



S2:E8 – David Stack | Leading with Kindness

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Beth Stallwood: Welcome to the Work Joy Jam podcast. I'm your host Beth Stallwood, Founder of Create Work Joy and today my conversation is with David Stack. And David is a business owner who has experience in the corporate world and the world of IT and beyond. And I think really it is one of those things that isn't separate anymore. It's a big part of how we all run our businesses and run our lives. And again, David is a person who really inspires me in his thinking, and we talk a lot about Kindness and leading with kindness and how important that is. And it's often a word that isn't associated with business. And as somebody who is a leader doing this work right now with his organization, with his employees, really leading with that mindset, I thought he would be a fantastic person to come on the Work Joy Jam and for anyone who is in that leadership space.

And it's one thing to consider how to do some of this work when you also have difficult business decisions to make. I hope that this episode will inspire you and get you thinking enjoy

Hello and welcome to the Work Joy Jam this week. I'm so pleased to be joined by David Stack. And David is a fantastic leader and I'm really interested to hear his perspective or about work. But before we dig into that, I'm going to hand over to David and David, could you give us your intro and a bit of your backstory about how you got to where you are today?

David Stack: Hi Beth and thank you so much for having me on this fantastic podcast. So I actually started my career as a scientist. I have a degree in physiology and a master of medical science degree in human nutrition. So I actually started work as a nutritionist and my first, I guess, my first real proper job was with a brilliant company called Mars. I started working there as a nutritionist and got more involved in technology as, as the role went through, and they were just a fantastic company to work for. They, they put a lot of focus on people, a lot of focus on leadership. I know, I'd also say quite a lot of focus on having some fun in, you know, in the work environment.

[00:02:52] So for example, where I worked with on their pet care side and they would allow dogs in the office. So you'd have sort of your pet dog on your desk. You can take dogs for a walk at lunchtime. You know, it was a really sort of caring, caring kind of place and, and they, you know, really promoted career progression.

[00:03:07] And I, I went through various different roles at Mars. I moved more into technology. I was quite interested in how computers work, you know, as a scientist, I was using lots of different

software packages and systems and work out how they all work to look quite curious from that perspective. So moving into more of a technology career, which, which definitely through a path through, through Mars and eventually ended up with me, uh, working in Dublin in Ireland where I was an IT manager for them in Ireland.

[00:03:35] And that was my first role. I would say my first real experience of leadership so I used to attend the senior leadership team meetings there and, you know, used to attend the local board meetings. And I just remember looking around one day, the board, the executive board in Ireland, and just thinking what fantastic leaders, all these people were. What struck me then was the actually, and this, this may come out the wrong way, but what struck me was they, weren't all really intelligent in their own right. They certainly run the most intelligent in the company. You know, you look elsewhere in the company and they both far, far more intelligent people but what these leaders on this board had was they had the intelligence, clearly they were very intelligent in their own right. But what they also had was, and I know it's a cliché but they also had the EQ side to their personality as well. So they were, you know, not only highly educated, but also they had this great knack of working with people or managing people and really getting the best out of people in their teams. And that really, uh, that, you know, that was still quite junior in my career, but that got me really fascinated to say, actually that combination of IQ and EQ, if you get the balance, right, you can be a really powerful leader. So for me, that was the start of my journey and say, well, actually, you know, I was still quite junior, but how, if I want to become a leader, what balance would I strike?

[00:04:59] And what type of leader would I be? And that made me really curious. A lot of research investigations in that area. And I remember it wasn't actually at Mars. I remember somebody saying to me once when I was quite junior, was that I would, I would never be a leader because I was too nice. I remember in one of my appraisals, very clearly you will never be a leader cause you're too nice. People will take advantage of you. They won't do what you ask and you just went back to control your way to be nice. If you want to be a leader. You've got to be nasty. You've got to strike fear into them and you've gotta be respected.

[00:05:38] And I remember thinking, wow, you know, is that, is that advice of what to listen to? Or is that advice I want to almost, you know, take as a challenge to say, actually, no, I'm not going to change my personality. I am a nice person. I care about people. I'm going to see if I can be a nice leader. And I'm going to prove that you can get to the top of any profession, by being nice and kind to people.

[00:06:00] And it's not a barrier. In fact, I actually think it's the opposite. I think it's an enabler.

[00:06:04] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:06:04] Well, how interesting that is just as a, I'll let you carry on in a second, but just that point about which advice do you take, because everyone's going to have advice for you throughout your career, but it's up to you to kind of filter and go, is this something, and I know for, for once, if you're one of the people, who's a bit like me, if someone said to me, you won't be able to, I will immediately find a way of doing.

[00:06:25] Because I just, if I take it as that challenge, it's always laying the gauntlet down for me and I will make it happen, but so interesting that when we're junior in our careers, we often take the advice as if this is, this is everything I need to know and take it really literally. But that decision to not take it like that as a really interesting one anyway, just wanted to pop in and say that.

[00:06:44] So carry on with your story.

[00:06:46] **David Stack:** [00:06:46] Absolutely. And I just want to say down a different track if I can Beth but I remember being at school and one of my teachers saying to me that I use my hands too much when I talked, I'm a visual animated person, I use my hands to, to tell the story and, and express myself.

[00:07:02] And he said, David, you, you use your hands too much. You're too expression fall. My advice to you is when anybody's talking to you to sit on your hands,

[00:07:12] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:07:12] I was told exactly the same thing throughout my schooling. Please sit on your hand.

David Stack: [00:07:17] And I remember thinking wow, why would you want to sit on your hands/ The nonverbal cues, the things you, you say with your hands and your words are so much more powerful than just, just work alone. So that was my first experience that sometimes adults or people more senior that will give you advice, but it's certainly up to yourself to, as you say, to filter and to make sense of it, to decide if you want to act upon it, I guess, anyway, back to my three minute story, which is probably now more five minutes, but that's my story.

