



THE PODCAST

S1: E9 Harriet Beveridge Handling The Tough Stuff With Humour

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Beth Stallwood: Welcome to the Work Joy Jam. In this episode, we are going to be talking to the fantastic Harriet Beveridge. Harriet is a coach, an author and a stand up comic. And one thing I love about Harriet is this combination of talking about work and stand up comedy. And it's not a combination we often hear about. So a really interesting perspective on how we can borrow the techniques, borrow the things that stand up comedians do in our working world to bring ourselves more joy, to bring more authenticity, to bring more productivity into our work. I really enjoyed this conversation with Harriet. I hope you do too, watch out for where we invent new words and he used the phrases that I've not had before, like social lubricant, enjoy. And I will follow up with my key takeaways at the end.

This week, we are joined by the fantastic Harriet Beveridge and I'll get her to introduce herself in a moment. I'm really excited to have our conversation today. So Harriet, it would be great if you could tell our fantastic audience like the old who you are and where you come from, what's your story. And then we'll get into talking about you and what work joy means for you.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:02:00] Cool. so I guess this will be, I'll do the slightly left-field, there's a story that probably sums me up, which is, is when I got my first ever paycheck. My first ever proper job employee paycheck, like a good little corporate puppy. The first thing that I did was I trotted off and, you know, started a savings account. So did the right thing, but, the branch of the building society I chose was in Electric Avenue in Brixton, solely because then I could say that every month I would walk down to electric company, take it higher. So the reason I ask is because I think that sums me up there on one hand, very, I was, you know, Oxford university, Head Girl at school, Ernest & Young management consultant, qualified coach tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. But on the other hand, I'm a stand up comic. And what I'm all about is the intersection of those two Venn diagrams in life. you know, serious coaching, serious results in proper job issues, but done through humor comedy.

[00:03:09] So that's me.

] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:03:11] So you have always been combining work and joy together.

[00:03:15] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:03:15] Well, I would say that to start off with, it was more of a dirty little secret on the side. My first one of my first ever managers, did that thing, you know, in

appraisals when the guy said so “what'd you think you've done well this year” and this is a blinding bit of panic isn't there where you go “Well, if I see something too good, they're going to think I'm really smug. But if I say something, nothing, they're going to go, oh, come on.” You know, there's like, how'd you get this balance between kind of just let right level of smugness. But I was about like 22 at the time. So I just jumped in and went, oh, I think I'm quite funny. Any manager without missing a beat, when, you know, I meant something relevant, Harriet.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:03:57] So I was like “okay”. So I kind of squirreled the funny stuff away. And I mean, I was probably always, you know, class clown on a project. When I was at Ernst & Young, I invented a board game as you do. So, you know, I kind of did bits and bobs, but, the standup comedy was very much a side hobby and not something that I was very open about.

It felt quite frivolous. So I think it's, it's only in the last 10 years I've gradually gone. Do you know what these really align? And some magic stuff happens when you openly say to people, this is where I play. And 2020, my goodness. You'd think on the one hand it was the least relevant year to bring humor. And it kind of is, but also on the other hand, it's been the most relevant year to bring humor. So for sure, drop mic, exit stage left.

Beth Stallwood: [00:04:58] So tell me a little bit more about how you got into, if you were keeping these two things separate to start with, let's go separate. So we know a bit about work. We know what the corporate world is, is like, tell us more about how you got into the sideline of comedy.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:05:12] Well, I think I was always that, that one, you know, with mates who were like, no, you're really funny. You should, you know, you should, you know, you're kind of down the, when you're chatting and you're always the kind of the one holding course as it were. So it was always an itch that I wanted to scratch.

[00:05:26] And I went on a course back in 2003, where they did to kind of plan your life goals. And even then I thought, oh, you know, up comedy is one that'll indulgent thing I'd like to do. And then of course there's a course for it. You know, everything has a course on everything right. And it was, it was a friend, you said I'm going to be on a stand up comedy course.

[00:05:47] I thought, oh my God, that's the thing. Well, I'm going to do that. And they are cunning. Cunning as a fox is what they do is they get you in a church hall to press around for six weeks. And then on the sixth of the week, they go, oh, we've booked a comedy club and you're all doing a gig and you go, oh, all right, then. And you get the bug. It's like, oh, just try this a little bit of crack cocaine, you know, it's a freebie and then they've got you. It's the biggest rush. It was the best fun. And it snowballed from there.

Beth Stallwood: [00:06:17] And how, oh yeah, obviously a joyful experience I imagined, but also quite scary in that first instance. You've, you know, as you say, in the church hall for six weeks, and then you're sitting on a stage at a comedy club with an audience. And how did that feel?

Harriet Beveridge: [00:06:31] Well I, I mean, I've, I've always been quite anxious, so I think. In some ways that can be limiting, but it also can be quite liberating because if you're scared to kind of, you know, open the fridge door and get the milk out, then quite frankly, you might as well feel scared standing on a stage in front of a hundred people, if that makes sense. So it was actually the stage

fight was something like, oh, hi there. Yeah. You've yeah. You know, you pitch up a lot in my life let's do this thing. so yeah, stage fright is, is, Is just the norm basically.

