



THE PODCAST

## S1: E11 Jo Smallwood Leaders are People Too

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**Beth Stallwood:** Welcome into the Work Joy Jam podcast. In this episode I am joined by the brilliant Jo Smallwood. Jo is a leadership coach, a leadership thinker, and someone who really gets under the skin of what leaders need to do in this world to be able to engage, develop, create great businesses that run with great people.

And I really enjoyed parts of our conversation when we get into this idea of the expectations we put on our leaders on our managers and whether they are actually realistic or not, and leaders are so often trying really hard to manage people, often different people with different preferences and realistically, they can't create joy for everyone.

And we talk about how it's important that we remember that as individuals, we're all accountable for our own joy, and it's not something that somebody else can be responsible for. I had a great time talking to Jo, some really great insight in here, and I hope you enjoyed the conversation too.

Hello, welcome to the Work Joy Jam . This week, we have Jo Smallwood with us, and I always joke with Jo that she has the surname that everyone thinks my surname is, and often calls me, which is smallwood and I'm stallwood. And it's great to have Jo with us today. So I'm going to hand over to Jo, Jo, introduce yourself to everyone and tell us your kind of quick story of how you got to where you are today.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:02:01] As Beth said, I am the alter ego, the smallwood to her stallwood and we've known each other quite a while now, quite a few years, through work, we met through work and I think probably there's, I don't know if I've ever shared my backstory with you actually, Beth. So this might be maybe some new stuff for you as well.

[00:02:23] So I currently work for a leadership development consultancy called Maier. And I've been there quite a few years now, probably getting on for 15 years. but way back in the, in the day when I, when I began working, I was very lucky. I had started working part time at McDonald's, just to, you know, as all students do.

[00:02:49] And I was given the opportunity to go on their very first management development program. And it was fantastic. It just took us through every different element of the business and really gave me a quite young age and insight into how, how big corporations work, you know, where, where all the, where all the moving parts come together.

But what I realized was, well, Donald's a very good at producing McDonald's managers and I was more interested I sort of got to the stage. I was quite interested in understanding a bit more about leadership and management outside of that McDonald's bubble. So I did a CIPD course. And I ended up at Vision Express heading up their learning and development department there.

And then a move to Norfolk, gave me an opportunity. To work in live events, which has fantastic, producing conferences. And it's something that, that actually I've really had enjoyed doing a vision expressor is part of the role of vision express. So it made sense to then, to then go and do that on a more permanent basis and then finally that took me Maier. You know, I'd enjoyed working with, people backstage working with understanding what messages they wanted to share, how they were going to produce the, the, the big sort of, you know, what are we trying to tell people here, what are we trying to get them to do?

[00:04:33] And I'd really enjoy doing that backstage. and then through a friend, found myself at Maier. And I'd say that was probably 15 years ago. So, so, you know, that's been a, that's been a whole journey in itself.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:04:49] Amazing. And it's so lovely to hear your backstory. I think I've heard bits of it, but not the whole story before.

[00:04:55] And isn't it interesting how you just take the opportunity that's there when you're young and it kind of interests you and sparks your interest in a certain area. And had you ever considered working in that world before you were in the McDonald's zone of their management development program?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:05:11] No, I think, he probably, you know, that the standard route as we all probably think when we're, when we're young and coming out of school was, was sort of university. And I didn't quite know what I wanted to do. and this was, you know, this was just a really good opportunity. I think I was quite interested in that they hadn't done anything like that before at McDonald's. and you know, I was always with McDonald's for over 10 years, you know, in all.

So it was a really good grounding. It was a, you know, I would, I wouldn't change it for the world, actually.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:05:49] Brilliant. And tell us a little bit more about your philosophy, your theory, what, what you think about work, joy, how people get it. What's your personal perspective on that?

**Jo Smallwood:** I was sort of making some notes on this the other day.

And, it's quite, it's not as easy to define as you perhaps first think. but I think for me, work joy is about really tapping into that strength, that passion, you have, whatever element of your role it is, whatever it is that you're particularly good at. But I think it's, it's not quite as simple as that for me.

