And how much in our strategy is about, I like the word you use, that connection, conversation? How much are we hooked in with learning? Because comms and learning, I mean, it blows my mind that they don't sit together and plan together and strategise together, because it's the same thing. When you communicate something, you learn something. When you learn something, you communicate, you know, why aren't we doing this together? So how connected are we? Because leaders might need a new skill very quickly.

So, you know, a company gets taken over. Leaders need the skill of difficult conversations, or like what I call it, messy conversations. When you sit there and go, I don't have answers. Let's just talk about how we're feeling, what we need to prioritise. That's very different from someone learning last week that they had to be this strong leader with all the answers and the vision and motivating and inspiring people. It's very different. So I think that in those moments of change, stepping back, looking at your strategy and getting a really good balance of broadcast versus this kind of more conversational tool that we have, is key.

Louise Everett (18:59)

You've raised a really interesting point there about leaders and managers. They're navigating change themselves. So what helps them to maintain that clarity and direction for their teams? You know, they're living change and they need to lead it as well. So how in your work, how do you help them? How do you equip them to manage through that?

Eleanor (19:24)

Well, of course, I have my five steps that people follow. I think one of the most important things, I mean, the first step is stopping, like everyone has to stop. And it starts with leaders. I love the, I like playing with words like: great change starts by stopping and starting to understand how you stop well.

That's a sentence you can't say quickly no matter how hard you try. But it's true. You know, you have to stop. So as a leader, creating space for you to think suddenly becomes like real gold moments, which hardly anyone does because you're in a panic, you're suddenly, your inbox is full and your mind is full, and you're trying to take on other people's stuff as well as your own stuff. You have to take time out, but you have to do it in a way that works for you, that you feel comfortable with. It's no good someone saying, oh, right, we're all going to kind of go and sit in a field for an hour and think. That's no good, because some people would completely freak out and that would be useless.

Other people, you know, might enjoy it, but they have to work out pausing and thinking, and what it looks like for you and build it into your routine. Because that's the only time you get

really rich nuggets. And then the bit around pause. What do you do? I always kind of think in circles, and I kind of feel like you become a circle. You're the leader. Your team are the other circle. And now where you need to think about is this overlap. So in your moment of pause, in your moment of thinking, consider yourself - where am I at? How am I doing? What do I need? What's on my mind? Because unless you do that, you can't really be there for your team.

The next circle is where are they at? What do they need? You know, how do we operate? And making sure that everybody understands there's an overlap here that we need to get to, and that's where conversations come from. It's where priorities come from. So I think there's those little tools that just help. But unless you're taking time out to think and understand that that's part of productivity, I think you're just going to be constantly on the way to burnout.

Louise Everett (21:44)

Do your clients find that easy to do?

Eleanor (21:46)

No, no, definitely not. So I think we have a pause problem in all walks of life. And I see it in all sorts of ways, which is sometimes funny, but also kind of sad. So like, I can run a workshop for two hours and I'll start with pause because that's the steps we do: thinking, resting, reflecting.

Like, how do you do this well? Because unless you do it, what are you doing? Like, you know, what are you actually doing? So we stop and in one of the workshops, all I do is get people to sit there for a minute in silence, just write down what's on their mind. That's all they have to do. And it's only a minute. I don't think I've got through one workshop with silence. In all kinds of different companies. People will get up and go for a coffee. They'll go to the toilet, they'll start whispering to someone else. It's only 60 seconds of their life. They'll look at their phone, I see it, I'm standing right there as a facilitator, in front of 40 people. I can say, well, half of you are on your phone. We cannot think. So therefore, you've got a question like, what is directing us? If we're not giving ourselves thinking time to check in with what's going on, what we should be prioritising and doing, what is directing us, helping us to, you know, know what to do next. So yeah, no, we're not very good at that at all.

Louise Everett (23:14)

This question came up in a recent conversation I had with Richard Stokes, I think you know Richard as well, and he's very much focused on the trying to establish focus through that sense of pause, stop, take a beat. You know, take that moment.