[00:07:47] Soso I, I guess I left my office in Ireland with really clear sectors. I wanted to be a leader, but I wanted to be a really nice one or a big, big one, but I to do it by, by taking people with me. Rather than, you know, destroying people beside size by being kind of your old I guess your, your typical historical type B that was very dominant and dictatorial and you know struck fear into people. Actually the modern day leader, I think is almost the opposite of that. So, , I, I worked my way through various different organizations, worked my way up the career ladder worked for many large global organizations, following my mandate, which was, you know, you can get anywhere you want.

I think you could just nice people will respect you for being nice or being kind, being polite, for being honest, you know, all the, all the attributes that we are taught as children. I don't see why they wouldn't work in the working environment as well. I think I got, I got to a position where, you know, my career was, was going places we'd just started a young family as well and for me, career wise, I always, you know, really ambitious trying to progress. I think at that point it was like, do I continue to expand my role to be more European, more global? And with that comes more travel, more time away from home and time away from the family. And I thought, no, that's not right now. That's not what I wanted to do. And I toyed with the idea for many years of going into consultancy type work but again, ruled out joining one of the big consultancy firms, just because of that work-life balance that I perceive to be there, wasn't quite right for me at that time.

[00:09:27] So I thought, well, here we are. Here's an ideal opportunity. I love the challenge of want something to still mentally stimulate me and give you that challenge. Ye. I still want to be there for the family and act like a {?} too. And for me, it's all, well, why not have a go at setting up my own consultancy, where I can very much, you know, control what you know, who and where, and when we work, to give me that balance, uh, but also that challenge, that I desired.

[00:09:55] So I started bright frog consultancy in 2014 and I kind of stuck true to my boundaries, which was if you work with really good people that share that same interest in IQ and EQ. So recruit

really intelligent people, but people that really get on with other people and really get the best out of others. wouldn't that be? You know, wouldn't that be a great consultancy if it was just full of people like that, that could do the job, but take people with them, inspire people and motivate them along the way. So that was my mandate was, you know, that's what I'm going to go out and achieve. And it might take me 10, 15, 20 years to achieve it, who knows, but that's, that's what I wanted to do.

[00:10:35] And I want to grow the organization that I want to be, you know, big consultancy. But in the early days, you know, it was really lonely. It was just me. It was me being an, almost an independent consultant on my own right. And I was everything from finance director to IT director. I had to do my marketing, my branding and comms, admin.

[00:10:55] Like, you know, it was, it was, it was, it was me and everything so it was quite tough in the early days. It's quite a lonely journey, but over the years, we've, we've grown. We've appointed more people we've taken on bigger contracts where we're now working with some global organizations, delivering some global projects and even through the pandemic, you know, we've continued to grow.

[00:11:19] The feedback we get has always been fantastic because, because of the people, when it comes back to that from me about leadership and people you employ the right people. You give them the right direction, the right support, and they'll, they'll deliver wonderful things. And that's kind of where we are now.

[00:11:34] We've just delivered one of our largest programs, which is a big SAP program into 40 hospitals in the UK, in the middle of a pandemic. When we couldn't even go out to site, we couldn't meet with the people physically it had to be done virtually people.

[00:11:57] So that's my three minutes story best probably in about 10 minutes. So that's where we are right now.

[00:12:02] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:12:02] And I, you know, one of the things I'm going to, I'm going to pick out a few things to reflect on because there's so many amazing bits the first bit is that my dad also worked at Mars. So I'm like you won't have known him cause he's older than you by quite a bit.

[00:12:15] And, uh, but ye, really interesting. Ye. Uh, you know, things I didn't know about David having mainly for some years is that you started life in the nutrition world. I have no idea about that. It's just making me really reflect on this thing around where you end up in your career isn't always where you start.

[00:12:32] **David Stack:** [00:12:32] Absolutely, absolutely. You know, my, my career ambition when I was a teenager and early was to actually become a vet. I remember from the ages of about five, five to 18, the only thing I wanted to do was become a vet and I remember, I, you know, I studied hard, I got very good grades. I had a place at Cambridge university to go and study veterinary medicine.

All I needed was three A's the level. And having got sort of straight A's at GCSE three A's in my mocks, I was assuring to pursue that career and I didn't get it. I didn't get my three A's. And you know, that for me was, was a massive life lesson in that if you take your foot off the pedal, no matter how intelligent or good you think you are.

You're going to fall short a bit. So that, that for me was the first time I'd really ever had a failure at that sort of level and I think that that kind of molded me a bit for life was that you've got to continue to work hard if you were to achieve what you want to achieve. So I didn't go into vet medicine.

[00:13:35] I took a different career path. I still stay true to science, but you're absolutely right. As you go through life, you find other things that interest you that you couldn't possibly have known when you were 15, 16, trying to choose a career and, you know, pursue the one that interests you the most. Cause that's gonna be the one that you're best at

[00:13:50] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:13:50] And be prepared to see those opportunities like you did, right?

[00:13:53] Because you wouldn't necessarily think moving from being in the nutrition world to IT is an obvious career step, but if you're interested in it and you, you find something there, like pursue it and see what happens. Absolutely.

[00:14:04] **David Stack:** [00:14:04] Absolutely. I remember there was no way when I was a child, I wanted to go into a job that meant I sat in front the computer working in an office.

[00:14:11] And here I am and I'm loving it, you know, and I think it's, it's just, you know, as you say, you listen to those opportunities going where your passion lies and really going for it.

[00:14:23] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:14:23] Amazing. So a couple of other things I'm really interested to pick out here is obviously there's so much to talk about here and we could go down major roads, but we'll talk more about kind of the work you do now as well.

[00:14:38] But when you were in the big organization, some of the big global organizations, leading teams in a senior level, and that idea of staying true to those values that you were talking about around being nice, being kind, being open, being honest with people and how you did that. Because I think people always want to know, right?

[00:14:59] How do I do that? And also the effect that that can have on performance and working as a team and all those other stuff. So I know that's a really big open question, but I'd be really interested to know how, how in those teams you showed some of those values and you demonstrated them.

