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### S3:E6 – Ellie Dix – The Joy of Games

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[00:00:00] **Beth Stallwood:** Welcome to the Work Joy Jam. I'm your host Beth Stallwood founder of Create Work Joy. In this episode, I talk to Ellie Dix who has a really interesting career and one that is I never knew really existed. And it's really exciting when we get to talk to people who have these unusual, interesting perspectives and interesting careers.

So I won't tell you anymore. I will allow Ellie to introduce herself and tell you what she does and I'll pop on at the end and give you my thoughts about what I'm taking away from our conversation.

[00:01:16] **Beth Stallwood:** Hello and welcome to the Work Joy Jam I'm your host Beth Stallwood and today I'm really excited to be joined by Ellie Dix. And I'm not going to tell you what Ellie Dix does until she gets to introduce herself, because she has one of the most interesting jobs I think I've heard of in a long time. And when I had really, I was like, right, we need to talk about this because this is really, really interesting.

So let's get you to do the reveal and what is it you do, and also tell us a little bit in the story about how you got to do what you do today cause it's not one of those jobs that is particularly on a career advisors list when you're at school. Is it

[00:01:53] **Ellie Dix:** It definitely isn't no thanks Beth. I'm a board game [00:02:00] designer. I design games for families, for schools and for, for anyone really to play together. And I started, and it's definitely not one of those jobs that's on a career advisers list. I mean, there's sort of operate heavy machinery and become a teacher or nurse and board game designer never appears on those lists and often people are really surprised when they hear what I do. And they say, oh, I've never met a board game designer before. I didn't even think that that was something that you could do. And yes, it is something you can do though many, many people who are board game designers also have another job. So I'm very, very privileged to be able to do it full time and it is a wonderful, a wonderful career to have. So how did I get into it? Well, , it's a bit of, a bit of a windy route. I took actually, I've always been a board gamer. We've always played lots of games as a family when I was young and I had quite an unusual exposure to games when, when I was growing up my, as well as some of the mainstream family games that you all would have had mousetrap, Monopoly we also had, some games that you probably haven't heard of. And so, and these are the sorts of more hobby board games. Both my parents were teachers in education. My mum actually taught on a teacher training course so she was teaching primary teachers, particularly teaching maths to primary teachers.

And one of the things that she would do, she felt very strongly that games, using games in teaching is a brilliant educational tool. So one of the things she would do was to one of the assignments she set was to get her students to create a board game to design their own board game, which had



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[00:04:00] some sorts of mathematical content. And then she would test them, but she would test them with us. We, while we were at primary school, we were their target audience. And so she'd bring home all these prototype games or we'd go into college and test them. And I remember her you know, taking notes about what we were saying, asking for feedback.

Sometimes we actually even went into college to give feedback directly to the student teachers. And so I was, I had this exposure to games that were being created and being prototyped and being developed over time and really thinking about what, what's the essence of a good board game. Then in addition to that, my dad is a bit bonkers and mad into gamification. Now I don't even know if he knew that there was a term for what he did, but the kind of elements that create that made him do this were really, that he's gets very bored very quickly. And so he wants to keep life interesting. So he really doesn't like doing chores and he really doesn't like knowing exactly what's going to happen so to get to bypass this and be able to still live in the world today and do a job and do chores that you have to do, he would gamify things. He mainly did this through creating through use of random numbers. So for example, if we were going to go for a family walk, we wouldn't just go to the local woods and have a walk there'll be this whole rigmarole about, oh, let's all gather around the computer program that's, dad's designed for this app, this benefit and this, for this, for this situation. , press a button and it will spit out a six digit random number, which will magically, , be [00:06:00] a, a grid reference within 20 miles of where we live have to go walk to, or, well, not from home, but we'd go travel to, and then we'd have to somewhere close and then we'd have to walk and navigate to the exact grid reference.

We wouldn't know where we were going to go beforehand. And there's this exciting element of randomness, which he's always used. And he does that in all sorts of ways. He does that in, you know, he's, he's done that for what music should I listen to? What book should I read all of these different things, , randomized so that he isn't bored and, and even now he does his cleaning and that way, you know, or written a program about that when you know that the stairs need hoovering every week, but the, the garage needs cleaning out once a year when the downstairs windows need doing every four months or whatever it is, and you'll press a button and the computer will tell him what he's doing that day so he doesn't get bored. And so these two influences really gave me this kind of exposure to, game design, gamifying things. We used to customize games that we made. I became a teacher myself and I'd choose games in the classroom. I would, create my own games to use with learners to teach them a particular aspect of the curriculum that we're doing at that time and I was really bowled over by the power that games have in the classroom. And so, and then I joined my husband and run an education company, training teachers, how to manage behaviour. We sold that company in 2017 and I knew that this was now the time that I was going to be able to jump into board game design, full time, which I've been doing on the side. That's a long answer to a quick question.