Eleanor (23:31)

Yeah. Well, I mean, just to pick up on that point you made, I mean, I'm not great at pause. So when I was researching for my book, it took me like five years to research and write this

book. And I realise how bad I was at it because I'm just not a pauser. I'll just do, do, do my way out and in of all sorts of nonsense, you know, I recognise that.

So I did really deep research and tried to find examples that I could tangibly give people for that moment. And as you described in this moment we're in, because it's - AI aside, it's a tool. It's just another tool in the tech and digital landscape that has already started eroding our attention span. So that's a change in itself.

So in my research I found this big paper about, you know, our attention span has gone from being able to hold space for 20 minutes. Like in a conference, you could kind of sit there for 20 minutes and hold that information coming at you. And so recent research came out to say you could probably hold space for three minutes now. So you can imagine like a conference, you are only absorbing three minutes of that. So when you go out and someone says, well, what was that about? You can probably get about three minutes of something they said, that's it.

Louise Everett (24:53)

This is shocking.

Eleanor (24:54)

It's amazing, isn't it? And it was such an interesting piece where it got me thinking about reading information and taking it in. So, with that sort of nugget, how do we build in thinking and silence and pausing, knowing that we've actually maybe biologically shifted? I don't know, that wasn't quite where the paper was going. So, I found this example of silent meetings, which I think Amazon, maybe Jeff Bezos, I think was the first kind of people who did it.

He ran a meeting where he was fed up with people not being prepared for the meeting. So that was actually the problem. So, he said, right, the first 30 minutes we're going to sit in silence and you're going to read the paper from the person coming in, and we're just going to sit, read through it, nothing else. Put everything else away. And then at the end you can then ask each a question for clarification to the presenter. And the presenter can then say what they're here for, what they need from us, and this is how we're going to. So that is a really interesting example of strategically building in pause into your work, because the value of thinking and thinking together.

And so I love that, you know, bringing in that kind of attention span that he knows, like no one's got the attention to do it, but you've built it in. So yeah, I think there's that, that we have to see these as problems to be solved, but there are solutions.

Louise Everett (26:26)

This is fascinating. I'd heard that before about those meetings and you've reminded me of what seems such a strong technique. So I think we can all take that one away. And certainly on the aspect of pause, I'm with you, I need to inject a bit of that, too. So before we wrap up, can we just take a step back a moment? I've got a couple of questions that I like to ask all of our guests.

So this year marks 20 years of Claritas. And over that time, communications has evolved rapidly - you've seen it, I've seen it - in terms of scale, speed and scrutiny. But some lessons do still endure. If you could go back to your 20-year-old self, what's the one piece of advice, career advice, that you would give?

Eleanor (27:19)

I like the clarification on career advice there, because we were going to go down a whole different route there. What kind of advice would I give my 20-year-olds self? Wow.

Louise Everett (27:34)

Exactly. Career.

Eleanor (27:36)

I think it would be around the confidence to not have answers. I personally have always had that to a degree. But I didn't know it was so powerful. I'm not from a corporate background. My family aren't corporate. And, you know, coming from rural Cumbria into London and then straight into corporate, all I had was kind of books in the 90s.

I read books and I just thought, oh, that's how you do it. And all the books were like, yeah, ask questions and challenge. So that's what I did. So I was kind of naively going, yeah, but what about this? And what about that? Quite right, you know, not quite rightly, but, you know, obviously getting pulled to one side a lot and said, you know, don't ask so many questions, don't be challenging all the time.

Sometimes you got to just do as you're told. And I would just be thinking, well, that's not what Dale Carnegie said in his book that I've just read, you know. Oh my God, you're so beautifully naive. But I would just go back and say, dial it up, ask more questions, because the confidence to not know is huge.

I once ran a graduate programme for a big organisation. I absolutely loved it, grads and apprentices. It was like the dream job. And I always used to try to say that to them. Like, please don't think you have to know everything. That's not the point why you're here. Please ask lots of questions. Be annoying. Ask the questions. Ask the manager. Learn how to ask them. Not in an irritating way. In a curious way. So yeah, I think it's that. We all have to just be confident to be curious. But, you know, don't just be that irritating like, yeah, but what about this? And what about that? You know, there's ways of doing it.