[00:15:16] **David Stack:** Yeah, it's, it's a big, it's a big topic, but I think for me, honesty is, is the top one.

[00:15:22] I think if you're honest with people about what you're actually doing, even if what it is you're doing, isn't particularly nice or they agree with, I think as long as you're open and honest as to why you're doing it. So a lot of the work we do and I have done my career involves reorganization going into organizations that might be struggling a little bit with their technology function or certain programs.

And assessing why they're struggling, and that invariably leads to change. And not everybody welcomes that change, but I think, you know, what we make a point of doing, and what I've always made a point of doing is being really open for the staff to say, this is what we'd like to do. We might not know what the outcome looks like, but this is what the journey is going to look like.

[00:16:02] And this is where we're going to go as a team and getting people on board, that journey being open and honest with them, listening to their fears, listening to them, you know, they're all going to have concerns. Nobody really likes change. Nobody goes out and goes, let's change everything today. You know, nobody really wants, but when it happens, people react to it in different ways.

Some embrace it and some actually do actually enjoy it. Other people really resist it all the way to the end so I think it's about recognizing that and recognizing there will be different people on that journey. Some are fully on board. Some aren't entirely sure what's going on and spending the time with the people to, to listen.

[00:16:41] And then to put into practice their ideas. So, you know, to answer the second part of your question, one thing that I do enjoy doing is talking to the people and asking them what they would do, how would they change? What would they do to make wherever it is, a better place? One example, I won't mention the organization's name, but one example where we went in, as I sat down, it was about 50 or 60 people clearly it wasn't working properly. And the feedback from other departments, you know, pointed that there was quite a few issues to resolve, but I sat down with all 50 people and asked them, you know, what was working, what wasn't working, what would they change? You know, how could they change it? How would they like to be involved in the change? What could they do to make the place better? And before you know it, you've done that with 50 people. You come up with a whole bunch of ideas that have come from them, not you of how the department could change. And then, you know, carrying that example through getting them all together to say, look, here's idea you guys had come up with who's up for this. And who wants to make these changes happen? You know, getting people on board and getting the ambassadors is a great way to do it. And, and we've done that several times now in different organizations and get, and that kind of peer ambassador roles going, you know, the, the teams I've worked with just delivered some amazing small things, and all add up to make a massive shift.

[00:18:02] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:18:02] So interesting. One of the things I often say when I'm working with organizations is that the people in the organization have the answer we just need to find and find a way of getting out of them and to be able to then use that as a way of driving, whatever change it is that you're working towards.

[00:18:17] **David Stack:** Absolutely. The answers are always there. I think people almost waiting for permission to do it. Simple ideas we had, and this is, you know, this is again, it's a cliché because lots of organizations do it, but just converting meeting rooms into nicer spaces to work and to collaborate and to be more agile in an approach, you know, just painting the walls, putting up whiteboards, thrown in bean bags, doing whatever you want to do to meeting rooms, to make them a more usable space.

[00:18:46] I guess a bit ironic in the pandemic. Now we don't need meeting rooms, but you know, almost people say, well, will we be allowed to do. Yeah, well, you know how much that's gonna cost a hundred quid paint the walls, throw some bean bags in and put a whiteboard up to a hundred quid. And suddenly people start using these rooms and collaborating and drawing things on walls.

[00:19:04] And you know, you get that buzz going. And each one of these ideas, we did a different organization. The budget is tiny yet the impact.

Beth Stallwood: It's so interesting. Isn't it, as there is so often the small little things that you do versus the massive things you spend money on that make the biggest difference in people's worlds and it isn't I know, I know it's hilarious talking about meeting rooms, amidst pandemic, and when this episode comes out, you never know, we might be able to see each other, like keep our fingers crossed for that. So to be able to do that safely, but I also think if we look pandemic wise. The environment for collaboration is one of the things that humans we, as humans at work are really missing.

[00:19:41] So the importance of it, we understand it now more because we haven't got it. And you're right. You know, for me, a whiteboard, some colored pens, some post-it notes and a nice place to sit and think is always a great thing to have and understanding that the answers are that, but you have to give people permission to share them.

[00:20:01] You have to then act on them. You have to do something with it versus just listening because you think it's well, we'll go and have to listen, but we're not really going to listen. You have to actually listen properly.

[00:20:13] **David Stack:** Absolutely it's a) just listening in the first place. Them thinking they've got somebody, they can talk to that listens, but then the acting upon it as well.

[00:20:21] So when people see that you're actually acting on their suggestions and their recommendations it's a great way of converting people onto your journey. It's a great way of getting people on board with what you're trying to achieve so that rather than them being a barrier and trying to prevent the change, they're actually part of it.

[00:20:36] And they're driving it. You've kind of related the touch paper and you can almost stand back and, you know, in some places where I worked, all I have to do is just so proceed. Give the permission and you know, five or six people stepped forward to say, I want to pick this up and run with it and, and great they're there your leaders of the future.

Beth Stallwood: [00:20:54] Definitely. And those ambassadors, the people who kind of get it and want to be part of it are, you know, great to work with. And you find some of the joy there. So that's like your honesty thing and thinking about change. Talk to me a bit more about being kind in your world.

[00:21:10] **David Stack:** [00:21:10] Oh, that's, that's a great one. For me, kindness doesn't cost anything. Again, these are cliches. I know I could go out in the world in a pre pandemic. And if I really wanted to, I could probably upset, I don't know, 10, 20, 30 people in one day I could do things that would really annoyed people, really upset them and be unkind.

But equally I could go out and do the opposite. I can just be kind and, and kindness could be something as simple as saying good morning to someone. It could be something as simple as saying. Asking how, I don't know the girl on the checkout till or the boy on the checkout till, at Tesco's, you know, how's your day going, showing a bit of interest, getting a cup of coffee for someone, asking someone how they're feeling, asking somebody how their, their weekend, when all those kinds of things, just very small bits of kindness, you know, sparing five minutes to listen to somebody's

problems when you yourself might be having a really tough day, but just listening to somebody's problems.