[00:07:59] **Beth Stallwood:** I'm [00:08:00] sitting here imagining like a primary school aged Ellie looking at your dad's computer going, Ooh, I wonder why we're going for a walk today. And it also loving the idea of totally randomizing, which housework chores you're going to do versus the same old, same old, boring side of things.



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[00:08:16] **Ellie Dix:** I'm one of five children, though, I don't think we're children now, the children 40 something, and we, and several of us use this cleaning program to, to work out what we're doing. And when he also has a computer program that tells him which member of the family, he should ring because he'll forget to phone u , but he doesn't forget that, you know, every other evening to sit in front of the computer and get the computer to tell him who he needs to phone.

And he always puts in when he's last called us. And, and it will kind of have some weighting system. And, but it does cause problems because my stepmom, for example, he's previously handed a ringing phone to her and said, here's your uncle, Norman. The computer said you needed to speak to him.

[00:09:11] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. It's like who wins the computer or your....I know that there are so many interesting things about this to start with and I've got a couple of questions for you. I think the first it's not really a question. It's all here is how much we all influenced by stuff we do when we're kids and how that obviously wasn't the first career you had cause you went into teaching.

Although I suppose there's some things though with your parents being in that world, but how that passion and that interest can be really harnessed at a really young age. And then that can lead you into great things in your future.

[00:09:52] **Ellie Dix:** things in your future. I think, I think that's really true. And, but I'm not sure. I think sometimes it's just about [00:10:00] exposure to something. So something that, I mean, even though it's obviously not normal, it felt normal to me, all these things that we were doing felt completely normal and it wasn't until, as it is with many children, often people say this about their own experiences. I thought it was normal and it wasn't until I was older and I started telling stories about what we'd used to do, that I realized that it wasn't a tool, normal, you know, these parties that my dad used to lay on for us.

Actually, I did realize they weren't normal cause I go to other people's parties and we'd be playing pass the parcel and things, and people would come to my parties and parents would sort of hang around half in trepidation and you know, they really wanted to see what we were up to. I remember this one party in particular, the, the astronauts party, that parents were sent these invitations and they were told to bring, let the child come just it well wearing a bin bag over there normal clothes, basically, as, as an astronauts. And, and the first thing that happened while the parents were still standing and watching us, they welcomed into the garage to do, a weight training program to see how much weight they could lift and carry on their backs because we were going on this ex extreme expedition through the house, which had been changed into a grotto we were going to land on a, on a strange planet and go and visit the God who was in the loft. And we had to give gifts to the God and we have to carry these gifts and they were just paving slabs that my dad had kind of...and the children had to put these paving, paving, slips their backs and wear beanbags and go through the house under blankets. And I remember there was always someone that was sick because the food was disgusting and there was always someone cause my dad would do like mystery, [00:12:00]



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fantasy food, you know, pork sausages and strawberry jelly and, and there was always someone that cried cause they got lost somewhere in the house because they were under a bed that had been draped in blankets or something and couldn't find their way into the pirate grotto or whatever it was. And I thought it was normal until I started going to other people's parties.

And I think that, yeah you're exposed to these things as a child and they stay with you, your experiences stay with you and they've course they form the kinds of things that you think about. , and I think one of the really interesting things is that we don't change that much, you know, from when we're children to when we're adults, what we liked doing when we were children is often what we like doing when we're adults.

And if you're not exposed, you know, and those things that you're exposed to for. The kinds of things that you enjoy, the kinds of things that you want to do, so if you always go on family cycle rides and that's a very pleasant experience for you as a family, and it brings you joy. That kind of activity is always going to be associated with that kind of feeling.

It's very much we are, you know, are, are the things we enjoy doing are formed when we're younger.

[00:13:23] **Beth Stallwood:** And then tell me a little bit more because you then used before you became a game designer, you were using it in your role as a teacher, and then your role as kind of educating teachers, how did you find games helped in that world. And then if you can, I'm thinking about actually in the context of work, if we thought about games, how might that translate into the context of work?

[00:13:50] **Ellie Dix:** Well, there are huge benefits to games and for clarity, I'm not just talking about, traditional board games like Monopoly. [00:14:00] I'm not saying that you should get Monopoly out in a classroom or in a workplace and start playing. When we're talking about tabletop games, there's this whole range of different kinds of games, whether there {?} placement games, whether they're role-playing games, party games, card games, or games with boards, all sorts of different things. These different kinds of games have different benefits.

Some of them of course are going to be, have curriculum content. You know, if we're talking about use in schools that are going to help, but really I'm talking about games in general, playing any kind of games of what the benefits are there for learning and for in the work environment. So first and foremost games playing games brings people closer together.

You know, many interactions that we have with our children or with our colleagues or with our learners are functional or transactional. And that only increases as our children get older. And it's, it's all too easy to get caught up with what needs to be done either in the workplace at the, in the home in school, and forget about having moments of fun together.



