



THE PODCAST

S1: E14 Janie Van Hool The Joy of Listening

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Beth Stallwood: Welcome to the Work Joy Jam in this episode, we are talking to the marvelous, Janie Van Hool, who, and we're going to be talking a lot about listening and it's one of those subjects that now she says, it's not new and it's not particularly sexy as a subject yet. It's one of those things that can really make a massive difference to how we feel when we are listened to and how we make others feel when we listened to them and how listening really builds, our curiosity, our understanding of other people, how it is the fundamental part of building great relationships. Where we can recognize people where we can have a really deep and meaningful conversation and not just talk about some of the transactional things that we need to get done in our working life.

[00:01:20] We talk a bit about paying attention, and I really hope that it's interesting for you. Do you have a listen and I will pop back on the end and talk about what I am taking away from this session

We have the fabulous Janie Van Hool who joining us, and we're going to get into a great conversation and talk a bit more about listening, which is what our listeners are doing right now. Janie, I would love to hand over to you to introduce yourselves and maybe tell us a bit of your backstory and how you got to where you are today.

Janie Van Hool: Thank you, Beth. And thank you very much for having me so lovely to be here and actually I think I'm going to describe myself as on my fourth career, because I'm actually, you, you mentioned listening, I'm writing a book about listening, which is, I suppose, a bit of an anomaly, really writing about listening.

When actually, I suppose it's much more of a spoken and, listening exchange, but I'm writing a book about listening, but I'm, I'm late to the party. To be honest, I didn't learn how to listen until I was 50 or I didn't learn consciously how to listen until I was 50. When I trained with the Samaritans as a listening volunteer.

[00:02:37] But actually what writing the book has helped me with is realizing that all my careers to this date have been about listening because I started out as an actress. I was a classically trained actress, went to RADA, did lots of Shakespeare was in Iraq, in 12th night, which was very funny.

I was an actress for 12 years, and then I had a couple of kids and that ruined my acting dreams cause that stay at home with the kids because I love them so much actually. So that was fine. But, I took a master's degree in voice because I thought I could still work in the business as a voice teacher, dialect coach and then a couple of really funny things happened whilst I was doing it in the first one

was that I was invited to teach a workshop in the Bronx, in New York, working with women, coming off, state benefits and the, and the ambition was to help these women get confident in their interviews.

I'd never done anything like that before Beth, to be honest and I brought a linen suit from Marks and Spencer's and in the Bronx, it was, there was no air conditioning in this room and they'd load a women in the room and. I stood at the front, started to introduce myself and, and they just all started talking to each other.

[00:03:57] Cause they were just obviously really bored by my approach. And I realized I was going to have to do something. So I just took my shoes off and stood on the desk and started talking about being a mom and the confidence that comes with that. Actually they were, they were just wonderful.

[00:04:14] They were absolutely wonderful. It was a totally transformative the experience when I realized that I loved teaching and that I could find a way of helping people communicate. So that was precious and priceless. And then about two months later, I met a wonderful one and on a beach in Norfolk who happened to be head of management development for a bank.

[00:04:34] And she asked me if I'd be willing to do some work with the chief exec. of the bank that she worked with because she said he wasn't a very good communicator and I, you know that. So I just, to be honest, I'd had a couple and I had alcohol confidence, you know, an idea I just dived in and, and it was so exciting and transformative.

And then I spent 20 years working in business. With leaders on developing their confidence and communication. Of course, for the last 20 years, that's really been about, you know, how do I project myself with authority and, and dynamism and confidence. And once that's been absolutely wonderful in the last three or four years, I've been thinking, this is the balances out it's just all about projecting and there's not enough focus on listening. And then, you know, coincidentally trained with the Samaritans. And, and so here I am today. Trying to keep the scales evenly, evenly managed between the two. So yes, I, I described this then as my, I think my fourth career, actress, voice teacher, business coach, and now my well now listener, I guess I would, I would like to describe myself as a listener.

Beth Stallwood: I'm really fascinated about this subject of listening and kind of really in on this, you know, rather than. It's so easy, isn't it? Especially at the moment where we're doing things online and we're not kind of face to face with people to actually not really listen. Tell us a little bit more about what you have discovered in, in this fourth stage of your career, about what listening can give you and how it can give you that work joy.

[00:06:26] **Janie Van Hool:** I mean, , can I just say, actually I love the title work joy, and I'm really glad to talk about listening in the context of just that, because my concern is that it can be perceived in that kind of therapy thing that kind of you know, you've got to be a super contemplative. You know, I sit back, I think quite earnest about the perception of listening, whereas actually, I, you know, listening is so full of joyful opportunities because it unleashes the curiosity within, do you know what I mean?

[00:07:04] There is so much that is fascinating to discover about everybody. And my concern at work sometimes is where everyone's so driven by. I got to get this done. I've got to get that done. Then it really, it holds the joy because they're not really finding out about what's underneath the surface. And I am particularly well, I mean, we're back to the scales really. I'm particularly concerned about the online experience because actually I think people are meeting online to transact, you know, what do we need to do? And they're going from meeting to meeting to meeting. I think none of them are memorable if you think back.