[00:22:14] Talking them through all just small acts of kindness that I think build up and people really, really respect that. And time and time again, when people come back and know, I think kindness gets repaid over time. And if you're kind to someone, they are more likely come back to you. And I think that continual kindness is what we need more of.

Beth Stallwood: So interesting. When we talk about work joy, we'll talk about the fact that work joy is catching. So if you go to work and you demonstrate some joy and people can see that you're enjoying it, that you've got a smile on your face or skip in your step, that that that's catching. But equally the other side of that, which is the thing we call work gloom that that's catching them.

[00:22:55] So, as you're saying that you could go and upset 30 people really easily, that that might then be those 30 people in a bad mood to go and do 30 people. And I can't do the maths 30 times 30. I'm sure you can because you're much more clever than I am, but if you were to make 30 people happy in one day, or to give them that moment of kindness, that little smile about whatever it is imagine, the knock on effect of that.

David Stack: [00:23:19] Absolutely. I remember, I remember I, I, I went for a job interview once and, and I got the job and I turned up for work the following week or the following month. And the receptionist was like, it's you, I said, sorry. She said, I'm so glad you got the job. I said, well, why is, why is that? She said out of all the candidates, you're the only one that say good morning to me and asked me how my day was going.

I went back and fed that back to the interviewers that, that you were a nice person. And also, I like to think I got the job on more merit and just saying, hello, good morning to the receptionist. It's that kind of thing that just small things just make a big difference. The saying good morning to someone doesn't cost anything. You know, it's a bug bear of mind. When I say good morning, somebody just drops their head and walks on by. Okay. I'll try harder tomorrow, but I will get you to say good morning!

[00:24:13] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:24:13] I imagine that your team, when you are in the office and I not working from home, know that they need to kind of be like, give you a upbeat, good morning so that you're ready to rock and roll.

[00:24:23] **David Stack:** [00:24:23] Absolutely. I think, oh, so you've got appreciate that.

[00:24:26] You know, not everyday people who are feeling, like saying good morning, you know, I guess you don't know behind the scenes, what people are going through. And particularly right now, backgrounds can be quite tough and it gets tough for a lot of people. Simple things can, can really alleviate some of that for it, for others.

[00:24:41] So even if I'm having a really bad day myself, I still try and put on that happy front because it's infectious.

[00:24:49] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:24:49] Yeah. We probably shouldn't talk about infection or viral,

I totally got what you mean that it can be as catching and people can take that and it, you know, definitely there might be some people who are having a bad day and that's not good for them, but maybe you've noticed it more because they're not their chirpy selves and you're able to then go and have a listen and get them to share what's going on.

[00:25:12] Absolutely.

[00:25:12] **David Stack:** [00:25:12] And that goes back for me to being a good leader, is that a good leader has to be aware that not everybody is in the same place, you know, emotionally, physically, mentally at the same time. So whatever it is you're doing, you've got to, you've got to find a way of unlocking all these things. And if you spot somebody who's not their usual chirpy self, or somebody looking a little bit distracted, I think it's about spotting that and almost tailoring your approach.

[00:25:37] Maybe having a chat with them offline just to understand what's going on, if there is anything that you can do to help, if you need to change anything or if they are uncomfortable with anything, I think a true leader really tunes into people's emotions, body, language, and verbal, whatever it is, and, and works out what, what perhaps they need themselves need to do differently to really connect with this individual.

Beth Stallwood: And that's also a really interesting point because I think it's one of those things that people find hard and leadership is this idea that there is not a one size fits all leadership thing. You don't go in one day and go, hello, this is how I'm going to lead. And therefore we're done. I am ready.

[00:26:10] I've been on the course. I have got my certificate ready to lead and you should all fit into my style of leadership because really good, and you talked about earlier, modern leadership requires you to be able to adjust to the individual's need. Right?

David Stack: Absolutely. Actually there is no one size fits all. And I think leaders themselves are also quite vulnerable because they're, they're put on this pedestal and told to lead and manage large teams or large programs, you know, and, and they feel vulnerable as well and what worked in one organization or something might not work on something else. So they have, they have to adapt.

[00:26:47] And you have to continually adapt and things suddenly change underneath you. You know, the pandemic is a great example. You know, what worked 12 months ago, having meetings with people face-to-face and buying people coffee, and having a chat over a beer after work, that's not there anymore. It's now all virtual.

So what works in the virtual environment when you're trying to connect with somebody and it's all about continually evolving and developing and changing your approach to adapt to the situation. And hopefully one day when we all go back to it meeting up again, we can start to revert to some of the other behaviors and activities that did work, or maybe not, who knows, but it's about continuously evolving and changing your approach

[00:27:27] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:27:27] and just dig into this bit a bit more for me. Cause you said it, that is that leaders need to, it makes them feel quite vulnerable being in some of those positions is I always think, and it's a thing from many many bits of research, including, I don't know if you've ever read the book.

[00:27:42] The great Brene Brown, thank you for thinking on vulnerability is that vulnerability is something that we really admire in other people. So other people are vulnerable with us. We're like, oh, wasn't it amazing that they were like that, but it's something we find really difficult to do ourselves. So we don't quite connect the, what I admire in others to what I could admire about myself.

[00:28:02] And just thinking about this for you as the leader, in that zone of kind of vulnerability, how do you manage some of those emotions and feelings that come with that?

[00:28:11] **David Stack:** [00:28:11] I think, you know, kind of going on that, that, that line, Beth, around vulnerability and authenticity, that they're two key things. I personally have no issue with sharing my vulnerabilities.