Beth Stallwood: [00:07:08] So it's just an, another thing to go with.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:07:10] Just make it happen. It's another feel the fear and do it anyway. Cause quite frankly, otherwise, you know, it would be quite dull. and I know there's a lot of literature around, if you really unpick emotions and you get down to their physicality, really what's the difference between say fear and excitement. I do find that quite intriguing. Because a lot of it is quite similar in terms of the physicality and a lot of it for me anyway, as in the labeling of it, you know, your heart's racing well, is that because you're about to open a birthday present or because you think someone's about to punch you, it's this it's, you know, there are differences, but a lot of it isn't the meaning you give it.

[00:07:51] So I've been playing a lot around with that. I get to do this, you know, I get to fold the laundry. Lucky me. That's pretty cool. I get to, I get to stand on the side of the stage going, why did I step up to do this? Lucky me? And it just kinda changes the flavor of it.

Beth Stallwood: [00:08:11] I love it. And I really interested in that, the language you used there, like you can, it can be limiting or liberating.

[00:08:17] And imagine if you just put liberating and everything you thought was limiting before and what you could do with your life, if you were to take that approach.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:08:25] Yeah, absolutely. And I think one of the things we're saying in that Venn diagram intersection between comedy and coaching is the narrative. And I will go, go more into this, but, you know, comics have that ability to make anything funny and okay, it's subjective right? So you might go, I don't like a particular joke or that particular narrative, but you can still see the, the skill of, and let's say 2020 has been a good example. And if you look back at that year of, of, you know, for me first, the first lockdown, there was some memes, there were some jokes that, you know, in the, in the, in the height of all that terror, as it were in the first lockdown, You know, it, it found a different way of looking at things.

[00:09:05] So it's almost like taking that strategy of here is this horrendous thing and, and hear we are providing the kind of oven gloves to handle the hot stuff.

Beth Stallwood: [00:09:14] Let's dig into that a bit more. So I love the metaphor of the oven gloves to handle the hot stuff and that the humor being those, talk to us a little bit more about your thinking around this and how you help people, or you yourself have helped yourself to use humor in that way to be able to handle all the hot stuff, the difficult situations, the difficult conversations, the difficult times that people have been through.

[00:09:41] **Harriet Beveridge:** Well, I think there's a couple of routes. So there is something about embracing the humor and the comedy, but I think, often people go, oh yeah, that sounds like enforced jolity. And that is the last thing I'm talking about. You know, the kind of David Brent approaches, not where we are going with this.

[00:10:00] So I do think there's a piece about. What authentically makes you laugh and it be different for all of us. Right. But the more that they do research, into, you know, what, here, when you're laughing, what it does to you, and you know, the endorphins that kicks off the dopamine, it kicks off, the oxytocin, which is the kind of connectedness drug.

[00:10:22] So it's the most joyous thing. If you're in a standup comedy gig and you're looking around the room and just everyone's with you, and it's the most amazing shared experience. So I think there's, there's something about finding the humour. And right now, during lockdown, I've got, I've got a picture of seal which is photo bombing, a picture of some penguins as my screensaver.

[00:10:46] And then it just went like, kind of, you know, what is it for you that would give you the life? So that's one side of things, just thing. But I also think in my coaching work, it's more around. I'm not asking you to be funny, you know, don't think this is like, you know, get like, you know, get a clown's nose and, and no it's around stealing some of the techniques that comics you use for our world in the same way that, I mean completely bonkers. I, I co-wrote a book called "Will it make the boat go faster" - which is all about an Olympic rowing team. I co-wrote it with Ben Hunt-Davis. It's on how they won gold at Sydney. I'm not a rower. I'm not sporty. I was that child with the verruca sock, you know, in the swimming pool, everyone gave a wide birth to, I was the last one to be picked my games, teacher...this is true. This is 1970s, eighties. motivation for my game teacher said to me how you waste energy was every step you take. I mean, you know, I'm not sporty, right? But I wrote a book about that because I just wanted to steal those ideas. I'm never going to get into a boat. I'm going to steal these ideas.

[00:11:47] And in the same way, I think there's so many things that that humor does. And comedy does that. Even if you're, you're never funny, you never crack a joke. You can steal that stuff and, and, and bring more joy productivity, authenticity, you know, into your, into your life.

] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:12:05] Amazing. And it's so funny, isn't it?

[00:12:07] Because not everybody is or can be funny. It's not in everyone's nature to want to be out there cracking jokes all the time. So let's talk a bit more about, for people who find this stuff hard or kind of sitting there thinking, oh, hang on a minute. A comedy, how do I use this? What are some of those techniques?

[00:12:25] What are some of the things that people can do or you've seen work? What can we steal as you say, from the world of comedy and bringing them into our lives to help handle the hot stuff, to get a bit more joy, happiness productivity in our lives.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:12:39] Yeah, sure. And, you know, stop me cause I could witter on for hours in terms of there's a gazillion different strategies.