[00:07:43] And you've been in eight meetings over the course of a day, how is one going to be distinct from the other? Because it's just all about stuff. Whereas I think we've really got to shift. I think we've really got to shift our, our way of being in these workplace conversations because we've got to, we've got to acknowledge the value of really listening and just chewing the fat, you know, in the way that through history people have got together and just chewed over stuff, sorted stuff, just by going deeper and I, I think we missing quite a lot of that at the moment. And it is a real opportunity for joy because everybody's so wise, everybody's got so much to offer and, and we haven't got the time to really pay attention.

[00:08:36] **Beth Stallwood:** So interesting. And I, you know, I put some of those meetings into the bucket of stuff and things. We're going to talk about stuff and things, but we're not really going to get anywhere with anything. We're just going to update each other.

Everyone is half listening and half doing their emails or writing something or trying to eat their lunch through the meeting. And we're not really getting anywhere with it. No, we're not really understanding what the challenges are. The issue is. We're not really understanding what each other's opinions or thoughts or amazing brilliant ideas or creativity comes into it.

[00:09:11] I totally feel that, but equally I've probably felt that in some way, Meetings in person as well about are people really paying attention. You know, there's been so many people bringing laptops and that you behind a laptop at work in a meeting and typing at the same time. And you're like, oh, are they typing about what we're talking about? Or are they sending an email? And, and we're still not actually really listening to each other.

Janie Van Hool: [00:09:36] No, I think that's where there is some craft that means paying attention, paying attention to I was watching I was watching a client video clips yesterday and. This person was asked a question and then took a full four and a half minutes to answer it.

And you know how in the teams thing, you can see everybody's pictures along the bottom of the screen, the slide is on the screen and I was watching the reaction of others and they were, I mean, they looked like they were, well, how can I say that? They went, they were looking at the screen, but they were doing other things.

They were rearranging stuff on their desk. They were looking out the window. I just, you know, you could just tell, looking at them that this lengthy response was too, it was too much for them and, and they'd lost their attention. And I think we, you know, we, I don't think teams is particularly helpful in that because the screen is full of slides and you can just see people drifting off.

And I mean, absolutely Beth in the way that we could when we were in the room, but.

Beth Stallwood: [00:10:45] it's also, it's also very much easier. Isn't it? It's turning your camera off for a bit and go and do what you need to do while yeah. While it's someone else's. And so tell me a little more about this craft idea. So what, what have you discovered in your throughout, well throughout your career?

[00:11:00] Because as you said, it's all been kind of leading up to this point about listening. What have you discovered are some of the ways that we can get better at this and get more out of things? If we focus on listening rather than focus on projecting or, you know, having confidence and being in that zone.

[00:11:18] **Janie Van Hool:** [00:11:18] I mean, I've actually written about this in my book. I think one of the challenges is, is not new and it's not sexy. Do you know what I mean? We, we kind of, we know that we're supposed to do it, but actually, because we're not taught it from an early age, it, it feels a bit elusive. So we only really listen if something is absolutely relevant to us.

[00:11:42] And so I think as communicators. We've got to take responsibility for trying to make stuff more relevant, trying to decide, you know, I think for leaders, for example, in organizations, you know, don't, don't just speak to your leadership team, you know, find out. What is relevant to people all through the business.

[00:12:04] It's really about opening up the organization to conversations with different people, different voices. I think there is a risk, particularly when we're very busy that we just listen to the same voices. So one of the first and most easy things we can do is to have different conversations with different people.

[00:12:22] Actually, do you know, I'm, I'm reminded of years ago. When I was pregnant and I was an actress, I used to temp as a receptionist for an advertising agency. And the leadership of the advertising agency was great actually. And they were hugely respectful of me and they would come and ask me about the people that had been waiting for them in the reception room, whether it was new clients, whether it was potential new hires.

[00:12:52] They would ask my view and it was fascinating how people interact with the receptionist. And I remember meeting a banker at a bank who I was checking in with the receptionist and she said, oh, you're seeing, you're seeing him. And I said, yeah. And she said, what's he like? And I just said, what do you mean?

[00:13:16] What's he like? And she said, oh, I've never, I've never met him. You know, because the leadership team come in through the other entrance. And I mean, that feels, I don't know if that even happens anymore, but I just think one of the first principles of any craft is to really open up the conversation so that I would say it would be step one, start, you know, start having random conversations with people and find out what they think back to the floor, you know?

Beth Stallwood: [00:13:44] Yeah. And in, in the digital world, that's about being proactive. Isn't it. And how about having some conversations with some people that isn't transactional, that hasn't got an agenda? Like the agenda-less catch-up like you would have, if you were casually meeting someone by the coffee machine or kind of the water cooler chats or, you know, wherever it is and the corridor conversations, all of those things.

[00:14:07] Yeah. If we are, you know, not everyone is working completely digitally at the moment, but a lot of people who are based in offices are doing that kind of way. Is those random connections, the random conversations, the unplanned, the unagenda you have to plan that now.

Janie Van Hool: [00:14:23] I think that's really interesting. Actually I don't know if you've read sapiens, the Yuval Noah Harari book, which God, it's a bit of a wade for me because I'm not that smart, but I did love the way it was written.