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And fun is so important because it brings us closer. It helps us to connect with other people to disconnect the person from the role. And, really it's about developing connections, improving relationships and games, help us to do that because they take us away from this sort of transactional and into a world of play.

And it helps us to build trust and unity with each other.[00:16:00] Secondly games don't matter and you can't overemphasize how important that is, you know, in the workplace where everything is measured, really, you know, your, you know, what your objectives are, you know, that you're being graded on what you're doing or you're, or you're grading yourself in some sort of way on what you're doing.

And it's all about deadlines and achievements and in school where we're all striving to, exams, getting through the curriculum, it matters what we're doing matters it has consequences, but in a game, the outcome doesn't matter at all. So the stakes are really low. It doesn't matter if we lose games, provide us with this platform to fail.

And we can fail over and over again. And odds are that most time you're playing a game, you're going to lose because one person, if it's ....going to win. So as we become more comfortable with failing, we start to learn from it. And we tend to avoid putting ourselves in a position where we, where we don't succeed in our daily lives.

We don't want to do that. You know, we don't want to put in a contract that we, you know, proposal, and then we don't get it, or we don't want to take a test and we don't do very well. but in games it really doesn't matter. And that's so liberating and it makes us behave differently. It makes us more experimental, more free.

Playing games, whether we, in a school context, whether the game has got any kind of innate in a educational content or not games, help us to develop learning skills. And this is useful in a work context as well. You know, games improve our memory formation and our cognitive skills. Our processing speed is increased as we're playing games and we have to make quick [00:18:00] decisions.

We, our logic and reasoning skills are developed. We improve our critical thinking and our spatial reasoning. Our verbal communication skills are developed when we're playing some sort of games that we have to negotiate for, explain what we're doing, our concentration and our attention span is developed.

And hugely importantly, we learn about problem solving and decision-making, we're presented with an issue with a scenario in front of us, and we have to make quick decisions. So games encourage us to think a new ways, yeah, I mean, I, there's all sorts of other things. You know, every player is equal in a game and that's not the same in the hierarchical structure of the workplace or, the classroom,



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games create this kind of shared experiences that we can come back to time and time again and that's really useful in a learning context because if you're teaching, sorry, that's my phone. We're going to ignore that. Probably going to try again. It's a bit of a nightmare I have a landline in my study that I can't even remove. We call it grandparent line because the only people that usually call on it are either my parents or my husband's parents. And it's not, it's not one of those numbers. I don't know who it is. They'll probably try again how annoying. Finally, there's one last thing that's really important about games is that there are both kind of physical and mental health benefits of playing games. Game-playing has proven health benefits because it chooses laughter and reduces stress, boosting the immune system and lowering blood pressure and board games really help us to escape from our daily worries and focus on something else [00:20:00] for a little while - you can't think of very many other things while you're playing a game, your focus is on the game.

So this brings us a little bit of balance in a hectic world and helps us to relax. And I think also, you know when we're talking about parents and using games in the home, teenagers particularly may seem to want to spend a lot of time on their own and their room, but it's not usually in the best interest of their mental health.

So taking time to play together can reduce that sort of isolation. And this is a loads of studies recently that say that people who play games are less at risk of cognitive decline, dementia, and Alzheimer's, so it's a bit of a win-win when you're playing games, reading.

[00:20:41] **Beth Stallwood:** I was going to say that list is enormous of all the..

[00:20:43] **Ellie Dix:** And it's not the whole list, but those are the sort of whistle stop tour.

[00:20:51] **Beth Stallwood:** I was giggling slightly at myself when you said it reduces blood pressure. And I had some very bad blood pressure raising UNO games with some friends in the past. But you think about the fun that you had and we actually, like, I could quote many times where Uno has been the part of our fun times.

[00:21:11] **Ellie Dix:** Yes, absolutely. And I mean, you know, many people say I don't like board games, you know, I can't stand them and it's because they're playing the wrong kinds of games to be perfectly honest and. That you know, many parents will cite board games as, you know, causing problems in the home and arguments. And really it's because they're playing these many mainstream games like Monopoly, that aren't really very good family games.

You know, Monopoly was, was, published in 1935 and we're still playing it. And there are so many better family games now than there were. And you know, when you think about it, Monopoly. It's very, very long. That's not a great family experience. [00:22:00] You could be losing for many hours. You could, be out a long time before other people.



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And the writing is sort of on the wall from really early on. Now, none of those things make for a particularly harmonious family experience. So of course, these benefits of playing board games rely on you picking the right source of games that are going to help you pull together with other people rather than bring you apart.

And now, I mean, there's all sorts of things that do that. There are, there are games that don't have conflict. There are games where, you know, where player interaction is reduced a little bit, but there are also co-operative games where as a group of players, you're working together to try and beat the game.

And, and that's, I mean, that's a great one called pandemic, which is probably the most well-known and it's obviously it's, it's been played quite a lot in the last couple of years. It's very appropriate for the time we are living in.