[00:12:44] So I'll pick a couple. So, for example, assumption busting. I think that's probably front and center that any joke, if you look at a kind of classic joke set up, then you'll have some kind of, you know, set up line to kind of misdirect you. And then the punchline shatters that assumption and all you're really doing is, is getting to the truth or all we know is shattering preconception. So for example, when I first started out in comedy, one of the jokes that I would say brace yourself, Beth,

right? Okay. You're going to have to pretend to laugh at this one was it was my early days, right? Because I'd stand up on stage and I'd say I've got two kids, a three and five rubbish names.

[00:13:29] Hey see. So with the assumption being that, you know, the three and five was the age and then the punch line is that it's their name. So terrible joke. Right? Terrible darn joke. But it illustrates the point of how a joke has made you actually it's that same technique that, you know, that coaching problem solving, dealing with uncertainty is like, what are the assumptions that we're making here?

[00:13:55] And how can we shatter them? So in a comics they're asking what could be funny here and in normal world, is it where if we just said, well, what's. What's useful here. And how can I use this? It's you know, it's sort of like where we're standing, a locked door, scratching our heads going, how do I flipping unlock this?

[00:14:13] And comics would kind of catapult past you and, you know, comedy trousers and, and, and, you know, trumpet and over the top of the door. So to get through it, you know, or asking what could be useful, it might just get you to step sideways. Oh, there's that? There's another way through, yeah. So that's that's, I think that's, that's a real key.

[00:14:32] Is that how much are we stuck in our thinking about it? This is a problem. This is the challenge. That person is difficult. No, we can't do this. And just getting that mental agility to go. What if you could, you know, what's this situation giving us. You know, for example, if my, now again, this is controversial, right?

[00:14:53] It's it's subjective. But one of the jokes that really made me laugh at the start of lockdown, was there was a whole string of on Twitter about Corona beer. Oh yeah. And, and one of my favorites that someone's like is okay, they've rebranded. and they'd be branded as Ebola extra, you know, and it's just like, You know that it just, just so wrong, you know, just so, but, but it was just a different way of looking at it.

[00:15:18] Right. And, you know, in the same way with, with, with, with my coaching work, it might be, well, how can we use this constraint? How can we use the fact that we're all working from home or you've got no marketing budgets or, you know you, you can't use that tactic that you normally use. Okay. How can we flip it and make it useful? So that's one idea.

[00:15:42] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:15:42] Great. So it's kind of interrupting the usual pattern of it's a problem. It's a challenge. We're never going to be able to find the answer. We've got no budget, so we can't do anything. And all those, assumptions and negative statements that we're looking at and actually going. A ctually, what could you do with this? Yes. What would I know marketing budget mean? If you were being like a super creative person or if you were looking at it from a different angle,

[00:16:08] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:16:08] If you take BrewDog, for example, that one of my favorite companies and they had famously had no investors, they never even gone to Dragon's Dan and they flipped it and went, what, how can we use that as a benefit?

[00:16:18] And they, one of the most successful crowdfunding projects of their day, and actually they look back and go back that was brilliant. We weren't beholden to investors. We had these, they

called them punks, you know, these crowdfunding, super fans who are now going to go and evangelize about it and it became this massive, massive benefit.

Beth Stallwood: [00:16:38] Yeah. And, and those people have now made loads of money because it's been amazingly successful. Yeah.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:16:43] I mean, so that's one example. I mean, another example might be around difficult conversations and I think that's probably a. I kind of prejudice that people assume that comics will stand there, stand up comics will stand up on the stage and they will put down hecklers.

[00:16:58] And I mean, there are some you know, very funny example of, of, of hackle put downs, like Rufus Hound has written a whole book on hecklers put downs and they, I mean, they're just awfully brilliant. They're just delicious, really horribly funny. but you know, that strategy only works if you have complete power, you don't give a monkeys about the person in the audience, and you're going to leave town that night and you've got good security. You know, that that's that's that works in that context. And I gently suggest that most of us in the corporate world don't have that luxury. No, because

Beth Stallwood: No, because sometimes the difficult person you'll have trying to have a conversation with all the difficult conversation you need to have is like, your boss is in charge of your career and all of those kinds of things.

Harriet Beveridge: So I looked to there's some fantastic comics out there. And my, one of my heroes is Jared Christmas. And he just, he does this thing of using the improvisation technique of always using an and so he'll, whatever the hacker gives him. He'll just take it at knowledge it, and he'll turn it into something.

[00:18:01] So he's maintaining rapport. And one of the funniest nights I saw him was there's this drunk guy who is quite challenging as a comic. If you've just got someone who's drunk and is like, oh, you know, doing it. Like you can't really work with it. There's not a common that you can do wordplay with.

[00:18:16] You've just got as if it's like a dog barking and Jared does this pretty thing of like, you know, all, you're obviously a bit feisty. I think you need a hug and it was just a warm, brilliant way of dealing with it, acknowledging with it not breaking rapport. And in the end, he actually got this guy up to have a hug and you know, that everyone was wetting themselves laughing.