[00:14:35] I remember thinking there was a whole piece about the importance of gossip and not in a negative way, but that those light conversations. Where we, where we talk about each other and others' experiences. There's tremendous joy in that. Oh, did you know so-and-so got a promotion or have you seen so-and-so's red jumper?

[00:14:56] Wow. You know, and there's a huge energy around that that is missing at the moment. And I wonder if we, when we eventually, and let's hope it's soon, get to go back to the office. I dunno. Even if it's just like two days a week or something. I wonder if those will be the opportunities to, to gossip to connect, to form relationships.

[00:15:19] And then when we're at home, we can have these more transactional, let's get stuff done but we need that space. We need that. We need that space to create relationships or the organization has to allow people to choreograph it into their day. And I, you know, as a piece of craft, I would say that's the other thing that's really important is to be more disciplined about the choreography.

[00:15:47] It is fine in an hours meeting of half an hour of it is how are, you know, really, how are you? And you know, the other half an hour is maybe sorting out staff.

Beth Stallwood: [00:15:58] Yeah. And so. Interesting when you're talking about gossip though. And I just want to London in my head a little bit is that gossip is one of those words that we always see is negative.

[00:16:10] And I talked to other day to somebody about the idea of the word selfish. We always assume it's negative, but sometimes it's exactly what we need to do to do make the right decisions. We just don't have a good word for it. But gossip is one of those things that we assume it's negative. We assume it's people talking badly about each other, but actually so much gossip is actually just sharing information.

[00:16:30] Did you know that somebody got engaged? Did you know that they've done something amazing and that. You're right. The energy that comes from those conversations and that little spark of joy that people get, but then helps them do an amazing bit of work that afternoon or that morning or whenever they are is something that.

[00:16:48] It's really, really important and humans need connection. It's part of what we all need. And however much you kind of like working on your own, you still need some kind of human interactions and human connection. And to go beyond the, you know, that you're talking about that even if the first half hour of the meeting is having a real conversation.

[00:17:07] Rather than the, how are you? Yeah, I'm fine. When actually you're not, or when actually you need some help or you don't really know what's going on or you're confused to be able to give it a little bit of space.

Janie Van Hool: [00:17:17] Yeah. Yeah. And you know, I, I just think that organizations are, I spoke with someone recently who was saying that the CEO of the company had proposed the idea of putting a camera in so that everyone could be checked, that they were working hard enough, which is so horrific the concept. And it totally misses the value of getting stuff done through relationships. And I think the more. I feel like there's a positive move in this direction, but I think we absolutely have to recognize that success is achieved with great relationships.

And how the hell do you build relationships if you're just talking about a spreadsheet? And I mean, you're right. The connotations of gossip are lovely. If we could, we need to come up with a word.

Beth Stallwood: [00:18:16] We do

Janie Van Hool: [00:18:19] but it's so important to place ourselves in the community by understanding what's happening in all its riches to the others in our community.

[00:18:29] I think rather than organization, we should start talking about community. Cause it's warmer.

Beth Stallwood: [00:18:36] It's much warmer. Organization. Again, it's one of those words that comes up with like structure and hierarchy and power and people who have it and people who don't and you know, you have to be at this level to be able to do this.

[00:18:47] Whereas the community is one that comes together for the joint purpose. Isn't it? It's wonderful, one level

[00:18:53] **Janie Van Hool:** We all play our part rather than now. I will pronounce what we're going to be doing in the next 10 days. You know, that's that feels a bit old now actually. Or is sitting where I'm sitting.

[00:19:08] It does. I'd be interested to hear what people's lived experiences

[00:19:13] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:19:13] in your organizations. I think some organizations still are in that mode. I think a lot of them have probably moved on or have the desire to move on, but not the structure or the kind of habits that really help people to move on. You know, so many organizations are looking for innovation and creativity.

[00:19:32] And for me, that starts with human connection. When you have those conversations and you spark an idea. People very rarely. I think, I mean, I might be completely wrong here and I'd love to hear if I am. I think that people do not come up with fresh ideas necessarily that they're able to deliver on, on their own, in a silo.

[00:19:53] It doesn't work like that. No.

Janie Van Hool: [00:19:55] No, and I love that. I don't know enough about it actually, but the, the principle of the coffee shops in the 18th century, where people would just come together and chew

over ideas and, and would, would build on each other's ideas and they would, they would play out and expand and extend.

[00:20:15] Incredible stuff that would come out of those conversations, which could be held for hours, but are probably, you know, culturally incredibly informative. And we're all in such a hurry. You know, everything is about getting, get where, like you said, getting stuff done, you know, but actually whilst that's important, we've got to kind of tip those scales back in favor of there's an important.

[00:20:41] That's an important part of our working lives, but we must also value you. Can't just talk about relationships. They take time, they take investment, they take kindness and thought and insight and understanding. And you can't just do that in two minutes of pleasantries at the beginning. How was your weekend?

[00:21:00] [00:21:00] Good. Okay, great. So I need to talk to you about your pricing. I mean, that's not a relationship build.

Beth Stallwood: [00:21:07] No, but the idea that everyone is in such a hurry, I'm always thinking like you know, a number of years ago now, but organizations used to, if you think about like a manufacturing type organization, some of them still do this.