[00:06:31] It's not about just indulging the things you like about your job or your role. because we all have bits that we like more than others. So it's not about indulging yourself in that respect. It's about, it's about making the connection, finding how, what you're really good at what you're passionate about actually adds value in the, in the bigger picture, to the bigger picture and, and how you, you know, ways of applying, what you do well, what you enjoy, what brings you joy?

Ways of finding new ways to apply it in the, in the role that you're in or in the organization that you're in.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:07:13] Yeah, it's such a good point that you make there is that it seems like it's about just doing more of one thing. And if you're really good at that, just keep doing it. But actually there, we all have to do stuff in our jobs that we don't necessarily enjoy, that we're not necessarily that connected to.

Oh that we just find a bit dull or boring. And I think those things exist in every job, whether you work for yourself, whether you work in a big corporation, whether you work in a small organization or a charity, there's always going to be some bits of it that you're not going to find that joyful because I, I'm not convinced there is a hundred percent work joy out that.

[00:07:49] And for me, I really like what you're saying there, it's about finding the bits and seeing where else you can apply them and seeing how you can yeah. Maybe multiply that in different areas or different thinking or different projects to get more of it and do more of what you're really good at and where your passion lies.

So tell me a bit more about strengths and passion and how, when they come together, that can be a really important thing, but also sometimes they can be separate as well. I think, I think because we don't, we probably don't do enough analysis of this. And in, by analysis, I don't mean sort of unpicking and unpacking everything, but we probably don't spend enough time reflecting on what it is that we enjoy about our job and what it is to your point.

[00:08:44] What is that we don't enjoy about our job I'm with you? I don't think any role is going to be pure joy. But I'm also of the opinion and I don't think it should be, I think there's a bit of that sort of light and dark going on here isn't there where, and that you can enjoy, enjoy things because they are not constant.

[00:09:04] You know, you have to sort of put in a few, you know, a bit of the hard yards to get to the bits that you really, really like. so I think there's a bit of that. Reflecting on achievements, reflecting on the work that you've put in. I think it is and I think it's about bringing in different elements of your strengths and your passion and knowing when we've been talking a lot lately, Beth, with, with clients, particularly in coaching conversations about tapping into new resources, because it's been such a difficult time for people, but really knowing when to dial up some of those strengths.

But also went to dial them back and we use a user product at Maier called strength scope, it's a psychometric tool, but they have a great phrase about strengths in overdrive. And I think what we sometimes see is people overplaying their strengths and scaling up their passion to a point where it, it means other people don't have a way in, don't have a way it makes collaboration very difficult to that stage. I think it's about being mindful about the level at which your strengths and passion about the optimum.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:10:23] It's such a good point. And just going back a little bit, one of the things I really liked about what you said though, is around sometimes you need the light and dark to be able to feel the light and to feel the joy and that sometimes the things that, and eventually bring us some joy or the things that we've put really hard work into.

Yeah. And the hard work can feel. Difficult and challenging and at points, you know, annoying, but actually it's what leads us to a better result. That's what leads us to the feeling of achievement and that, that joyful moment wouldn't have existed if the hard bits weren't there. So it's about appreciating, and I hate this word because it's so overused, but the, yeah, I need towards some of that joy as well as the actual moment of joy yeah. This idea about strengths and overdrive is really interesting as well. And how we sometimes, you know, I'll give you an example of being totally out there is one of my strengths is that I'm a quite a positive person. I tend to find the joy. I tend to find the way through and the answer and a solution, but sometimes people need me to dial that back and sit and just listen to what's actually wrong versus trying to always be upbeat. And sometimes people find that quite hard if it's too much.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:11:40] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I agree. And I think, you know, I think it's something that, I think what, what I've learned through this period that we're, that we're continuing to live through at the moment, is where people have referenced joy in its most obvious sense is where they have come together in unexpected ways with colleagues with, with other people in the business, where they've been given an opportunity to really pull in the same direction and I think there was a period right at the start of the crisis that people referenced a lot about that sort of, you know Dunkirk spirit where we all had to sort of pull together. People, people really. Really sort of looked back on those moments where it felt the direction felt clear.