[00:18:36] They were cheers. They were whoops. And the heckler in question was shaking his hand, and I bet he's a super fan now for the rest of life. So in the same way with, with difficult conversations is kind of like. Okay, how can I "and" this? You know, how can I, I hear what you're saying and, I get where you're coming from and, you know, that, that that's really, oh, I just joyful way of, rather than, you know, having this barrier, this, this kind of difficulty, to kind of work around it.

Beth Stallwood: [00:19:08] Yeah. So what you're doing by doing that as you're kind of building the understanding, so you're listening to somebody and, your trying to have empathy with them and get your own perspective across. So it's never a, it's not a battle it's a conversarion.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:19:22] Exactly that it's a conversation. And back to that oxytocin thing in the, in the, in the context of comedy, it's, you know, I have a philosophy of, No one left behind and the audience.

[00:19:35] I don't want everyone to laugh. I don't want it to be at the expense of one or two people. That's that's not fun. so, you know, I think they're really good quality humor is where everyone comes out, having got something and it's warm. And so, and the, in the same way in the workplace, like how can we, yeah. How can we make sure that it's a, it's an, and, and it's a, it's a "rapport-full".

[00:19:56] Is that a word is now?

[00:19:59] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah we'll copywrite it. Written it down. Yeah, I'll be right. And that's really interesting as well. Cause I think. Some people, in fact, many people assume that comedy has to be about putting someone else down or about, you know, that, and that's the kind of thing that actually in a workplace can be really divisive rather than helpful.

[00:20:21] So it's about finding the right kind of funny, isn't it? And the right kind of technique that isn't about. I actually will laugh because we'll just put someone else down. Exactly. Yeah. Somebody wrong with something.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:20:34] And I think it's. It's almost like humor in the workplace is a really good indication of power.

[00:20:42] It's almost like the best 360 tool that you can have, because if you want to know, who's got the power, see who gets a laugh, even when they tell a rubbish joke. I know you can go into the boss, the boss cracks a joke. I was like, no, it is. And it's because it's a power play thing. So if you're in an office environment and everyone's laughing at your jokes, just take a moment and notice.

[00:21:08] You know, is that a power thing? you know, often chief execs have sort of lost that ability to, to realize that, or are we, are we always laughing at the same person? Is it always the same person? Who's the butt of the joke. And I find this here with families in friendship groups in teams and the corporate world has a really good red light flashing indicator on your kind of 360 reports ago.

[00:21:34] Hm. Is that okay? You know, or that become a bullying, a laughing out rather than a, you know, an oxytocin and juicing social lubricant as it were

[00:21:45] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:21:45] Social lubricant. That is a phrase I didn't expect to hear

[00:21:49] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:21:49]. Okay. See, re "rapportfullacy", and, and social lubricant is all, is all happening right here.

[00:21:56] Yeah.

[00:21:57] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:21:57] Right here. Right now on this podcast. Love the techniques so fast, they're thinking about, you know, what could be useful here thinking rather than what could be funny here, what could help us get there rather than the and rather than the but, I just want to get my head across. And it's really interesting. Often I talk to people, my people, I coach people I'm working with around this idea that they talk about.

[00:22:19] I need to have a difficult conversation. I often say to them, but if you're labeling it already before you've had it as a difficult conversation, are you going into it thinking it's going to be a battle and therefore, what is your behavior saying? Hmm,

[00:22:32] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:22:32] definitely. And I think that mindset of, And, you know, and again, I find the kind of standup comedy as a useful metaphor that if you're walking on stage and you're higher than everyone else, and you've got the microphone they haven't, and the spotlight's on you, it's all been set up and manufactured to give you power.

[00:22:52] So how, how are you going to use that power, you know, young grasshopper, you can use it to eviscerate people in the audience or you can use it to speak your truth. You can use it to be authentic. You can use it to handle hot topics. And it was really bright in my last Edinburgh Fringe run, was called Estrogen Armageddon. And it was all about menopause and it was just like a real penny dropping. Like I'm going to talk to my tribe about a topic that's really important to me. And I'm going to use that power that I have in the spotlight with the microphone to be me and to talk about stuff that's really important to me and using all that and stuff, you know, if people don't like it, that's cool.

[00:23:35] You know, I'm going to talk about controversial things like HRT or whatever, and you know, when we can and our way out of it, if any, you know, kind of spiciness. So, so yeah, I think it's exactly the same in the corporate world. Everyone, everyone holds the microphone at some point, even if you're the most junior marginalized, whatever. There will be points if you spot them where you've got the microphone, you've got the [00:24:00] opportunity to grab the microphone and, and, and yeah, that the choice of you don't have to, I cannot be. I think for the first couple of years, I did try to be, I kind of alpha male comic.

[00:24:12] It was like a private note to self. You're not an alpha male, probably not the best strategy. And as soon as, you know, relax into your authentic way of doing, it's like, oh yeah, this, this works now. Okay.

Beth Stallwood: [00:24:23] That's really interesting in the world of work though isn't it about how, because maybe it's not right here, but we see very many in the past alpha male type comment.