[00:21:18] They, you know, at 12 o'clock or 1230, they all down tools and they all go for lunch together and they have a conversation within that. And then they go back to work and they work really hard and they get stuff done. But that built in to that kind of structure of that day was time for conversation. And I think over however many years, we've eroded the power of the lunch break and the break and the conversation that can happen informally.

[00:21:44] I mean, you see it when I see it so much, when I was going into offices and seeing people, and even now you see like people working through their lunch break, people not connecting because they're trying to get more and more and more and more stuff done in the same amount of time.

[00:21:58] **Janie Van Hool:** [00:21:58] And I mean, do you think Beth that people, is there some sort of sense of achievement from getting stuff done?

[00:22:06] You know, some sort of psychological safety from going, Ooh, you know, I've had a, I've had a long day, but I've got 10 things off my list can feel much more satisfying. You know, when you're, when you're having a conversation with someone and all you're thinking about is, oh my God, I've got to get everything done. I wonder if that just gets in the way.

[00:22:26] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:22:26] I think it does. And I think also things like reward systems and performance management, if it's done in a way that rewards that behavior, people then continue on in that way. So think about it. If you get rewarded by, you know, Being there being at work the longest, doing the most work, getting the most things off your to-do list, regardless of how well you've done them or how much it created a term impact or relationship or positivity is that's, what's driving that behavior.

[00:22:56] And I think you get into habits of doing that, , because it's [00:23:00] rewarded or recognized because people talk about, oh, they worked really, really hard. And that's a great thing.

Well, there's imagine if people talked about, do you know what they worked really, really hard over two years to build that relationship that has now created this amazing partnership for our business.

[00:23:18] And it was a, a long process and it did take time and we didn't get to do that lovely feeling of taking something off the, to do this until now, but it was so worth that investment. And I think sometimes it's about seeing things as an investment rather than an outcome.

Janie Van Hool: [00:23:34] Yes. And I, you know, I, I love that sentence because I just think we organizations have fallen into a space where they value, output over everything else, output outcome, you know, it's all about that.

[00:23:49] And I understand that they have to satisfy often, especially if they're public companies, you know, they have to satisfy the shareholders, but, you know, that's – it feels like we're approaching the edge of that. We're going to have to do something slightly differently.

[00:24:02] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:24:02] Yeah. And it's an often short term targets and short term deliverables versus in the long run, what is actually going to make our business, our organization, our charity, our social enterprise, whatever type of organization you work in, short-term thinking will lead to that kind of behavior versus Maybe giving people a bit of, or you talked about it as like kind of opening up and giving that space, , to create better conversations, which will inevitably lead to maybe more innovation, better results, better thinking, better products, better service. You know, customers are crying out for better service aren't they?

[00:24:44] So, but short term thinking or doing things quickly, very rarely leads to really good customer service. Yeah. Yeah,

[00:24:51] **Janie Van Hool:** [00:24:51] absolutely. I just I'm desperate to plug Cath Bishop's book "The Long Win" here because actually just that, you know maybe that's the start of really transforming. Our approach because the relationship build has to be the way to help lift ourselves out of all of this.

[00:25:11] I think actually, maybe that's a really good thing.

[00:25:14] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:25:14] Yeah. And definitely I was about to say the same thing. We were on the same path because Cath is also on one of our podcasts. So you can go and listen to can as well, talking about the long and how we can really change up. What we look for and what the outcomes are, and, and to really change our perspective on short-termism versus that on Wednesday.

[00:25:34] Definitely good plug that, love it

Just the right time, the other thing I was just going to come back to, and one of the things you said is about, and I love the way you post it, obviously from your background in acting the choreography of your day and how you do things. What are some of the things that people can think about to choreograph, more opportunities to listen?

[00:25:59] So that's my [00:26:00] first question for you. My second part to that is when you've created the opportunity to listen, how can people listen really well?

Janie Van Hool: [00:26:08] So brilliant. I mean, I think actually this is something that being online does afford us is the opportunity to choreograph a bit more. So for example, if you sign into a conversation, let's say with three or four people.

[00:26:27] The objective would be to say, okay, let me be really clear that I would like to spend at least twenty-five minutes just finding out how you are and then we can get onto, , our agenda or whatever. If you find yourself. I mean where I'm sitting now, Beth, as I'm thinking, I'm looking out the window, it would be really important to say to my colleagues online that if I, if they could see me- may look off to the right, quite a lot. I'm not distracted. This is how I think, you know, just trying to help people by. Letting them understand the context in which you're having the comments where you are, what you're going to be doing, how long you would like to, to be spending on staff. And, and actually in terms of listening, I would say, keep those conversations short and then collaborate on a docent and then come back to the docent for a further conversation.

[00:27:29] Instead of spending an hour, hour after hour, just chatting through on zoom. But as a, as a listening practice, I would invite people to think of w what, what is your approach to listening? And, and I'm in my book, I'm talking about three different methods of listening. One is listening to support where you are just really openly inquiring.

[00:27:55] Tell me a bit more about that? What's up? Tell me how you're feeling? How is that going to play [00:28:00] out for you? All of those very I would call them interested statements or questions. Then, then there's also a listening to solve approach. Sometimes we're listening, we get the answer really quickly and we go. Okay, great. I just need, now. I just need to tell them what they should be doing and that's less, that's a less helpful I have listening. I mean, honestly, if you're listening to support you properly, using curiosity, if you're listening to solve you, just waiting for the gap so that you can dive in and tell people what to do.