[00:28:25] I've got loads of them. I make mistakes every day, every day I make mistakes and I'm not ashamed to admit them. You know, I'm happy to share them and I'll put more important. I'm happy to learn from them and great things come out, mistakes, you know, some of our best opportunities have come out mistakes that I've made and we've adjusted and moved on. I think putting your hand up and admit to those mistakes you know, again, not, not on a political bias, but in the press right now, w you know, politicians always make mistakes and, and it always amazes me that they will never own up or address them. Very few of them, will ever put their hand up and say, I've made a mistake, I should have done something differently. This is what we're doing for you. I think they would get more respect if they did that than an approach, which is try and cover it up or, or, you know, bamboozle a bit and not admit you made a mistake. And for me, I've, you know, we will make mistakes. I'm happy to put my hand up, show them of vulnerabilities and learn.

[00:29:24] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:29:24] It's so interesting. I totally agree with you about that. We won't go into politics because this could be another couple of hours and people don't want to listen to us rattle on about that. I totally agree. I think there's something there about, you know, slinging blame to other people or just ignoring the fact of things.

[00:29:41] And I honestly think, especially if you think about like the pandemic situation, everything, if you said we did the best we could, we probably didn't get it right. This is what we're doing now to try and fix that. I would be like, okay good on you.

[00:29:55] **David Stack:** [00:29:55] Absolutely. I mean, you look at some of the things that the UK and government and globally has been done, this, this amazing things that have been done and there's been some pretty rubbish things that have happened, but ye, putting your hand up, nobody's ever been prepared for this ever mistakes will get made and just owning up to them and admitting them and explaining what they do differently. Next time. It's trying to avoid the mistakes. I think we've gone down far better than do you want to cover some of it or brush it under the carpet.

[00:30:21] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:30:21] Definitely.

[00:30:21] **David Stack:** [00:30:21] But I find that to back to sort of the leadership and the corporate world, I think that it works the same, you know, I admire personally, people I've worked for that have put the hand up and say, oh, you know, we got this a bit wrong. This is what we do next time. Or even involving the people, how could we do it differently?

You know, what mistakes do we make? We always do a project wrap ups at the end of our projects, like a bit of a retrospective or reflective to say, what did we do well, What didn't we do so well, what can we do differently next time? So it actually encourages that feedback encouraged us to look at ourselves, see where we have our vulnerabilities and where we've made mistakes so that we can get better on the next program or the next project. And that's worked very well personally and corporately.

[00:31:08] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:31:08] I love that. And I know a lot of teams do this. What I do find though, is people spend a lot of time thinking about what didn't go well and what they would change. And my nudge for more work joy in people's lives. If you're doing these kinds of things is actually to spend more time on the, what did go well so that you know what to repeat and what to keep and to kind of remind yourself that you did a good job, because even though there will be a project with mistakes. Everyone's human, right. Things go wrong and situations happen. And you know, there's difficult things that are happening, things. It, the acceptance that things will go wrong. I honestly think if we spent as much time looking at what went right as we do as what went wrong, we'd probably find that we've actually got the answers in what went right as well.

[00:31:50] **David Stack:** [00:31:50] I fully agree. I think you may be mentioned on your Lunch and Learn Beth, but we hang on to the negative feedback, we hang on to it our whole lives. You know, I hung on to the fact that my school teacher 40 years ago told me to sit with my hands. How many pieces of good information or good feedback do we just forget about?

[00:32:07] Because that's just the way we're programmed. I think we focused on the negative side, but I fully agree focusing on the, what did we do well and making sure you do that. It's the typical appraisal approach. Appraisal will tend to focus on weaknesses, but things aren't quite doing well enough and you need to improve on.

[00:32:23] The other school of thought is forget about that. What things are you really good at and exploit them? You know, if you were a really good football player, you're a really good striker focus on the score and we'll go, don't worry about the fact you can't be a goalkeeper or defender. That's not important. You score goals for the team. You get really strong in that area. So focusing on the strengths again, key part of leadership is recognizing where people are strong and play them in those positions and use them in those areas and worry so much that perhaps they're not good at other things. Does that really matter?

[00:32:54] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:32:54] A bit, like we said, well, we were getting onto the tech for recording this podcast. Like don't put me in your, IT help desk. That is not where my strengths lie. You know, put me in front of some people to talk to them. That's where my strengths are. And understanding that in yourself really important for your own joy, you know, play where your own strengths are and that people often take that as like really literal, which means you never have to work on anything again, you just don't.

[00:33:19] And I'm like, no, as a filter to that which is keep working on the stuff that will help you be even better at the stuff that you do well. So what's around that. What can support that? What can help make that happen, but also knowing what you're not good at and that you don't have any desire to be good at either.

[00:33:35] So for me, could I be better IT. Of course I could, I could probably make an effort. I could probably try harder. I could like read or watch, you know, the millions of videos that are out there and get better at IT. Am I bad at IT, no. Does it mainly get me through the day? Yes. Do I want to spend more time on it? Not really.

So you're in that zone of finding out for you personally, what are you good at? How are you going to build that? What are the things that can support that happening? And then as a leader, how do you help your teams with that strength with their strengths, with developing with you, talk about leaders kind of continue to learn and adapt. So do your team. So how do you encourage that in your world?

[00:34:19] **David Stack:** I think it's, I think it starts with individuals. So it's helping individuals to understand where their strengths or weaknesses lie understanding where they want to go as a career as well and matching the two things. And then as a leader, it's about moving those people into positions where they're really going to thrive.

[00:34:36] So you've got an individual, let's say who's really good on communications, really good with people. They're really, really enjoys that, that engagement side know, perhaps consider moving them into a role where they're going to get more of that and they would excel. If on the other hand you've got some that quite enjoyed the technical side, maybe a bit shy, maybe doesn't like talking to people. Maybe move them into a role where they can really explore their technical skills, and, and work with them. You know, it's, it's not, it's always a two way process that they've got a voice, you've got a voice. And it's about understanding, you know, is, does that work for both?

You know, if you put those the other way round, what a technical person in front of a, uh, an audience or communication type roles, they might resent you. It's about understanding the individual, understanding what you need to achieve as a team and trying to match it all up.