[00:24:33] So it's they a role model of what a comic looks like versus what your version of comedy looks like? And it happens so much in the workplace where people. Try and adapt and flex themselves so much to become what they see so far. So if you are in a group that's been marginalized or my top minority in the workplace, or if the culture is very alpha and in that masculine world, and you're a woman trying to, you know, trying to get on, it's so easy in some ways to get lost in that adapting of yourself versus being strong in the authenticity of who you are.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:25:15] Absolutely. And again, there are so many paramount parallels when I started out say 2003 was my first gig. and it was still very firmly that you'd get comedy bookers going well, I've already got one woman on the, on the bill. So I think that's enough. I'd have people that, you know, very open to go.

[00:25:33] Yeah. But women, aren't funny. And I think that's shifted. it's still there, but it's shifted. So I think it's really analogist to the workplace that, yeah, I absolutely tried to be that stale, pale

male to begin with. and, and then you kind of go, I'm never going to win that. I'm never going to, it's not me.

[00:25:52] What's the point, but also I'm never, there's always going to be someone who's, you know, better in adverse commerce alpha-male than I am, because look, there's something. So [00:26:00] actually the more I relaxed into, Yeah, what I want to talk about in my style, it differentiated me. It may be noticeable. I found my tribe.

[00:26:10] It was just easier. And also you find your support group, right? So, whether it's, you know, the kind of female comics kind of support groups on Facebook and all that stuff, but actually it's also knowing, you know, people of any gender, any background that a, a supporting, and I do think there's a big question mark around.

[00:26:30] When do you, when do you fight the battle of when do you feel right? This is just not, I'm just not getting the joy here. I'm not going to, I'm not going to play in this arena. So for example, Susan Kalman decided quite early on, I'm not going to play this type of club where it was a real kind of "stag party woo!" And it was a really successful train across the whole of the UK. But she said, you know, immediately I sign up, they call, you know, they call me fat. They call me a lesbian. What is the point? This is not joyful. I'm not doing it. so [00:27:00] I think that's a really interesting space for us in work around where do I fight?

[00:27:05] Where do I start up and where do I go, not fun by. And that's a really personal question, but I think knowing that you can walk away knowing that there's, you know, in a gig you can go, yeah. Bye. Thanks.

[00:27:22] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:27:22] And, and to not eat, you know, I took those quiet hours that not everyone's going to like you, you're not going to be everyone's cup of tea and equally, you know, what you like as well.

[00:27:32] So you know that you don't like all types of comics, you know, that you don't like all the people that you work with. We're not in a zone where you have to like a hundred percent of people or be liked by a hundred percent of people. And there's. A different balance for everyone isn't there at work about actually, at which point does, is there not enough of a tribe for you to have the, the combined joy, the, the things that you get from having an amazing squad around you, different skills and different people who, who really kind of lift you up and raise you and get you.

[00:28:02] And that will be different for everyone, but it's that idea that you actually have the choice. You have a choice to think about, is this the right place for me? Should I be thinking about something else? Or is actually, I just need to be myself a bit more and if I'm myself a bit more, I might find that tribe.

[00:28:17] **Harriet Beveridge:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And, and, and there's no one answer. So I found that the first Edinburgh fringe that I did, I was kind of trying to compete with. The student improv's and that this isn't, I was too generic. But the year that I, I did the menopause and the Armageddon, even flyering was so much easier.

[00:28:37] There was some people go, Ooh, God, and walk by. It's like, cool. Well, you would not have enjoyed it. So I'm glad that we filtered you out right from the get-go. But the people who

turned up. You know, absolutely knew what they were coming for. So it's like the marketing was easy, the rapport was easier. It just, it just flowed better.

[00:28:54] And I think that squad thing, sometimes you get inside work. I think often we [00:29:00] underestimate how much we need stuff outside work as well. I love the fact that Nobel prize winner, Daniel Kahneman, you know, it talks about friendship in such a passionate way. It's like this guy is an economist. He's a, you know, he does some serious maths.

[00:29:13] He doesn't see it like this isn't fluffy. Right. You know, you need, you need the group inside and outside of work to kind of get the perspective in the, in the, in the, in the joy and the balance.

Beth Stallwood: [00:29:26] And it's been hard, hasn't it? In 2020, when we think about, in some ways, apart from online, we kind of lost some of the connections with our cheerleaders, both inside and outside of work.

[00:29:38] Yeah, I want to do it online it's different.

[00:29:41] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:29:41] It is. And I think, again, you know, this is going to probably sound cheesy, like, oh, what's good about that. You know, it's been, it's been tough, right? It has been tough. And trying to find that, that slice of like what could be useful here. It's certainly forced me to really be more, more choiceful, more conscious about the connections that I have. I think I was on a bit more of a, an autopilot of this, the commute that I do, and these are the people I hung out with and these colleagues and yada yada, yada, and, you know, having to actively go right. Actually. I should be reaching out to that person over there because they are, you know, they are my battery recharge person or, you know, they are my, my nutrition, my kind of, you know, connectedness, nutrition. And it's funny. I've started up a, I did a knock down leg up where we did stupid comedy nights every week and cooking nights every week. And it was, it started off as a coaching community, but it was actually, we just need some connection and I was surprised how much connection we could create through shared experience, joy, you know, and, and an active decision to, to kind of connect.