[00:28:38] And then the third one is listening to switch the conversation back to ourselves. You know, that's I can you know, the number of times I might've said to someone I was talking actually about running the other day at which I am rubbish. And someone asked me about fitness and I said, I've been doing a bit of running, but I find it really hard.

Then within a split second, the response was, oh my God, you find it hard. Wow. Well, let me tell you about when I was training for my first marathon, it was blah, blah, blah. So there's absolutely no intent there to find out about me at all. I don't blame her to be honest because, , Right. What I've got to say about running, you could fit onto a stamp, but.

[00:29:23] It's just that sense of seizing the conversation back to my agenda. So those three things I think are simple enough for us to look out for, am I supporting, am I solving or am I just switching it back to me? Wich we're all, you know, we all do, but I suppose my question would be what's your intention.

[00:29:44] If you're having a conversation, what would you really want to do? Do you know, do you really just want to give your opinion. Do you really just want to talk about yourself? I mean, my concern is that we've become so bad at listening that actually everyone wants to switch the conversation back to themselves because they're not being heard anywhere.

Which I think, you know, is why, for example, I, you know, at the moment. At this time, the Samaritans, for example, are just overwhelmed with people who are desperate to talk about how this is for them, because during the pandemic, you know, the moment you say I'm really struggling at the moment, the chances are that, you know, the personal people are going to say, oh my God, you're struggling.

[00:30:24] Well, let me tell you about me so those would be a bit of choreography, make it really clear about how we can get the most from this meeting, make it short and decide which of those three positions you're going to be in as a listener would be helpful. As a starting point.

[00:30:43] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. I love the way you described those three possessions and, you know, we can all think of times when we've done the switch or done the soul, which is probably the mode we're in most of the time, I reckon I solving because it gets it done quicker switching because we haven't had a chance to talk about ourselves.

I work with a wonderful coach and he always says, some people just need a really good listening to yes. And some people you just need to set a lesson. I'm also wondering here about. What is it that the other person is expecting from you in that time? So your intent and their intent, and sometimes people want you just listened to them, which I would put in your listening support category. Right? They just want somebody to listen to the challenges they're having. They don't need a solution. They don't need anything else. They need to get some stuff off their chest and have that out there. Sometimes people come to you because they do want you to solve it.

[00:31:36] But if you jump in with a solution too quickly, it might not be the right solution. Right. So you might be sitting there thinking, actually I have done that listening to support, and now I'm thinking, do they actually want me to say something about that? Yeah. Yeah. And then maybe it's about getting curious about what they're, what they're actually looking for.

[00:31:49] So it's saying something like, and tell me if I'm wrong here in your world. Thanks to being like, oh yeah. It's really fascinating hearing what you've been saying about that. Is this something that you want me to see if I can help you with, or is it just a conversation for us, for me to listen to. And, it's, it's fine.

[00:32:06] It's fine. It's cool. Either way, but I can jump in and I've got some ideas. Do you want to hear them rather than assuming that everyone wants to hear what you've got to say? Absolutely.

Janie Van Hool: [00:32:14] Beth, I think, you know, the question that I think is so powerful is what would be helpful or, you know, or how, how could I help you?

[00:32:25] I mean, I, the intention behind that is so generous. And actually if we ask it in that open way, people can then say actually, do you know what? Just being able to offload has helped or. Well, you've been in this situation yourself. Could you give me some advice, you know, if you, if you just have the generosity to be able to say, what would you find helpful?

[00:32:49] What would you find most useful right now? That's a really great way of finding out and I appreciate the intent to go, oh my God, you know what you should do. I appreciate that. But it's often the least helpful.

Beth Stallwood: [00:33:04] I'm just thinking about your example of the kind of running thing there. What if the other person has said to you, oh, that's really interesting. What is it that you find hard.

Janie Van Hool: I mean, do you know what it wouldn't have taken me very long? Like I say, there's not much to say about my running, but it's just so frustrating when someone is clearly that uninterested in, in, in this case, my experience, I find it quite hurtful actually. And I, I mean, perhaps I find it hurtful because professionally I listen and, and a lot of my friends are really good listeners and I know it's not, it's not.

[00:33:45] You know, they didn't mean to hurt me, but I just find it. If you say something about yourself, like, oh, I'm finding this really hard and then it's swept away. I do find that I find that hurtful. I find it really, I feel without value. [00:34:00] Do you know? And I know that's probably not the intention. It's all.

Beth Stallwood: [00:34:03] But the difference between intent and how things come across and there's, I call it like there there's often in conversations kind of one upmanship about who has it worse. Yeah. Yeah. And so you, someone says, oh, I'm actually having a really challenging time. And I would say this, like, I don't have any kids. So I might say to someone, you know, I'm finding lock down a bit hard or I'm finding the situation we're in a bit harder or I'm finding work, whatever it is I'm finding difficult.

And someone else might say, oh, but imagine how much worse I have it because I've got kids and someone else says, well, imagine how much worse I have it because I've got kids and my kids' school has closed down because they, they, their bubbles and you get to into this, or the thing is. Every, I always think that everyone's experienced and how they're experiencing and how they're feeling about it is valid.