[00:12:45] They knew what they were doing. They knew the value they were adding. They saw the efforts of there. They saw the results of their efforts. but I think it was that and it was, and it was a joined up. It was a joint. You know, sort of effort that, that created the, the end result. And I think people have, I think, I think since then people have sort of been trying to recapture some of that. I think it is that right. You know, seeing your strengths aligned with other people's strengths and passions as well, where, where some of this really begins to sort of cumulate and create the moment of joys as, as you're describing it.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:13:28] And it's so interesting. Cause I I've been hearing some of the things about that actually responding to the crisis initially there was that let's bring it together and that's make it happen. And it's really hard to replicate that when there isn't a crisis when it, and then the crisis in, you know, the world that we live in in the UK has become kind of into the new businesses, usual business as normal and. It's not so easy to get that spirit when we're not suddenly trying to find out how to, how does everybody suddenly work from home or when we're in it now.

[00:14:05] And it's kind of an ongoing drudge through lockdown, not locked down, restrictions, different tiers. What's going on here? How are we going to work? Work from home, work from the office. And that's a really tough thing for leaders to manage. Isn't it?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:14:21] Yeah. In fact, we've, we've been writing blogs since the beginning of, of lockdown just because we had access to so many different clients who are sharing so many different stories, but in all of those, there were elements that, that crossed over. There were common themes that were, that were emerging and we felt it was important to sort of capture those somewhere and in some way. And you're right. You know, the, the latest blog we've written which is out today is on, is on fatigue and how sort of, I suppose, just, empty, you know, and how empty the tank is. for a lot of people, you know, they've had to work in very reactive ways. They've had to, you know, really

pull on sort of, you know, different, different parts of their personality that perhaps they didn't even know they had. They've certainly had to apply themselves. In such different ways teams have had to work differently. There is the, the remote element as well, which adds complexity to everything and, and yeah, it has taken its toll and we haven't been able to replenish our energy in the way that we normally would we haven't been able to go out for, for meals and drinks with friends. And we haven't always been able to go to the gym and we haven't always been able to do what we need to do to, to sort of recharge. And I think, you know, that sense of fatigue, I think we're coming to the end of the year. I think there's still a huge amount of uncertainty. And I think it's, it's beginning to show and obviously that's.

That's why we need to re-find those points of joy. I think that that, that's where it becomes even more important that, that we know where to go to in our role for that, for that joy, that, that gives us that, you know, that much needed boost in our day.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:16:16] And I'm just reflecting on, you know, this time, last year in the run-up to the end of the year.

I think that fatigue is normal. Actually at this time, it is one of those things. At the end of the year, you do people needing a break needing to do it. It's just that it's almost under a magnifying glass now how much more people need it. And you know, there's so many stories out there of people haven't taken the holidays. Cause you're not really going on holiday. Haven't taken a rest break. You're not getting out there to do the things that would normally recharge you. And, you know, there's the fastest season in 2020 is going to look very different for most people as to how it has done previously. So there's that really interesting point about how do we find the joy, even when we can't do the things that we would usually do, and we might do some work on what are the things that can bring us joy within the situation we're in versus hankering after some joy that we know we can't have, because that's like unrequited joy. I can't have it. You know, you and I cannot meet up right now and go for a coffee and have a chat it's just not allowed. Yeah. So how do we find the small bits of joy within those restrictions?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:17:30] Yeah, and I think that's a really good point. I know in a lot of coaching conversations that I've had recently. I think where people have been trying to reclaim that time that they need, they've been talking about, you know, how do I carve out space in my diary to, to be able to sort of give, give real sort of.

[00:17:53] You know, proper thinking time to some of the big issues that are going on. How do I, how do I reenergize? And I think people have been looking for those really big chunks of time, you know, how did, how do I get half a day to do this? How do I, how do I, you know, make sure my diary has a day, a month to, you know, for reading or whatever it is.

And, and a lot of the conversation has come back to perhaps don't do it for half day. Perhaps look for 15 minutes, look for 10 minutes. And I think that applies to the joy as well. Don't you? Where perhaps we're looking for the big, you know, the big obvious points that, that bring us joy and happiness in our day, when really we, we might be better just trying to look for the smaller version of it. The, you know, those, those instant, what, see what seem insignificant, but when you reflect back on, it were really good parts of the day, they might be sort of 10, 15 minutes long. So I think it's about, as you say, not, not trying to find the big bells and whistles versions of everything at the