[00:23:07] **Beth Stallwood:** Just sitting here thinking about that idea of games being long and boring versus the right ones for the concentration span you have with different people. And also one of the things I was really thinking about when you were talking earlier is how games are often, I think, and if I think about my personal experience are first or most easiest introduction with failure and resilience against it and being okay with it and understanding that if you know, it's just part of life.

[00:23:40] **Ellie Dix:** And, and that's why it can be so damaging when you have an, and I totally understand why parents do this, why some parents do this, that they'll let their children win the game, because it's easier to do that. And it's really actually quite damaging to do that because it stops the children from getting comfortable with losing. [00:24:00]

And, it's difficult it's, you know, it's a difficult lesson to teach as a parent. But it's, it's, it's the fact that we don't get and, and now even less so. We don't get put in a position where we are forced to lose, because we're, you know, we've schools are very much more about, you know, not putting, not, not, not grading children against each other, which is great, which is, which is an improvement. But it has put us into a position where children aren't used to, knowing where they stand in a, in a situation. And then, so they're less likely to be able to cope with losing, but you have to push through that. You have to teach your children how to manage that so that you can have so that you can access the joy and all these wonderful benefits that playing games bring.

[00:24:56] **Beth Stallwood:** And I was just thinking a couple of weekends ago when it was raining again, I had my friends and my daughter around for a barbecue. So we ended up inside and at 11 years old, she absolutely whooped me again, called Rubik's Race about 10 times. And I'm thinking I just need to let her win. She was going to win. There was no hope I would win in the situation. Her brain moved so quickly,



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[00:25:23] **Ellie Dix:** Absolutely. And it's to do with the kinds of games you're playing. So, you know, if you're playing games of, you know, of luck where there's no, you know what, it's just, well, it's going to be person A or person B that wins. And there's nothing that you can do in terms of your own choices within the game to win.

Then you're going to have a, more of a problem when you've got a child who can't cope with losing because there is nothing they could've done to win. And I, and actually I think it's, counter-intuitive we think that that will make them feel better, but it doesn't, it's actually better to have made decisions and lose in the game than it is [00:26:00] to have not made any decisions and lose because then it just feels totally unfair.

You can see, even if you're upset that you, your decisions have had an impact on your eventual outcome in the game. And okay. There might be elements of randomness and a game, but really these good games have got some choice for players so that they can have agency over their own destiny. And, and that's what we want to see.

And then, okay. You might be frustrated because you've made some poor choices or the choices that you've made prevented you from winning, but then you can get better and better, and there's the opportunity for you to get better and better and ultimately to win. I mean, you know, child, who's played their grandfather every week at chess for five years and never beaten them. And then suddenly one day they pip them at the post and it, there is nothing that compares to that kind of sense of personal satisfaction. And you get there because you failed so many times.

[00:27:02] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah and that's the that's the thinking is, is about the long term benefits. Not necessarily winning in that moment, understanding how to play the game and understanding all the different techniques and stuff and building your skill.

And there's so many lessons in that for life in general. Children. Everything is sometimes about understanding that you've got to take time to build your skills that you don't just suddenly the first time you play it play amazingly well.

[00:27:27] **Ellie Dix:** Absolutely. And I was speaking to a couple of guys who have written a book about chess improvement, which is really written for parents and coaches of chess players.

And, and children who are becoming chess players and they said something very interesting. They said, you know, the best sorts of questions you can ask after a child, I guess it's same with an adult, playing a chess match – are not about the outcome of the game, you know, don't start by saying did you win. Start by saying, what did you learn? And whether you won or not is irrelevant. You know, what were the interesting bits in the game? What, what did, what, what, what was unexpected ask those sorts of questions. And so you can see that as a parent or as a teacher, you can start to form the way that children and young people think about the game playing experiences that they've had





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by the questions that you ask, if you make it all about who's one, if you let the person who's one not clear away, or you will give them a clap and say, oh, brilliant, well done aren't you wonderful. Then there's more emphasis on the outcome of the game rather than the process of playing.

[00:28:51] **Beth Stallwood:** And I see the translation of science, you know, think about a project and you're doing like a project review at work rather than asking, did we win at the project? Did we get the exact outcome we were looking for asking things like, what did you know and what were the unexpected, how did you overcome things? What were the challenges? What did you feel? The joy.

[00:29:10] **Ellie Dix:** Absolutely. And it's got to be in a work context, not just about the winning or the losing. It's got to be about, you know, if you're embarking on a project that is, or, you know, you're putting together a proposal for something and it's not, and the outcome is not at all certain then, there's, there's got to be a reason more than we want to win this project to do it. You know, we've got to learn from maybe it's that in four years, we want to be able to win. You know, I enter my ball games into board game competitions. The, the point is not to win those. The point is to get the feedback from the judges so that I can make those games, which are in development, which have not been published, which just in the sorts of development stages, I can make those games as good as [00:30:00] they possibly can be. It's you know, getting to the final of a competition or winning a competition is a wonderful by-product but the reason I'm doing it is not that. So, you know, and it's got to be the same in the work context that there's gotta be another reason why we're doing this other than to win the work.