Beth Stallwood: [00:30:55] Yeah. And it is about that being more mindful and actually, I think probably I could put myself in this category. It's easy to get lazy about your connections, but the people that you just generally see regularly, those there, they sit next to you or the people who, while they sit next to you in the normal world or the people that you always see on a Thursday night, because that's when you do your thing or your hobby, that those, the people are there.

[00:31:18] And actually in some cases it's being quite nice. To think about actually I need to reach out to some different people and them, some people who I would have seen at a certain event, or I would have seen once a year, because we were doing something and where those things haven't happened, taking a more proactive approach to actually having a conversation or scheduling something in the diary.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:31:39] I think another kind of comic stretchy, almost I find fascinating is, is often like routine and deadlines. You know, they don't sound very joyful and there's a kind of, I guess, a creative type, you know, I, I rally against constraints, but they could be so freeing that if

you've got the gig in the diary, It's going to happen, you know, if you set your, if you, you know, so it's, it's like, what are the default settings? And you know, I've been MC at certain nights where like, it just, this is when the regularity of how it happens. So you kind of, don't have to think about it. You just have to show up and get connected and feel, feel joyful. So it's made me think about what, how can I, you know, make the default setting "Joy" rather than, I mean, daft example, right? I've got so into podcasts, see what I've done there Beth, plugging the whole concept, love it, you know, for like the chores around the house. And it sounds such a blinding flash of the obvious, but actually if I'm going to be folding the laundry or doing the washing up, I might as well have a laugh while I'm doing it. So kind of making that the default setting has been really, really interesting.

Beth Stallwood: [00:32:46] And it almost kind of really looking at your habits and your routines and saying, where can I build in things that make it more joyful within those mundane ordinary things? And what is it, you know you find a podcast joyful, what do other people find joyful?

[00:33:02] What is it that gives you that moment? Even if it is a fleeting moment and with work joy, we're always talking about the fact that. You're not going to feel joyful 100% of the time. And if you did, you probably wouldn't feel as joyful as you did if you had some lows because the highest felt higher and the, you know, you get that.

But it's about how do you build in, you know, you'll have talked about this for sure. In the, in the world of rowing and how you get there, that little tiny thing that makes a big difference, a little tiny thing you do every day that you build up to, it becomes a habit of more joy. So if it is, I get to listen to my favorite podcasts when I fold the washing. Brilliant. It makes folding the washing seem a lot less boring and it gives you a little bit more. And then you almost look forward to it, even though it's a really mundane task because you get to do something else and it's repeating your language. I get to do this. Yes, absolutely.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:33:53] And I think there's there's when I find habit formation a whole topic in its own, right. Fascinating that, you know, The reason we, we have, we get habits get stuck is because you get that dopamine hit that your body gets conditioned to going, oh, here's the trigger? Oh, duke mean hat. And it could be a really inappropriate one that it's like, you know, smoking or, but, but if, if you're trying to kind of set up a new habit, then actually factoring in the joys who at factoring and making it fun, could be massive.

[00:34:21] I mean, we've again, during the kind of lockdown leg-up thing that I run, we did this thing of like move for one minute. So you were sent a daft video of, to do a bit of exercise for just one minute and then come on, we can do one minute. And the, you know, the subjects, of the email was a bit daft and if they did it, they'd get a video of, you know, a panda rolling down a slide or something as it just to kind of, you know, so the hope would be you get a bit of a laugh as the trigger to do this useful thing. The useful thing, you know, might not feel you might not get the dopamine hit immediately. So let me show you a ponder rolling down a hill until you get the dopamine hit, you know, and, and it was] just, it was just really funny. The reactions we got of people going, I'm now associating exercise with having a laugh.

[00:35:07] And pandas. Yeah.

[00:35:09] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:35:09] Yeah, yeah. And you get people saying, oh, I'm just going to go to the panda by the stairs, going to the gym because I associated so heavily in their brain.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:35:20] what's going to happen with this mysterious queue of people. I didn't know why. I didn't know at all doing lunges. I don't know what's going on.

[00:35:29] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:35:29] I was going to say, why is so many people squatting and lunging outside of the panda cage, everyone's wearing black and white. It's very strange. And it will all come back to you and they'll be like, sorry about that. Yeah.

[00:35:47] You see, we've gone down and laughing route now. I love this idea. That habit formation is that if you build joy into it, it doesn't have to be the thing that's joyful. It could be something else alongside it that creates a whole joyful feeling. Yeah. I mean,

[00:36:04] **Harriet Beveridge:** Yeah. I mean, there's a, there's a, research that she called Katy Milkman and she talks about temptation bundling is like, look, if you struggle going to the gym and you love eating that bar of chocolate, why not actually go well when I'm at the gym, I'll eat that bar of chocolate, just bundle it together. And then, you know, you're kind of offsetting the, the, you know, the, at least it means you do the good stuff.