minute, but really looking really, really being critical and, and looking at the small elements that come together to, to bring us joy.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:19:09] Definitely. And I think it's in line with, if you think about how much people's worlds have shrunk over the last year, like the world, our world has become a lot smaller. I think we need to do the same thing with our expectations of ourselves and probably our expectations Joy and to think about actually, if I can get five, many bits of joy in a day, that's really good. Or even one just, you know, start small and then grow it from there. But there's even that time spent, you know, talking to people want time to spend thinking about the big things. I would really advise everyone to spend some time thinking about themselves as well and putting themselves on their, to do lists, especially, and we're going to talk about this in a moment and when you're in a leadership position and the requirements and expectations of you as a person means that you're, you're giving a lot of your time and your energy and your effort and your emotions and your empathy to the people who you lead is that so many leaders I speak to, they don't exist on their to do list anywhere.

And then that makes that tank empty and they're running on empty. And that then actually doesn't help them be a great leader because when you haven't got any reserves in you leading with empathy, leading with kindness and all the things that people need at this time, they come a lot harder. Because we all know that when we're running on empty, we're a bit more snappy, we have less patience, we have less creativity in our thinking. So there's something for me about how do we do that? And yeah. If the smaller things and giving yourself permission to give yourself some time. Yeah, yeah,

**Jo Smallwood:** yeah, definitely. And I think, you know, again, sort of self care and wellbeing and yeah you know, and, and all of those sort of check-in points that we've been talking about. You're absolutely right. You know, we we've seen we we've seen the impact that's had on leaders firsthand. And, and as you say, if we're not feeling strong ourselves, it's very difficult to be strong for other people. and you know, we're not saying, we're not saying, you know, you have to fix things for other people and that's absolutely not your role as leader.

[00:21:19] But, I think what is evident as you say, is. When we're feeling low, running low on energy, we react differently. We respond differently and it's not always, it's not always positively as you say so, so yeah, it's a big, big deal at the moment that we, that we take take time out to really think about how we look after ourselves during each and every single day that you know, that we have to give, give, to give to our teams. We have to also replenish that somewhere and I don't think we're doing enough of that.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:22:02] Totally. And let's move on to kind of the subject of leaders in a bit more detail, because one of the things that I think can bring people enormous joy is working with a leader who is inspiring, gets them, understands them, has empathy.

You know, all of the things that if you were to look up a book on leadership, you go, yes, that's everything I want in a leader. That that's really exciting. But also that leaders can be a source of. Like the opposite of joy, the gloomy is the things that actually really get you down. Yeah. One thing I'm really always really interesting is that people hold a lot of expectations about what their bosses can do for them.

[00:22:45] And I'm not always sure that those expectations are particularly realistic. And I work under the banner, usually that we need to remember that leaders are human beings as well, and that they're trying, and most of them, well, most of them that I work with are trying to do their best and they're struggling, like all humans do, and they're finding some of this stuff hard.

[00:23:06] And I just be really interested to know in your thoughts around actually when you're working with leaders, because that is your specialist subject, helping them. What is some of the guidance and advice you would give about being a leader who can help people feel the joy, but also empowering people to actually do some of the stuff themselves, rather than relying entirely on their boss or their leader, their manager, to be able to do it for them.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:23:35] Yeah. It's interesting. And I think, you know, I know he kept going back to sort of the, the pandemic, but I think it's, it has made leaders look at themselves differently.

And I think it's made, teams look at the leaders differently. I think where we're coming into an era where, as you say, you know, we've often, we've often spoken about leader as coach and, you know, and, and things like that. But I think as you say, there is a new, there's a next level of empathy that's needed at this moment in time and I think the leaders that have responded well to that I have to say are the ones that have shared some of their own vulnerabilities it's as you say, they are, they are human too. And you know, to, think about, how, where leaders have really had greatest impact. I think the ones that we've been working with, the ones that have had the bravery to, to say, do you know what I'm not dealing with this very well either.

[00:24:40] I don't know how this is going to turn out. And that's a very difficult place for leaders to put themselves because you say we've always sort of secretly felt that they should be sort of infallible to a certain extent. And I think, I think because there is that sense of nobody's been through this before, this is new to everyone.