[00:35:28] And that's the bit I love about leadership is, you know, it's a big jigsaw puzzle. There's no right or wrong answers. But if you do get it right, you end up with a really good puzzle, a really good picture at the end of the day.

[00:35:40] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:35:40] And it's really interesting cause one of the things that, the themes that's really I'm thinking about with everything you've talked about so far, David is this concept, I think is all about actually getting to know your team and the people who work with you better and to really be having a more in-depth conversation about them and what they good at and what they aspire to and where their strengths are then just, okay, well, here's somebody with this job title, where do we put them?

[00:36:10] **David Stack:** [00:36:10] I couldn't agree more. I think the more you know about the people that work for you. The more we know about what, what ticks their boxes, what motivates them, but equally what de-motivates them. I think you can really get the best out of people. You know, you're not always going to be able to give fantastic roles to people all the time, and they're going to need to do stuff that perhaps they don't really want to but recognizing that's the position and recognize they might need a bit more of a nudge when, when they're in that area. I think is good. So really understanding people. To me, it all comes back to people and knowing how to manage people and get the best out of people.

[00:36:44] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:36:44] Again, really reflecting on that is that one of the things that we talk about a lot in the work joy theory of life is that there is no such thing as a job as a hundred percent, exactly what you want to do all the time.

[00:36:59] The life doesn't work like that. And it's about, have you got an enough of the things that really bring you joy and you also have to do the other stuff. Like I do have to deal with IT. And I do still have to do financy stuff, even though I don't particularly enjoy it. And I do still have to do X, Y, Z, whatever it is in your role, but it's about knowing that that's part of it and not the whole thing.

And then when you get to do the bits that are the bit that you love, you get to really thrive in it and you get the recognition for it and you get to feel great about it. But it's, and I think the other interesting thing, I just am reflecting there is, obviously in businesses, you can't always craft the exact perfect role for everyone. Sometimes you need some stuff done that isn't perfect for what people are looking for.

David Stack: [00:37:44] Absolutely, absolutely. And you know, I've got a painted a rosy picture, but business isn't always easy just because you're a nice leader and an honest leader. It doesn't mean that you don't have to take tough decisions. But even when you do, I think doing those tough decisions with honesty being as considerate as you can still, you know, it's a lot of respect, I think, to respect the individual, you know, if they're in a role, they really don't mind.

[00:38:13] Recognizing that fact, talking to the individual, helping them through it. What else is it that can be done that would make that role more, more sustainable? What is it that's missing? You know, how can we make it work. And I think being collaborative, open and honest and still have {?} of tough decisions, you know, {?} goods that they're really strong leader.

Beth Stallwood: Ye. And having those conversations where it might be the, actually this job is a square peg and this is a round hole and it's not quite fitting together. Is it that we can shave a bit off hereor change a bit here and make it enough, or is it actually that it's not the right fit?

David Stack: [00:38:49] Yep, absolutely. I work with somebody that called that freeing their future free their future. They don't like the job. They don't like the organization, but they're not prepared themselves to make the change or to make the cut and go elsewhere. I remember them saying you need to free the future for them. Which I guess is a nice way of putting it, quite a tough position, but it is that it is that sometimes things don't work out and you have to recognize when, when is the time to say, actually it's not worked we've thrown everything at it, it's not working, we'll just try something completely different.

Beth Stallwood: [00:39:23] And although it might not seem like it in that moment, when you are making tough decisions like that, that is in some cases, the kindest thing you can do for someone.

[00:39:31] **David Stack:** [00:39:31] Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, you know, a lot of people will look back on periods of significant change like that and realize that actually some really good things come out of it. You know, I've been involved in, in quite a few sort of reorganizations and where people have had to move on to different roles, quite a few people will look back and say, actually, although at the time it's quite scary, there's a lot of change going on and people anxious and

nervous. The result, and what they've ended up doing is, is much better for them than had they just stayed, put and kept on doing this.

Beth Stallwood: [00:40:02] And I've had the same thing and many years working kind of in the HR and people world, I always think that the people who are, what did you call it, are freed for their future. I've seen so many people go on and thrive in different industries or in different roles. And that is lovely to see. And however hard it is in that moment. And it's always hard. And I think here's an interesting one because sometimes people think is easy for leaders to do that. And it's not.

David Stack: [00:40:28] It's not, I think particularly if you're a kind of a considerate and a kind leader, it's very tough because it's people and it's, people's livelihoods and it's people's families and it's, you know, it's difficult.

[00:40:38] So it's never an easy decision. Some of these things are quite physically, immensely, quite, quite tough to do. But at the end of the day, I think as long as you're straight stay true to your values of, you know, being kind, being honest, making sure you're making the decisions for the right reason, then I think people generally accept that.

[00:40:57] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:40:57] Yeah, definitely. Oh, it's, it's, it's really interesting kind of diving into this world of leadership. And obviously now in your consultancy, you've now got, more people joining you you're growing as an organization. How, cause this is a question I know that I work with a lot of founders of organizations who had kind of trying to grow and how hard it is to find, find the right people and know what you need. What is your focus when you are hiring new people. What do you look for?

[00:41:30] **David Stack:** [00:41:30] Great question. Great question. So a couple of things, actually, Beth. So firstly, obviously I'll be qualified to do the job that you're asking them to do but secondly, again, are they a nice person? Is this somebody that you connect with?

[00:41:46] Is this somebody that you're happy to have a chat with? Could you great get advice? I was given by my manager once. You know, when you're recruiting the person you're recruiting, would you want to sit next to them on a really long train journey? Is this the sort of person you'd want to go down the pub and have a chat with work with be friends with, do you get on with them?

Are they a nice person? You know, are they a people person. So for me, you know what I said earlier on about Bright Frog and recruiting people, people, you know, people that get on with other people, you know, would I have to have a chat with this person? Did I feel like it was a two way conversation and we bonded.