[00:34:51] And just because other people are in a different situation, which may be more complicated or harder to deal with, it doesn't mean that the person who started the conversation who then got one upped there, that their situation isn't as important or isn't worth the conversation or isn't worth listening to.

Janie Van Hool: [00:35:07] Yeah. And do you know Beth? I mean, that's such a great point. Do you remember, was it Monty Python years ago or was it, I can't remember who it was. This is years ago, but there is a whole thing. I look up to him because he, you know, and then he looks down on me, but I look up to him. It was a whole kind of, it was hilarious.

It's about status and actually you've probably done this kind of work on status play. There's a great book called Impro by Keith Johnston and he does all this work on status interactions. And, you know, he says all those things about one-upmanship and you can play hours of games of just getting, getting the one-up.

[00:35:48] Even if, even if your friend rings you and you say, how are you? You old slapper? You know, it could be funny, but it's, there's an intention there at some deep level of playing the higher role. And I, I always found that work really fascinating in, well, as an actor, I found it fascinating, but I can see it in organizations now, you know, you can just, there's the slightly you know, anyone that's interrupted or cut across in some way is, is experiencing a diminishing of their status. And we're not

careful with other people's feelings in that way I had to say it was a revelation to me. I'm not, I know I get frustrated by interruption, but one of the research articles I was looking at in my book was about types of interruption.

[00:36:41] And, you know, they were kind of cooperative interruptions actually, which we're doing a bit here, which is kind of, yes, yes. I want to, I want to add to that because it's such an important, but then there's the disruptive ones which just cut across and I, you know, I'm sorry to say, I know a lot of my female clients and I have to say as a woman myself, You know, some, sometimes it's just to bat an idea to one side to dismiss it or to reduce it in some way, you know, that that is devastating to listening.

[00:37:12] You know, if you get trampled on and reduced in that way, you know, we check out.

Beth Stallwood: [00:37:19] Definitely. And I love the way that's described the co-operative interruption. Like when you get excited about something and you want to add to it, and it's part of the conversation and that's kind of normal than interruption, but a cut across or a diminishing of your idea ...so it's hard to talk about that right now. Anything in that zone is really, really unhelpful. Isn't it?

Janie Van Hool: [00:37:41] Oh, really? The unhelpful and, and you know, much more long-term damaging, I think, than we realize, you know, it's just, it shuts the door in somebody's face and that is not clever.

[00:37:54] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:37:54] No, because people then won't speak up again.

[00:37:57] Will they? Nope.

Janie Van Hool: [00:37:58] No, but what they might do is speak behind your back. Do you know what I mean? You know what we were talking about gossip earlier, you know, that can have a downside. It certainly can be, you know, it brings, it brings out our worst behaviors, I think, is it to the Neuro Leadership Institute?

[00:38:16] Talk about the importance of acknowledging status. And I think in their article, they've got a model called the scarf model. I'm sure you're very familiar with it there, but one of the first principles of the scarf model in influencing is about status and saying that you have to. As the brain is binary in the sense that it heads towards reward or away from threat.

[00:38:43] So if we feel reduced in some way, we get this massive stress right response, which, , you know, it's very damaging. Of course, you know, a huge surge of cortisol will really affect our listening. Cause you know, that that basically shuts it down. We're not there to listen. We're just there to attend to threat so it's really important knowledge and support and encourage, even if it's difficult, even if you don't agree, you know, step into that, stepping into a place where you can thank someone for their contribution or recognize it. And then if you must, you can disagree with it, but it comes from a place of respect that is so vital.

Beth Stallwood: [00:39:27] It's making me think of in the, in the worlds of drama in the improv thing, which is what you're doing, you have to say yes, and you're not allowed to disagree with

somebody you're not allowed to diminish what they suggested, even if what they suggested is utterly crazy, you have to go with it.

Yeah. Yeah. Build from it. And yeah. The thing is, I think sometimes we get things joined up in our heads that aren't, shouldn't be joined up. You can disagree and still listen really carefully. Yes. But our brains [00:40:00] somehow put these things together that if you disagree, you no longer have to listen.

Janie Van Hool: [00:40:04] Yeah. That's such an interesting point. That's such an, ah, no, this is this person's talking rubbish. I'm going to, you know, think about something else, you know aActually, I, I don't think that social media is very helpful on this front because it, you know, if you look at. I see, I saw someone define Twitter the other day as a place where crazy people get into fights that no one's going to win.

[00:40:28] You know, because actually it's just the brevity of you're totally wrong. And therefore you're an idiot means that all the complexity of debate is stripped away and it just becomes as slightly childish playground. A my dad's bigger than your dad kind of conversation.

Beth Stallwood: [00:40:49] It does. And the idea that, because somebody has a different opinion to you, they're wrong and they're stupid. Such limited thinking, they just, they just have a different opinion. You might violently disagree with them, but just telling them that's cheap, but probably isn't gonna work that challenge out.

Janie Van Hool: [00:41:07] Well, it's going to be a very unusual exchange if they turn around and go, oh my God, you're so right.

[00:41:13] Thank you for pointing that out. I must change my point.

[00:41:20] Maybe I'll try that today, but just see how it goes. Yeah.