So yeah, I mean, hopefully it gets replaced with actually the activity itself. Is joyful enough. But, but often I believe like teeth cleaning, the research suggests that it's actually that, that squeaky clean feeling of, of, you know, ding minty mouth, but it's the dopamine hits like really, really?

And you know, it's not, it's not like they're going, wow. I feel so much. Better for having removed teeth decay at some indeterminate future point in my life. You know, it's the immediate "ding" the more visceral we can get it. And then you don't get much more visceral than a bit of a laugh and some joy.

[00:37:03] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:37:03] definitely. And, Let's see this temptation bundling and thinking about your version of the, I would call it the adulting stuff like having to do the laundry, you know, the boring life admin stuff that you have to do, like paying a pension and all those kinds of things. If we can find a way to temptation bundle them together in some way, that works really well.

[00:37:23] And there must be a hundred examples or many examples of things that you have to do at work that you don't want to do that if you don't want to do, or you don't find any joy from, so you just know you have to get on and do them, what could you bundle that with, to make it more joyful. Yeah.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:37:39] And, and you can also get a double hit that, if you can make it a social thing, then you build in the accountability.

[00:37:46] So, I mean, it depends, right. It depends in a bit, it could be like, okay, let's both commit that we're doing, or, you know, I dunno that invoice or expense spreadsheet of doom that we all hate. So we're going to do it exactly the same time, half an hour you know, and then at 12 o'clock we, you know, we have a five minute cup of tea FaceTime, or, you know, and then you've got the accountability built in.

I better flipping do it because you know, Jenny's doing it at the same time. It depends on the task in hand, right? I mean, I, that, you know, we've got the kids, we do a, kind of, they have to do housework club, so you've made it fun by making it a club. It's a club I know for about a wee they were like hang on a minute. Yeah. This isn't a club. Right. You know, this isn't like Karate Club, but, you know, put the music on it's just an hour. Everyone does it at the same time, bit of banter,, you know? So I it's it's yeah, depending on what the thing is at work, whether it's trying to make the actual thing itself, more enjoyable, or the kind of trigger for it or the reward for enjoyable or making it social that they, those can be some really interesting hooks to get the dull stuff done. Yeah. I was just remembering at one

Beth Stallwood: Yeah. I was just remembering at one point, in an organization I worked with, I had to get loads of volunteers to help me, set up a conference area in our offices.

[00:39:09] And basically I was getting people to move big flip charts and tables and chairs around, which is. In theory really, really boring. So what we did is we put loads of music on playing it out loud, and then we did it like a ballet. So we thought it was like directing a ballet, moving people to start with but like, oh, this looks like forced fun and nobody likes forced fun. And then the minute, like you've got one of the directors with a flip chart swooning on down. But that is the whole point that was really boring. It was really hard. It was annoying and it had to be done and it was late at night getting ready for the next day, but suddenly doing something so random, really made a difference.

I've got a little video of it on my phone and occasionally just go back and look at it and I go, this is hilarious, but it's one of those things like totally unexpected. We just started doing it. And then everyone was giggling by the end of it, rather than going, oh, this is really hard work moving 250 chairs.

[00:40:13] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:40:13] And, and that that's a classic, you know, you had to be there, right. Because it, because people are going, oh my God, that sounds horrendous. But there again, it comes back to that authenticity piece. I love the fact in comedy that you know, you might be a massive fan of James Acaster. You might hate him.

[00:40:27] You might love Billy Connolly. You might hate him. You don't mind Michael McIntyre now just, just, there's so many different types of comics out there. And in comedy, we celebrate that. We celebrate the difference and it's like, you got to find the stuff you genuinely laugh at. And I wish we could take that metaphor, that strategy and just kind of shift it to the right of it and go. Okay at work. What are your super strengths? What do you, you know, what are you really good at? Where are you in flow? And, you know, for sure, of course there are the bits we need to suck up. Like, we've just talked about the kind of the dull bits, but you know James Acaster is brilliant because he's a hundred percent James Acaster.

[00:41:05] If you try to be, you know, JC Lawrence, it would not go well for him. So, you know, authenticity.

Beth Stallwood: So don't try to be anyone else be you find out what makes you laugh, have the right squad around you. Make effort to make connection. Use the, and rather than the bots or here's my opinion on it and see where it can get you because none of those things are complicated to do.

[00:41:31] They just take some thinking and absolutely some that kind of interrupting the unhelpful habits you've put in place over many years to kind of go, oh, actually I don't need to do that in that way anymore.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:41:42] Exactly. And is it there's, you know, there's the twin tracks, right? We said at the beginning of this conversation, sometimes it's around, can I get humor into my life? Wherever humor means. For, you know, for us authentically and also, you know, that piece around, we're not saying you've got to be funny or it's around, here are some techniques you can steal, you know, I will use it to manage hecklers, and I'll use it to manage, you know, that colleague that I've labeled as difficult or that that's a tactic that I'm using to build a joke which I can tell onstage it's exactly the same tactic that I'll use to unpack a difficult problem and relabel it as something that's useful. But I just haven't found, I haven't found the usefulness yet.