[00:42:22] So that for me is really, really important. Aside from the technical, the functional skills they need to have that people skill set is so important because if you've got to put them in front of CEOs or CFOs, or, you know, or receptionists, they need to make an impact, and you need them to leave their mark and is, you know, so when I look at people, I'm assessing them, yes, they've got these qualifications and they've got this and that, but is there somebody that can represent Bright Frog, represent our brand.

[00:42:52] And I would feel comfortable being in front of people of all different seniorities.

[00:42:57] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:42:57] I love that. And yeah, it's a really interesting point because your work is always with clients, isn't it? Your people are always out there well out there or virtually out there and working with your clients and being able to represent you and have the right conversations with the right people, whoever they are is really important.

[00:43:15] And I'm, I'm a big believer personally in the fact that if somebody has 80% of the technical skills or 70, even 70%, I'd go down to the technical skills I need, but have absolutely the right attitude and the right the right values to match the organization. And to think about how does that work together, then I'm happy to train them on the, you know, the 20 or 30% of skills that they need because you can't really train the other stuff.

[00:43:43] **David Stack:** I couldn't agree more. I couldn't be more technical and functional skills. You know, you can train. Obviously you'd like them to come in with a certain level, but you can always train that and you can always refresh that and people can learn that the behavioral side tends to be so innate and ingrained from a very early age. It's really hard to change all that stuff. You can, it's not impossible, but you know, if you're on a short term project, if you really got time to address a behavior or characteristic that you need to train or. Uh, probably not. So you need the people to be hitting the ground on those people skills, right, right from the beginning. And, and it's much harder, not impossible. It's much harder to train some of that stuff.

[00:44:22] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:44:22] Definitely. Thank you for that. Cause I think that's a really interesting one, especially for people that are hiring it's like, what do you really look for? And it sounds like you just kind of go back to your core values of what all these people can be great with the clients.

[00:44:36] Are they going to act with kindness? And that that's a great idea about. Would you want to sit with them on a train journey because that's a really good test there. Isn't it like, would you be happy to sit there and have a conversation with them and see how things went?

[00:44:49] **David Stack:** [00:44:49] Would you feel relaxed with this person? It just simple things, you know, just smiling. Most of our interviews now done over zoom, but if the person comes on and does it doesn't smile, this sounds silly, but you know, they're not even smiling.

[00:45:02] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:45:02] But that's a universal human thing. Isn't it? If you smile at you, people feel safe and warm.

[00:45:06] **David Stack:** [00:45:06] ye, absolutely. Absolutely. So why wouldn't you do that? If you're not going to smile an interview, you're probably not going to smile when I put you in front of the CEO or the, you know, or the, the project manager, and immediately subconsciously, even though we, we deny it subconsciously, we're already making those assessments of industry. I'm never going to say no to a person just because they didn't smile but it's just another little thing that people can do to start that, that bonding process. It's one of hundreds of little things that all add up. So person's doing all that and they've got all the technical and functional skills. Well, can you start Monday? Is that kind of conversation?

[00:45:44] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:45:44] Definitely. I love that. That's great. Right? I am now going to Segway us into the quick fire questions. Are you ready?

[00:45:53] **David Stack:** [00:45:53] I'm not sure, but I'll give it a go.

[00:45:55] **Beth Stallwood:** Give it a go. So for you personally, David, what is one thing that is always guaranteed to bring you a little bit of work joy?

[00:46:04] **David Stack:** [00:46:04] Oh, great question, couple of things. Good cup of coffee in the morning. No matter where I am a lovely cup of coffee, and that could be, be someone doing a project, just gazing out the window or at my desk, that, that just puts a smile on my face. Working with fun people. I love working people that make me laugh and make me just enjoy my time, working with them.

[00:46:27] So, you know, working with fun, energetic, you know, ease, easy going people gives me a bit of work joy and, and a good tick list. Cause I know you you're in that camp as well Beth, a really good To do list. I can just tick as I'm going through the working day, puts a smile on my face

[00:46:45] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:45] I love that. So if you could ha happy having a meeting with a tick list and a great cup of coffee with someone who's really fun. You're in the ideal zone.

[00:46:55] **David Stack:** [00:46:55] I'm out of it. I'm ecstatic about that would be my ideal day Beth.

[00:46:58] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:58] Brilliant. Thank you for that, next question is what book are you currently reading?

[00:47:09] **David Stack:** [00:47:09] Well, I'm reading lots of books at the moment. The three that I've kind of got on my bedside, the first I've already read once actually, but I enjoyed them so much. I'm reading again. A couple of years later, this one's called Yes, 50 secrets from the science of persuasion by a chap called professor Noah Goldstein. It's a really fun book around it's lots of little short stories about how to influence people's decision making and when you're obviously in the, in the business that we're in and yourselves are in, and hopefully many of our listeners are in, you know, it's an interesting take on how to persuade people and how to influence the behaviour.

[00:47:47] So there's some really good tips and tricks in that book, but I've not read previously and I've forgotten a few of them. So I'm rereading it again. But lots of the stuff in that book I've adapted to my everyday life actually. So I really liked that book. Sounds great. The other one is one called Blink by Malcolm Gladwell. I read it the first time. So much stuff. I don't think I absorbed it all. So I'm now reading it again, but again, really fascinating the whole psychological side of things and how we make decisions really comes out of that book. And I love that. And the third one is just something completely random, but it's cartoon drawing how to draw cartoons. To sort of simulate the other side of my brain, I guess, but, uh, you know, we do it all facilitation and everyone whiteboards and post-it notes and I'm pretty rubbish out. So I'm training myself to be able to kind of draw things that people baby recognizes as humans or boxes or items or whatever it is.

[00:48:42] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:48:42] I once did a course on how to literally how to draw on flip charts. And it was brilliant. Loved it, loved it. Loved it. Loved all these three. I'm definitely going to take a look at yes, and maybe I'm going to pick back up my Blink and actually all of the stuff by Malcolm Gladwell I've read and I really love it.

[00:49:00] So brilliant suggestions.