Beth Stallwood: [00:41:23] Just see how it goes. Because if someone calls me stupid, the thing I really, really wants to do is to change my entire opinion on something.

Janie Van Hool: [00:41:31] Yeah, exactly. Oh, and there's such a lot of this out there, isn't there such a lot of, and I think, you know, certainly from a respite research perspective when, when opinion is so binary like that, you're never going to get anywhere.

[00:41:45] You've got to have somebody who is willing to say, yeah, help me understand how help me explain to me what led you to this point? Because I'm, I'm curious to find out, you know, then suddenly you get to hear a much more detailed picture, a much richer picture and, and you may not agree, but at least you understand.

[00:42:09] Whereas I think this throwing stones things, you know, we're not going to get very far.

Beth Stallwood: [00:42:13] No, definitely not. Right. It's been so fantastic to talk to you about all of these different subjects. And I think we could probably talk for hours about it, but we do need to end at some point on the podcast and what I would love to do now, if it's okay for you is to just fire some quick fire questions that year.

[00:42:35] Okay. You're on the spot now. First question is for you personally, as an individual, what is something that's always guaranteed to bring you some work joy?

Janie Van Hool: [00:42:50] Well, oh, variety. Actually, whether it's different conversations or different things to do in my day, I, I was so rubbish at school cause it was the same thing every day and the same timetable every week.

[00:43:03] And my life now is full of variety and that makes me joyful.

Beth Stallwood: [00:43:09] Brilliant and you know that spontaneity and not always knowing what you're gonna do. Exciting. I, I feel like half of our listeners. Now this is one that will divide the crowd. Total Marmite. Some of them will be like, yes, variety, spontaneity.

[00:43:25] And half of them are like variety, spontaneity. Like it sends me into a panic, the idea of not knowing what you're going to do every day. Everybody's different. Yeah.

Janie Van Hool: [00:43:34] That's so funny. You know, my youngest daughter, she, when she was little, five years old, she'd come and wake me up on a Sunday morning, often by just grabbing hold of my eyelashes and opening my eyes. And then she would say, mommy, mommy, mommy, what are we going to do today?

[00:43:52] So different. Cause I just let the day unfold. Whereas she has a day plan. Every day and she sticks to it, man, absolutely. A hundred percent.

Beth Stallwood: [00:44:03] Sorry. They like the idea of the child opening your eyes by your own actions. She's obviously more joyful than that now though

Janie Van Hool: [00:44:13] Largely because she's so persistent, she gets exactly what she wants from life.

Beth Stallwood: [00:44:18] So what book are you currently reading?

Janie Van Hool: [00:44:24] I am reading a business book.

Beth Stallwood: [00:44:28] Do you mean a business or, you know, or otherwise give us that? Yeah,

Janie Van Hool: [00:44:34] I've got two on the go at the moment. I've just started Shuggie Bain, which won the man Booker prize and is beautiful. I mean, you know, if anybody that wants to explore empathy, it's just a wonderful joy.

It's not joyful. It's quite sad, but I mean, I love misery lit. I'm afraid I do love a good torture story. So it's fabulously written beautiful book about. A really difficult life. and then work wise, I've been reading a book on relevance by Nina Simon. Who's a museum curator in the States, but really interesting about how she curates and crafts, exhibitions and experiences for people.

Not that the, that the museum wants to do, but the actually are relevant to the community and how you do that. So, cause I've been fascinated by that for my own work on. In communication, making stuff relevant.

Beth Stallwood: [00:45:26] Yeah. Sounds brilliant. I'm gonna have to pick that one up. Next question throughout your career, throughout your life, what's the most useful or helpful, or the best bit of advice that you've had that you always come back to.

[00:45:41] **Janie Van Hool:** I can answer this immediately without hesitation, because I've been a freelancer all my life. I've never had a job. And somebody very early on said to me, always enjoy downtime as a freelancer don't panic because you know, you can be, you can have a really busy period and then suddenly, well, for example, this year, you know, a lot of your work can fall by the wayside and they said, you just have to find a way of going, I'm going to make the most of this because it always turns around and it always does. And then you're always incredibly busy again and go, oh, damn, I should have really relaxed when I had the opportunity or done something different when I had the opportunity.

[00:46:21] So I've made a very purposeful decision, all my working life to go it's okay. And I'm going to maximize the opportunity of, you know, being at home. Not having to get up at stupid o'clock in the morning or whatever, and just really enjoying that time. And I have really loved the space this year, even though I'm not as, I'm not as comfortable as I normally am, but I'm not afraid.

Beth Stallwood: Such, such good advice to think about that space as to enjoy it and to relax and to know that there will be other things coming as well, and that you will be busy.

Janie Van Hool: [00:47:04] Well, I remember my, my mum died when I was 23 and it was devastating, devastating time for me. And I remember being so I mean, awful, but I mean, horrible bereavement, terrible grief, but I do remember thinking one day, I know if I sat in this room and didn't move for 20 years, I would feel different at the end of that time.

[00:47:25] You know, I know that I'm not going to stay this way forever. And actually, you know, I'm by nature, quite a joyful person. I'm optimistic. I try with the look on, I don't try. I just always look on the bright side because there is always a bright side. So I think that's a, yeah, that all kind of wraps up in the same spot for me, really

Beth Stallwood: [00:47:47] love that.