[00:30:18] **Beth Stallwood:** And, and then, then you think about actually, if we were to maybe some of our meetings, if we were to do a game within them. At some point, if there's this big challenge that we're looking at, how do we look at it from a different angle, maybe using some games. And then the other thing, I was just really thinking about that when we're talking about games, I think the pandemic gave us a really interesting opportunity to use games, to connect. Because I cannot tell you how many zoom quizzes and zoon game things I have been on. Well, they seem to fizzle out after the first six months, but for the first six months of the pandemic, when everyone was in lockdown, there was a lot of trivia stuff going on. So many different things that as a form of connecting with each other, which wasn't just trying to have an awkward chat over zoom.

[00:31:07] **Ellie Dix:** Yeah, absolutely. It's and that becomes, you know, we need structure, and if you think about when you often see your friends or speak to your friends, it's often in a structured environment, either it's in a work context or your all, you know I sing as part of a Glee club and we go and sing and that's the context in which we meet and we chat and there's plenty of time to chat, but we've got this structure to when we meet.

And of course all of that was taken away and it's very difficult because when you're on zoom, you can't have mini conversations between different parts of the group. You can't, that doesn't happen naturally. So, we've had to find ways to, you know, say, oh, you, you, you go first and [00:32:00] tell us what you've been doing and then we'll sort of go round the screen. And actually some of the best



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conversations we have are when we're doing something else, you know, when we're cooking a meal together, when we're playing a game together, when we're going on a walk together and the focus isn't on the conversation, the focus is on something else.

And the conversation forms naturally as, as, as part of that. And that's one of the reasons that playing games is so good for people who find it really hard to manage in social situations. So, there was some work situations or some workplaces that attract really neurodiverse colleagues and you'll know what I mean in the, in that kind of place, some types, there are accountancy firms and places like that, where the people that enjoy that kind of work, might be on the autistic spectrum. Some of them, I know I'm hugely generalizing here but there are higher proportion in some workplaces than others of this sort of neurodiverse background. And what you'll see with many of those people is that they don't, they're not interested in small talk. They find social situations quite difficult because they don't always know what's expected of them. And, and they prefer something more structured. So when you have a game that you're playing, it gives you a framework within which to operate. And you can talk about the game. You can talk through the game and people who don't want to make small talk, don't have to, and that's really empowering that's a brilliant social activity for any workplace to have.

And it's going to make employees who struggle in those kinds of free-flowing social, social situations, much, much happier and, and feel like they, are much more comfortable within their own work place.

[00:33:56] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah because the game has boundaries and rules and, [00:34:00], a reason to be doing it.

[00:34:04] **Ellie Dix:** Yeah. And points and kind of victory conditions and, and a rule set. So they know how they're behaving within the game.

[00:34:14] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. That's really, it's really interesting. Isn't it? That there's potentially so many uses for games at work yet that isn't, I don't think it's something that many people think about when they're in the working context is how could we, how could we use some games or some thinking, you know, even that, I always just think about the randomizer from when you first came on, you know, you could have six subjects on an agenda and a dice couldn't you and you could go, right? Which order are we going to do? The men we're going to that the dice decide.

[00:34:44] **Ellie Dix:** Exactly. It doesn't have to be complicated. It doesn't have to be complicated. You can do that. I mean, one of the things that we used to do and when I was running the education company is we would have certain points, like, for example, I mean, this is just one example, but at our Christmas at our Christmas event.



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We would have a sort of, okay, you've got 15 minutes. This activity and it's going to be in a, in a, an envelope and you pick up the envelope out of a box. And that's the activity we're going to do next. And, one of the activities was, for example, create a new product for the company. You've got 15 minutes and the winner will that their product will get developed next year.

And when you've got that kind of 15 minutes at time, time limits people are, you know, and you're in groups of different people from different departments. People just sort of create in a very unexpected way because they've just built a gingerbread house, and now they're now they're creating a product for next year.

[00:35:55] **Beth Stallwood:** And it just gets your brain into a totally different zone.

[00:35:58] **Ellie Dix:** Yeah, it does. Yeah, [00:36:00] exactly. And you're working with people you don't normally work with and , you're yeah. You're, you're collaborating on some things and your, you know, you've got your own voice within that as well.

[00:36:09] **Beth Stallwood:** And as a business owner, you can get loads of amazing ideas.

[00:36:14] **Ellie Dix:** Exactly. Really. That's what you want to foster and develop, you know, if, if you need ideas to keep your business going, which, I mean, I don't, I don't know a business who doesn't, whether it's a marketing plan or whatever kind of idea was a new product or it's a new service or it's how to make, you know, how to develop a service you've already got or how to streamline it.