Louise Everett (29:25)

Do you see that coming through in the sort of younger cohorts that are coming through? Is there a need to feel that they know everything?

Eleanor (29:37)

I think it's such a good question, Louise. I feel like people think they should know. And then we've got the beautiful out that's called imposter syndrome, which is again, kind of irritating. They probably don't have imposter syndrome. You've got the moment in time when you genuinely don't know.

And that's okay. You don't have imposter syndrome, you know. But people say that. So I work with a lot of younger people who are just starting out in comms and they're kind of like, well, I don't know this. I just feel like an imposter. I shouldn't be here. I'm like, no, how would you know? You just started, that's ridiculous.

You have to learn to ask questions. That's what we're here for, to unravel things and get people thinking in fresh perspectives. Like, I love it when people say, well, what about that though? I think, oh my goodness, I've been doing that for 20 years. I don't know why I do that.

Louise Everett (30:34)

I've seen in myself, this sort of confidence crisis and that feeling of needing to know everything, which of course, you absolutely can't. You know, I've asked so many questions along the way, a lot of them are completely daft. It's okay. And sort of remaining curious and being open and having that curiosity, is so important, I think, for all of us of any age, you know, none of us even at our ripe old age, you know, we're still learning. So this is a really lovely point that you make. So looking the other way, if we were to look forward, if you could put one idea or piece of advice into a 20-year time capsule, what would it be and why does it matter?

Eleanor (31:25)

Well, we could probably just keep building on that and saying, keep asking questions. Even if people in the future, you know, saying you're not allowed to ask questions, which is sometimes the vibe we're getting from some spaces right now, like no, you can't ask me a question. I think questions are the most important thing we've got. Not so much because we have to have direct answers, but because we get to know people's perspectives, their point of views, their spaces they're at.

So it's not that we need the answer, it's that we need the perspective. And we need the thing to come at us that then we can think about, we can process and think, well, is that what I think? So yeah, I'm going to stick with the important thing from the past and bring it into the future and never lose the power of asking really good questions. Learn how to ask brilliant questions, and I think that you'll always be thriving.

Louise Everett (32:33)

That's fantastic. And that links to this idea of judgment as a human skill. And the way to build judgment is through continuous learning. And that continuous learning is through asking questions.

Eleanor (32:48)

Absolutely. I mean, can you imagine if we lose the skill of asking questions? Well, for a start, we can't use AI. AI is built in asking questions. Right? Well, the basic kind of models are. So we have to learn how to do it well. And then the next level is what to do with what comes back. But you know, let's start on the first step. But yeah, asking good questions. I actually feel like that's where comms is going as well. Helping people to ask good questions, process

what comes back, understand fresh perspectives, problem solve. That's what communication is about. It's not about broadcast.

Louise Everett (33:29)

Fantastic. Eleanor, thank you so much. We could go on for the rest of the day, I know. Unfortunately, we need to stop. But thank you so much for taking the time with us today. This has been fascinating. And we will all be swiftly ordering copies of your latest book.

Eleanor (33:49)

Thank you so much for having me. And, yes, Louise, I was very frightened that at one point we were going to go into the past and start giving advice to my 20-year-old self, and I don't even know where to start.

Louise Everett (34:01)

Where were you at that time? Were you at uni?

Eleanor (34:04)

Where was I? Well, it's the 90s. I actually don't know. Living my best life in the Hacienda or something like that. I don't know.

Louise Everett (34:21)

Thank you. Super. Wonderful.

Outro

Louise (34:22)

What I'm taking away from this conversation is that when change is constant, clarity becomes even more important. Not just in the messages leaders share, but in how they help people make sense of what's happening around them. And to everyone listening, if this episode resonated with you, please share it with someone who's leading through change right now. Thanks for listening to ClarityMatters - because when the world of work gets more complex, clarity isn't a luxury. It's leadership.