[00:47:48] And then. For our listeners, what is one super practical advice that you could give them that they could just go and do? Now that's easy to do that. They can practice today tomorrow, next day, next week, make it a habit that you think might help bring them some work joy.

Janie Van Hool: [00:48:09] Actually, what, what your listeners don't know is that you and I were having a conversation about dogs before we, before we started to talk and I have for quite a long time now I've been trying to get people in between meetings, in between conversations to shake the old one out physically. Now, maybe you don't want to shake like a dog coming out of a pond. I fully understand that, but maybe it's a yawn and a stretch or maybe it's is somehow take 10 seconds to reset. And I just think we tumble from one thing to the other and actually the stresses and strains of the day can really build.

[00:48:50] Whereas if you break that momentum just by physically changing your state, shake your legs, up and down, run up and down the hallway. I don't care what it is, but 10 seconds to go. How can I reset? And it's a very intentional. A process, just a habit, make it a habit. It may actually, when I

had my first child and my voiceover agent said to me at the time, she said, my darling, if it all gets too much for you, take your best bottle of Claret and lock yourself in the bathroom.

[00:49:25] So I'm not advocating that, but mentally I am advocating that. It's just a moment of going. It is literally Beth. It's literally 10 seconds. Breathe out, breathe in, shake it out. Start again. That's the way to do it.

] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:49:42] And it's like freeing your mind by giving yourself some physical freeing as well. So it helps your brain, but you're doing something and it's so easy, right?

[00:49:50] Because at the end of a call, you could just stand up, shake it, do whatever you want to do, stretch on and then get back on the next one.

Janie Van Hool: [00:49:57] Feel totally different, totally different. Because actually, if you think about it, we just sit in the same position for hours and hours and hours ending one call starting another ending that call starting another, or, you know, even back in, back in the office environment where we go from meeting to meeting, to meeting, and it's usually our head is full of what are we going to be doing?

Blah, blah, blah, when actually just press the reset button. And start, you know, you know what it's like as a performer, it's saying the same lines night after night, after night after night, you have to find a way of pressing the reset button so that you are as fresh, but this new audience as you were for the one the day before, and as you will be in six months time.

So, you know, that's a discipline, but it's one that really pays off. I think.

Beth Stallwood: [00:50:45] Yeah. And it's an easy one, right? So discipline, but easy. You don't have to think about it too much. You can just do it. You don't have to do loads of research, loads of writing or anything like that. Just get on and do it. I'm going to start practicing that every day.

I'm going to do it. I'm going to commit to that. The thing is like with me, I'm a, I'm an all or nothing person. So this will be a full like entire body. Shake it, shake it out, any kind of like casual, like slightly subtle yawning. It would be crazy. Maybe I'll do a little video of myself doing it and put it on Instagram or something.

[00:51:18] **Janie Van Hool:** [00:51:18] I think that would be very helpful, Beth. And actually we can start a movement

[00:51:29] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:51:29] hashtag shake it off. We should do it my final question from me is, where can people find out more about you, your writing, your philosophy, your work?

Janie Van Hool: [00:51:47] , I have a website www.voicepresence.co.uk. And I also have another website, which is in development at the moment, which is going to be for [00:52:00] my book and all things listening, which is www.listeningshift.com. I'm also on LinkedIn at Janie Van Hool. And yeah, I've got to just love to hear from anybody with any ideas or comments or want to have a chat or anything.

Beth Stallwood: I'm here to listen. And what we will do is, put your links to both your websites, et cetera, onto the webpage so that people can click on them and get to know you a little bit better.

That was Janie. Thank you so much for joining us today. I've really enjoyed the conversation. Once we finished off here, I'm going to go and shake it out and, make that happen. Thank you and have a great rest of the day.

Janie Van Hool: [00:52:52] Thank you to Beth. It was just, it was such fun. It was a lovely conversation. And you know, you are, you spark that joy? I loved it. Thank you for your time.

Beth Stallwood: [00:53:06] Great conversation that was with Janie. And I do hope that you enjoyed it and took something from it. So what about taking those little things? Experimenting, trying things out. Yeah. I really liked Jamie's advice about how we can all be more intentional and share our intentions with others about what we're hoping to achieve in our conversations, especially when so many of those conversations are happening in the online world versus in the face-to-face world.

[00:53:33] At the moment, I also loved her bites about choreographing our day. And making sure that we put space in where we have time to listen for me, the three different types of listening and how simply Janie explained them are going to land in my mind and sit there for awhile. And I sit here thinking I'm so guilty of doing some of those things myself and I'm sure we can all think of examples and times where we've rushed into solutionize or to.

[00:54:07] Take it back to our way of thinking or to get the attention back on. And finally for me, the shaking it out, I am totally going to shake it out. I'm going to put a video of me on the Insta doing it, and I'm going to try that every day and see what a difference it makes, because I love a quick and easy, low effort solution to things.

[00:54:29] So let's all give some things to try. And thank you all for listening. Do let us know what you think. Get in touch with us on Instagram @createworkjoy. Maybe share your videos of shaking it out after a meeting or a conversation. Thank you.