[00:49:03] **David Stack:** [00:49:03] I think his first one was outliers, I think was another one who wrote, which is another, another classic.

[00:49:08] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:49:08] And there is one called David and Goliath or something like that, which is all around how people who have been through challenging times actually often come up to them.

People who've had really easy life. So it's a, quite an interesting way of thinking about it. Ye. Brilliant. Next one is in your life. What is the best or most useful piece of advice that somebody has given you that you always find yourself coming back to or sharing with others?

David Stack: [00:49:38] That's a great question. I think I'm just going to go back to the theme, Beth, which is the best advice is just be kind, just be nice to people because you never know when that's going to come back and repay you and just being kind to people makes you feel better about yourself. I use the example of the the receptionist and saying good morning so that you don't know what people are going through being kind doesn't cost anything.

[00:50:02] I think that's the best advice I've ever had. And it's kind of on my core values is just be a nice person, you know, be respectful show, good manners. Put smiles on people's faces. There's a really good, uh, it was a really good video on LinkedIn or YouTube about Usain Bolt. I'm not sure if you've seen that one, but obviously a global megastar and they did a bit of a montage of him.

[00:50:25] So before every race, you know, all you got all the boys and girls coming out with athletes, carrying their basket of clothes. And they stand behind the starting block and what I didn't realize at the time. And, and didn't, didn't realize was that before every race Usain Bolt turns round and thanks the boy, the girl was standing behind his starting block for sort of holding all of his clothes.

And it gives him a bit of a fist bump and there's a montage and we do it before every single race, even in the Olympics, when he's winning gold medal, you know, really his focus, you couldn't fault him if he's focused elsewhere, you still took the time out 10 seconds probably to fist bump, high five the supporting person behind them.

He took selfies with one of them. And the bit for me was the smile. They then zoom in on the smile on that girl's face after he's done and they are so made up, you can't help, but think that it's completely made up that boys or girls day, if not week, if not life, because we've got, they can latch onto this one thing that made them feel so special. Got millions of people watching them and it made them feel safe. And it was for Usain Bolt 10 seconds of his life didn't need to do it, but you did. So that kindness, I think is it doesn't cost anything, but the impact it can have is enormous.

Beth Stallwood: And remembering that, that, that little thing makes such a big difference in someone else as well.

Okay, final question for me is, where can people find out more about you?

David Stack: Great questio , we are, I and the company are quite, active on LinkedIn. So if you go into LinkedIn and Google David Stack or put my name in David Stack, you'll find me, our web address is www.bright-frog.com.

[00:52:11] There's a little bit about us on there, our story of where we've come from and where they're going to is on there. The people that worked for us, it is all on there and all sorts of things that are up there is on there. Or if people want to email me directly, I'm on David at bright-frog.com

[00:52:27] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:52:27] Brilliant. And we will put those links into the bio, etc when we launched the podcast.

[00:52:33] So David has been fantastic talking to you and catching up and hearing your story and your advice. And I think, for me, I think this episode is going to be called something like leading with kindness. I think that's the real, vibe that I'm getting from it. And the difference that that can make, to use a leader to those people and to your business.

[00:52:52] **David Stack:** [00:52:52] Excellent I think there's a, there's a book in they're somewhere.

[00:52:55] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:52:55] Maybe we should write it together, but I need to write the Work Joy book first. Uh, it's a great theme and thank you so much for your time and for your sharing, your story David. It's been fantastic. So thank you for joining us on the Work Joy Jam.

[00:53:14] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:53:14] I really enjoyed my conversation with David and to work with somebody who is doing their stuff in the real world in his business right now is so great to see. And I find it really interesting that it is possible to do these things, even when you're, you know, making this difficult business decisions.

[00:53:32] And sometimes how kindness is about actually being honest with people and giving them some really direct feedback or saying when things aren't right. And we often think of those tough messages as not being particularly kind, but it is one of those things that can make a massive difference in people's lives.

[00:53:49] I love David's perspective on creating that right environment, where people are kind of friendly to each other, where if you have a good attitude, if you're able to be authentic, and I know that's a really overused buzzword, but being honest, being open, being vulnerable as a leader and actually showing people how you show up makes a difference that can be really infectious and really create a culture where people are able to be kind to engage with each other and to make that happen and really leading that from the top of the organization. And also little things like giving everyone a smile, checking on how people are doing welcoming people in when you're working together in a real space. When an office, I will say love the motto of just being kind. And that bit of advice there is really simple. And it's something that I think we could all consider. And I know that when I'm having a good day, it's something I do consider. But perhaps when I'm not having such a good day, if some things have wound me up or if I've got some work gloom and maybe I'm not as kind as I could be and I'd love to be more kind and. I think maybe we could all take that motto and think today, have I, have I made the kindest decisions? Have I done things in the right way? Even when things have been tough when things have been hard to do have I done them with kindness in mind? So that's my big takeaway is just to consider that factor whenever I'm making a decision or having a conversation. I hope you enjoyed this conversation with David. I know I did. Thank you for listening. If you'd like to find out more and stay in touch with everything that's going on with Create Work Joy. Do follow us on social media, we're on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn at [createworkjoy.com](https://www.createworkjoy.com). Joy is all one word. If you'd like to find out more about our program. Head over to

the website, www.createworkjoy.com where you can find out more about my signature 16 week coaching program, whoever you are, whatever stage of work you're at, whatever crossroads you're coming to.

[00:56:01] It's a program of one-to-one sessions with me with a group that is. You know, able to help and support and engage you and with some soda experiments to do as well, that will really get your self thinking as acting on some of the things that you really want to do to create and cultivate more joy in your working life.

[00:56:23] And we also have Club Work Joy which is a growing community of people who are keen and working on creating and cultivating more joy in that. From individual perspective from organization perspective, wherever you come at it from. Thank you very much for listening to the work joy jam today, I've been Beth Stallwood, or with your host.

[00:56:45] Do you go and have a listen to some of our other episodes for more inspiration of what you can do to create more joy in your work? Thank you.