[00:25:01] I think we've had to sort of lay bare some of the. Some of the areas that we're less confident in as leaders, I think, we've had to share that with our teams and I think those leaders that have done that have had teams that have responded remarkably well. and, and I think, you know, they have come out a stronger leader for it

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:25:27] And it's, it's in some ways, The next stage of where things were heading in leadership guidance. Anyway, isn't it, because empathy has been a big point and coaching and developing people and having that positive relationship and not being in that kind of command and control of your and it's interesting because it's, I think in some ways this could be, and again, I'll put my positive hat on here.

[00:25:57] This could be one of the best things that comes out of pandemic is more leaders who are open more empathetic, able to understand and care for others, able to be vulnerable and show that they're human too. And to, to gather people together, to work on a solution rather than just assuming they have all the answers, but that's a tough change isn't it? In terms of some leaders and how they have been to how things are now

**Jo Smallwood:** It's huge and I think one of the things that we're working on with a particular client, one of the values is kindness, which I think is an amazing value to have. And you know, one of the

things, again, that's come out of the crisis is people have had to reevaluate, reinterpret their values as an organization.

But I think that the client that, that springs to mind hearing you speak about that, Beth is, is one that, you know, there is a danger that, that we can, you know, going back to, you know, over, dialing up strengths too much, there is a danger that we can go too far down the "I'm going to be empathetic, I'm going to be understanding" route. Of course, we have to have all of those things as leaders, but the client we're working with, one of the clients we're working with at the moment is talking about how they. How they match levels of kindness with accountability, because we are still, we are still operating a fully functioning business and one that's having to navigate incredibly challenging landscapes.

[00:27:28] So it is this, it is this understanding as leaders that we have to have a balance as well. You know, we can be kind, we can be respectful. We can be empathetic. But in all of that, we also have to recognize where people are accountable. Where we can, engineer a bit of stretch for them where we can, we can introduce new things into the role that perhaps challenge them a bit more, but also, you know, grow, you know, help them to grow.

So I think we have to, we have to think carefully about not overplaying empathy too much as well. It should absolutely feature, and as you say, this is a next generation of leadership that we're going to be looking at. But I think my, my fear is that. It would be easy to go too far. and, and then we're, we're missing that, that real sort of, that, that real role that we have as leaders in terms of developing and nurturing talent, but also, you know, sort of shared shared ownership and shared responsibility for the success of the organization.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:28:35] Definitely. And it's such a fine line. And you're really making me think of Kim Scott and her book "Radical Candor" about the quadrant that she talks about, which is ruinous empathy, which has so much empathy that you don't get anything done. And you're actually end up not helping a person in a job because you're being so kind and you've gone so far down the empathy route that you're no longer giving them any challenge or any growth potential. So definitely want to think. And this is where I think leadership becomes even harder than the next generation. And I know we're always looking for ways to make it easy for people to be leaders, but actually leadership is hard. And if you're in those kind of roles and if you're looking up to leaders, I think there's something we need to understand is it's such a fine tight rope of going too far.

[00:29:23] One way too far, the other way, trying to balance everything and trying to work. Often with many, many people or have slightly different preferences, slightly different needs, slightly different levels of skills and strengths and all of those different things and trying to be all things to all of your team is a tough gig.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:29:45] Yeah, it is. And that's the point where you lose your own authenticity as a leader as well. But I think also if we take it back to joy for a moment, it makes me think listening to that. There's something for me about what we always tell leaders, you know, you shouldn't, your role not to provide all the answers, fix the problem. You know, that's absolutely the opposite. You need to be getting people to find their own solutions. And I think, I think for me, you know, as leaders it's not our job to help people find their, their work joy either. Is there, you know, only I



know what brings me joy in my, in my role and only I can sort of only I should be responsible for, for making that, you know, making that part of my priority.

And I think as managers, if we go too far down that ruinous empathy route, we will end up trying to. Trying to identify joy for others when really, you know, that's their journey to, to, to, to take not ours.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:30:49] Definitely. And we would always come wouldn't it from, if you're a leader in that position, you come from what brings you joy and will bring new joy is never going to be what brings someone else do?