Then you can't just have one person creating those ideas. And if you have a sort of hierarchy or structure or job roles within your organization that say only these people can have ideas or only these people can have ideas that we will listen to, then you can be sure that no one else in the company is going to come up with any ideas. Not because they can't, but because that's not their job. They're not listened to, or they're not asked, or they're not put in the situations where they could have ideas. So by mixing that up a bit, you start to create these interesting situations where, where people that are really unexpected are going to start to have really excellent ideas, which will spark someone else, which, you know, and people bounce ideas off each other.

So, you know, put them in that kind of situation. But do it as a game where the outcome really doesn't matter. You know, you're not being judged on whether you've come up with a brilliant idea in the next 15 minutes or not. It doesn't matter if you can't, but you know, you might well do because you're eating chocolate crepes from the man who's cooking them in the corner from your work. You're having a wonderful. ..

[00:37:51] **Beth Stallwood:** Placing food and games together, then you're in the ideal location for great ideas and, yeah, I think there's just something. So [00:38:00] if we can understand, I always



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think this is that we always learn more. We always get more out of things when we're enjoying ourselves and having fun.

And when the pressure to create something is off, right? So you take away the pressure because it's a game. So the outcome doesn't matter. And you said that right from beginning outcome doesn't matter here - but it's about the process and the thinking and the collaboration. And then what, I would type in the work context it's the more you do that, the more that just becomes the way you do things, even when there isn't a game provided to you.

[00:38:26] **Ellie Dix:** Yep, absolutely. And it's about that, knowing that you can talk about those things with other people, you know, oh, I've had an idea, let's have a chat about it. You've done it before you've created a situation where that has happened before, and that can happen again. And it's interesting, the whole kind of creativity in the workplace idea because many, many entrepreneurs will say they have their ideas when they stop, when they stop working, when they go on. And if they go on holiday for two weeks, a year, that's the time where all out there, all our ideas are coming because they're doing something different because they're not trying to you know, tick off things on their task list, which is really contradictory to opening up their minds to new ideas. You can't, you can't schedule a time in your week to have new ideas. You just have to make those experiences within the life of the company or within your own work life.

[00:39:24] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. So can I because we are getting to time here, it means we've got to do some quick fire questions where we add the head from here. So I got to know a bit about you personally. And what is something that for you is always guaranteed to bring you a bit of work joy in your life?

[00:39:45] **Ellie Dix:** Well, I would say. I'll answer this in a roundabout way. I'm telling you what doesn't bring me work joy. I mean, it's really the opposite of this, which is [00:40:00] pretty terrible. Being being forced to do something by somebody else. So, I'm not a very good employee because I'm always fighting against what I've been told to do. What, what brings me joy is being able to make my own decisions, having complete autonomy over, not only my own time, but what I'm spending my time on, what I'm developing, what I'm creating and the things that really, I mean, you could probably tell as as a I mean, I'm a board game designer, but I also own my own board game publishing company. So the design is part of what I do, but I'm spending a lot of time publishing games, working with manufacturers work at loads of time on marketing to try and sell these games. So the design is only part of what I do, but it is the bit that brings me the most joy. You know, sitting down with an empty page and a bag full of wooden cubes and some bits of cardboard and a Stanley knife and think, right, what am I going to create today? That's totally exciting and very joyful.

[00:41:13] **Beth Stallwood:** It does sound exciting I'm sitting here thinking I'd love to do that it's such an interesting, an interesting world to be in a really interesting job. I'd also, I know that there'll be many people who are listening to this who relate to the being an employee thinking is that really where I should be? One thing that freedom to be able to use your. Your skills and your strengths and



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the way that you like to work for a good purpose, that links into what you want to do and what you enjoy. Totally get that

Second question. I'm going to split into two halves, but can I ask you first one? The question I ask everyone, which is, what book are you currently reading?

[00:41:54] **Ellie Dix:** I'm afraid. It's not simple to answer that because [00:42:00] I sort of have three books on the go, I've got some work, a sort of businessy type book that I'm reading and I've got a sort of design-y type book I'm reading. And then I've got a novel though reading. So the, the design type book is called Understanding Comics and it's a comic. It's written, it's written as a comic with pictures and it is all about comics and what they're about and how they communicate and how they, and why it's such a powerful form. It's very interesting.

[00:42:39] **Beth Stallwood:** And then I was going to go into a second question, which is, I think there's gonna be a really hard one to ask, but, , what's your current favourite game?

[00:42:48] **Ellie Dix:** It is a hard one because most people who play lots of games with that will change quite rapidly.

I mean, I have, oh, probably between 350 and 450 games in my collection and I'm afraid I get new ones all the time. I preview games for a magazine and extend me them either when I get new games on Kickstarter and I go to conventions and I just acquire games, but so I've got a favourite game that is very, it's a very big game It takes about three hours to play. It's called Terraforming Mars, and it is, each player sorts of acts a corporation who is trying to make Mars more habitable. And you're trying to increase the oxygen level. You're trying to increase the temperature when you're trying to increase the amount of water on the planet, and you do various things to do that.