Beth Stallwood: [00:42:26] Yeah, so amazing. Thank you so much for sharing all of those brilliant bits of insight and your story, and for being funny as well, which I always love to talk to people who make me laugh.

[00:42:38] I have five really quick fire questions for you. Okay. So question one for you personally, what is always guaranteed to bring you some work joy?

Harriet Beveridge: I have a daft picture on my phone lock screen every time at the moment, it is a bollard that has been yarn bombed.

Beth Stallwood: What is a yarn bomb.

Harriet Beveridge: it's when someone does knitting. And puts over something. So you might knit and cover a bench with a bench shapes, but it's missing. So someone just went along and put bollard, and it's beautifully, beautifully knitted. So just taking something really dull and just going ta da for no apparent reason, genius.

Beth Stallwood: [00:43:24] Brilliant. So have something that you see all the time and look at it and. Brilliant. What book are you currently reading?

[00:43:34] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:43:34] I'm not because I'm bad girl. So I'm going to give you, I'm listening to a podcast, which is Cabin Pressure, which okay The humour is subjective. But it's a BBC sit-com, audio book, it's got Benedict Cumberbatch in it and it's just, I just want to think it's very, very funny and it's, and it's family friendly as well.

[00:43:56] So that's given me joy right now.

Beth Stallwood: [00:43:59] Ah, thank you. [00:44:00] what is the best or most useful bit of advice that you've ever been given that you always come back to?

Harriet Beveridge: [00:44:09] On that comedy course in the ramshackle church hall was you're not there to do your set. You're there to create laughter. I love that as you, we're not here to do the, do you know? What's the purpose? It's to bring joy and make people laugh.

[00:44:28] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:44:28] I love that. They bring you back to the purpose. Yeah. Yeah. Brilliant. so. To round it all off. What is the one super practical bit of advice for our listeners? That is something that they could take from your advice from today to do it today, do it tomorrow, do it easily, do it quickly that might help get them better. A bit of work joy through the lens of laughter and funniness.

[00:44:55] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:44:55] I think it's that bit about assumptions. If a comic can find a joke about anything and okay, it might be appropriate or not, we might not, you know, not find it funny at all, but if they can take anything and make it funny, then surely, surely if we just ask ourselves the question, you know, what assumptions can I pass?

[00:45:14] Or how could we know what's useful about this? We can look at things in a different way

Beth Stallwood: [00:45:17] Yeah. So it's almost just taking that couple of seconds. Isn't it to say, actually, what are my assumptions here? Thank you so much for joining us today. It's been a laugh.

[00:45:34] **Harriet Beveridge:** [00:45:34] Oh, it's been so much fun. Thank you.

[00:45:37] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:45:37] I'd love you to share it. If you can, before we finish off, is where can people find out more about you, your philosophy, what you do your comedy, and to get in touch with you.

Harriet Beveridge: [00:45:49] So the simplest is, checkout HarrietBeveridge.com. So I've usually got some daft endeavor. Like I was talking about the lockdown left leg up that people can sign up for. if you want to book me for a gig or a, you know, a speech at work or some coaching and yeah it's the easiest way to find me.

[00:46:07] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:07] Brilliant. And we'll put the link on the website page as well, so that people can click straight through.

[00:46:13] Okay. Thank you very much Harriet it's been great to chat with you. I'm loving that where you have invented new words and I've learned new phrases today, social lubricant and rapport-ify or something in that world. Well, we'll take them forward. I always say if Shakespeare was allowed to invent words, why can't we game on, make it happen?

[00:46:39] I am going to go away and find small things to laugh because how good it is for your brain. And also just really focused on that. You know, who in your squad is there? Who, who builds you up? What do you find funny and bring more of that into my everyday life. And I hope our listners can do the same. So huge thank you. And perhaps we'll come and talk to you again

Harriet Beveridge: Hey, thanks for having me remember to always rock down to electric avenue.

Beth Stallwood: I will definitely rock down to electric company. Thank you. Bye. Thanks all for listening. To our conversation with Harriet. I think she's given me some things to think about and some advice, things like how might we change the label we put on things.

[00:47:24] How might we pause for a few moments and consider what are the assumptions we're making in this situation? Actually, what's useful about the situation. However hard it is, there might

be something to gain from it. I also love this concept that we can learn so much from different and seemingly unrelated fields.

[00:47:44] In Harriet's example, work, putting together comedy and business. I'm sure there's a hundred different things where we can take the techniques and apply them to our work to get more work joy. I'm definitely going to think about Harriet's advice there. You're not there to do your set, your here to create laughter and the idea of always bringing things back to your purpose.

[00:48:10] I think that's my, my takeaway is how do I take that? And you use that in my world. Thank you all for listening today. I hope you enjoyed it. Do let us know your feedback. Do tell us what advice you're taking, what things you're reading, what you're learning through this podcast. And you can do that on our Instagram, which is @creatworkjoy