Every time you play it, it's completely different, the combination of cards that you get is completely different but the reason I love it is because my children love it, it's a big [00:44:00] game. It says 14 plus, but we've been playing it for years, but only because they played lots of games. That's how we can play it. Yeah. So that is pretty solidly. My number one.

[00:44:12] **Beth Stallwood:** I love that you love it because the kids love it. Proper family time stuff going on there. And it's one of those ones where it's more collaborative so you're all working together.

[00:44:17] **Ellie Dix:** If it's completely cutthroat competitive, you can steal plants off other people. You can steal animals, temperature, tokens, and you can do, you've got all sorts of things to.

Stop them producing Titanium and all sorts of things. Brilliant. You can put tiles on the board and places what are going to prevent them from scoring. So it's a little bit backbiting. We call it an engine



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building game, building your engine which is then going to run which will produce more and more it takes effort to build this thing, but this thing is going to produce more than you would produce if you don't build it.

[00:45:05] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah sounds really good and one that you can all get involved and work through.

[00:45:10] **Ellie Dix:** But it is definitely not the first game to play. If you've met played many modern games. Do not go and search for Terraforming Mars, unless you've got loads of games already.

[00:45:22] **Beth Stallwood:** It's not for amateurs then, not for the first time.

[00:45:25] **Ellie Dix:** It's not and if people are interested in finding some better games, there's a couple of things that you can do. But one of my biggest tips is to search for gateway games on Google because gateway games that's the term for games for the uninitiated great hobby games, but for the people that have only been playing mainstream games up until now. So search for top 10 gateway games or so, you know, top gateway games or something on Google and you'll find a load.

[00:46:00]

[00:46:01] **Beth Stallwood:** What's the best or most useful bit of advice that you've had in your life, in your career that you always find yourself coming back to?

[00:46:11] **Ellie Dix:** I think it's. I can't remember who gave me this advice. I feel like it's been sort of, I feel like I've heard it from loads of different people over the years, because it's such a basic piece of advice, but it is so important. It is to treat other people kindly and yes. It seems so obvious, but when you are a teacher and you've got all sorts of other things going on and there's a child that's kicking off in front of you, it's hard to be kind to that child.

You don't know what's happening in anyone else's personal life. You don't know what situation your colleague has just come in from or what situation that child has got at home. You don't know anything about. What's going on with that person. So just the best all the time and treat people kindly because you know, if you treat people kindly, then they will by and large treat you kindly and if you have high expectations of people and give them the benefit of the doubt, then that in my experience will come back time and time again and, and pay you over and over. And I think, you know, if you're an employer or if you have subordinates, people that you manage. It's having high expectations, but treating people kindly those two things together are going to make for a very good work, a work experience, a very good relationship with anybody that you work for.

Yeah. Yeah.



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[00:47:51] **Beth Stallwood:** It's a great, a great piece of advice and people often think about, but what about all these other situations? It's like, just add kindness in just add kindness as the first thing.. What is one super practical thing that people could go and do in their lives with their families in their work place, you know, really easy something you can go and do that might bring a bit of game benefits into their world.

[00:48:18] **Ellie Dix:** Yeah. If you'd like to have, , you know, have some more gaming experiences in your home and you think that your teenage children might be a bit might not, might not be very receptive and then you could use, what I call deliberate stealth instead of saying let's play a board game in which they don't know, remember if you haven't played lots of games and you've only got games that aren't brilliant family gaming experiences, like we've talked about with Monopoly, for example, then people's expectations of what a game is going to be are not always exactly as you might want them to be. So think about. Okay, how can I stealthily expose them to some great games without making a whole big thing of it?

You might not want to clap your hands and say, let's play a lovely board game, everybody, because they might just, you might get not the best response. So there were a couple of ways that, that I do this, that have done this or suggested that people do this get some board games that are quite pretty on the table. Set them up and play them by yourself. Loads of board games now have a solo play mode or play them with another adult or someone else in the house that you think is going to be most receptive. And they look beautiful on the table, position yourself to be found by the children or by whoever you think is going to be the most reluctant to join in, don't ask them to join in [00:50:00] just, you know, let them saunter over, ask what you're doing. You know, this could be as simple as playing a game called so there's a patience game card game called Spaces. And it's probably my favourite patients' game. So low card game. It involves you need a big table you're going to put all 52 cards out in, , on the table, face up in four rows of 13. And just that itself takes so much, it has so much table presence. You cannot just sitting there doing this. Other people in the house, your kids will stop and ask. They will stop and sit with you. They'll stand next to you and look and that's, and, and then they'll say, oh, well, you could do that you could do that. And you're hooking them in very gradually, very stealthily. Another thing you could do is deal out cards with dinner. You know, they're going to sit there at the table anyway for dinner. They probably, you know, if you've got teenagers, they might not want to do. So actually they might be quite happy to be given some cards or some dominoes or some dice or, or some kind of game that they can play while they're eating.

And then that will extend dinner for a bit. It will keep you together for a bit longer and you will start the game. Playing will start to become something that happens in your family. Of course, you can do the same thing in other environments.

[00:51:17] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. I love that some table presence. Yeah. Yeah. That makes such a difference.



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[00:51:25] **Ellie Dix:** Yeah. And don't have your book games in a cupboard where nobody can see them, you know, have someone show have some of these puzzle games, like Rush Hour or something on the coffee table, have a game called like Zombie Dice on the kitchen counter. It takes five minutes to play.

You can play it when you're waiting. You know, waiting for the microwave even, you know, just have these things out and around the house, have a sort of leaderboard on the back of the toilet door where, you know, you've got a single player game and you're writing your personal times for that month or that week and that game. Exposure, you know, [00:52:00] make it so that it's clear that you are a board game family playing family and that's part of your brand.

[00:52:06] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah, I'm just thinking about the, on, on our fridge. There is currently a leaderboard between me and my husband has to who's winning at boggle.

You can totally do that in the workplace. Then you can take, you have, you know, just have some games out at lunchtime if you've got some space for it or meeting. Something random. I mean, I know as a facilitator, some things I do, if we're going to do a, who's going to go first with the presentation. If people pick a card need you highest, lowest, like that starter of a gamification type thing, but it's really simple to do.

I love it.

[00:52:40] **Ellie Dix:** There are plenty of workplaces that have little board games, little mini board game libraries or board game clubs that happen at lunchtime.

[00:52:52] **Beth Stallwood:** And finally my final question for you is thank you so much. And where can people find out more about you and your boards games and all of the amazing things that you produce in the world?

[00:53:04] **Ellie Dix:** Yes. Well, I have a website which is the name of my board game publishing company [www.thedarkimp.com](http://www.thedarkimp.com) and can get in touch with me there through the contact page. There's an online shop. So you can see all of the different games that I've created. And I specialize in creating games and small formats that are very giftable. So games on coasters, games on placemats at games and Christmas crackers. And so that there's all sorts of things there, and you can get lots of downloadable print and play games for even just as little as £1.99. So I'm sure there'll be something there for you to try. I've also written a book called The Board Game Family, Reclaim Your Children From The Screen. So you can get that on Amazon or again, through the website. I generally, hang out on Twitter. That's where I'm most active in social media. And I'm at Ellie Dix tweets. I'm also on Facebook and LinkedIn, but yeah, I'm spending most of my time on Twitter.

[00:54:19] **Beth Stallwood:** Brilliant. And we'll put all those links into the show notes as well.





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That it's been lovely chatting to you. I could chat for ages more and find out more about all of these amazing things around games, but I just think it's a really great thing for our listeners to think about is how could you use games for all? I mean, that list of benefits is enormous for some of those things and just see how it works for you. And for me, that stealth mode side of things like go and put the stuff out there, play it and see what happens. It's a great way of getting people started and interested. So thank you so much for coming on the Work Joy Jam

[00:54:50] **Ellie Dix:** Thank you for very much for having me, Beth. It's been lovely to be here.

[00:54:58] **Beth Stallwood:** Thank you for listening to the Work Joy Jam, and thank you very much to Ellie for joining me and talking all about how games can really help us in our lives with our families and obviously in the workplace as well. So many things to take from that and the interesting things about how it can benefit things like collaboration and creativity and creating new ideas.

And getting people to connect with each other, which I think in the workplace is such an important thing and how it can actually have a benefit on things like your mental health and learning how to fail and learning how to grow and so many different things. And I loved her phrase games can put a bookmark in your mind, something to refer back to something, to come back to as a group that really helps people understand and contextualize what's going on in their world.

And that, well, the other thing that I really, really liked, and I often talk about it as going into like stealth mode, is this idea that you [00:56:00] can get people excited about these things by actually doing it yourself, having something there, having something on the table, maybe having something in your work place that just encourages people to consider different ways of thinking, using games as a way of learning and as a way of connecting as a way of connecting. So huge thank you to Ellie for being part of it. I think it's a great advice there and do you go and take a look at [www.thedarkimp.com](http://www.thedarkimp.com) if you are interested in getting some games and seeing what Ellie does. Do you go and have a listen to the other episodes of the Work Joy Jam as well. We have many people from different backgrounds, different experiences, different industries to talk to and find out what they do to get work joy in their life.

As well as some of their advice and they'd guidance from their expertise. If you're looking to really up the level of joy in your working life, you might want to consider coming and joining our Club Work Joy. And this club, we're an amazing community of people who are all trying to do the same thing, which is creating and cultivating more joyful working life.

We have a range of speakers, we have networking events, we have collaboration on our app and it's a great place to be. So do go to [www.createworkjoy.com](http://www.createworkjoy.com) to find out more about the club and do come and join us. We'd love to see you that have a great day.

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