It's so individual it's. So based on all of the different things in your life, not just work, and I, I don't think you could create joy. I think on the other hand, what you can do is you can try and avoid creating the opposite of joy. Yeah. Perhaps a leader's role in the future. When it comes to joy is about creating a zone of neutrality where people can build joy from versus zone of negativity. And it's very hard to go from the opposite of joy, to joy in one step. Whereas if you're going from actually, everything's just, okay. I can build joy from here. It's much easier to do that.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:31:36] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I think, I think it is, it is a really good point that, you know, we, we try, I think sometimes we, we expect things to happen easily and quickly, and there is, you know, again, we talk a lot with leaders and teams about the need to.

Just test things out, try things out, give it a, go. See what happens. I think we, before this, we had got to a point where it was very difficult to do that because failure was such, you know, such a difficult thing to manage and, and something to be avoided. And I know it's very easy to talk about failure as growth and failing forward and all the, all the great sort of, you know, phrases that sit around it, the business phrases that sit around it, but in practice, it is hard in business to, to, to fail and then to sort of pick up the pieces and learn from it.

We don't always have that environment for that, that time to be able to do that. But I think there is something about, as you say, When we're, when we're looking for those points of joy in our roles, in our responsibilities, it is about giving things a go, because I think also we will all have unidentified joy as well.

[00:32:58] Things that we, we had no idea brought us such, such pleasure and such a sense of achievement. And so I think it's about finding new points of joy as well.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:33:10] And not just assuming that we know all those things already, right? We, no one in the world has tried everything yet. There's nobody who's tried everything and what some people might find is that actually they get a point of joy from something outside of work that helps them feel better when they're at work. Anyway. So, you know, we talked about things like, you know, people doing stuff outside of work that brings them joy. So you know, is it that going for a dog walk in the morning will set you up to have a really good day, and that gives you enough joy for the day.

[00:33:39] Even if what you're doing, isn't actually giving you that level of excitement and joy on that day. Is it that, you know, you're someone who's really into yoga or you're really into having a zoom quiz on a Saturday night that just makes all of the joy happen sometimes it's about joy in your life, as

well as joy at work and having the balance between some of those [00:34:00] things and, you know, giving stuff a go is such a good way of thinking about it because giving stuff a go doesn't commit you to being a lifelong commitment to it. It just makes you say I tried it. Did I like it? No, I'm not going to do it again. And I'm just thinking of it. A couple of years ago, a friend, bought me a present for my birthday. That was to go and do some pottery. And I have to tell you I was totally rubbish at it but it gave me immense amounts of joy.

[00:34:31] So, you know, when you think actually, sometimes we think it's about being good at stuff that gives us joy. Sometimes it's just the process of doing it. Like you get to be messy and people like you have all this mud up your arms and it's like, oh, hang on a minute. This is fun. And you get to be practical with stuff for me that gave me loads joy, but I didn't have to be good at it in my head for so long.

[00:34:54] You only got joy from things that you're good at, and that really kind of turned it around for me. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:34:58] **Jo Smallwood:** [00:34:58] Yeah. That's, that's such a good point that, you know, it's not just finding your joy, it's also finding your level of joy and, and that, that concept of I have to be good at it to enjoy it we just have to enjoy it to enjoy it. Don't we, we don't have to be brilliant at something and, and I think we have this, we have this need to sort of jump into things and instantly be brilliant or instantly be an expert or instantly it is the, you know, it is the modern world, isn't it? This, this sort of instant gratification that we're all becoming more and more familiar with.

And I think sometimes you know, the, the process of, of building up our knowledge, our skills, the process of connecting with different people in a different way all of that sort of all. Sort of come together to sort of give us this, this end picture that we can reflect back on. And I think in the moment, it's sometimes hard to recognize those as those, you know, little pieces that are gonna make this, this great picture in the end, but I think it is important for leaders to keep encouraging, keep letting people have a go at things. And I'm part of that, as we know, is, is creating that safe space to do that. And, and we've, we've done a lot of work over the past weeks with teams where we've, you know, we've, we've really drilled into what it means to have a safe space, to be able to bring back, You know, small wins, issues, problems, things that didn't go well, there has to be that, that space somewhere for us to all come together and, and share, you know, share our stories from the week and I think that is probably one of the most important roles as leader at the minute, to be able to, to enable that for, for people.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:36:59] Definitely and, and share your stories without the judgment on this is it's so easy, isn't it for our brains to go into judgment zone. Why you didn't do that very well, or that was really great, but actually just creating a zone for people to say it as it is and be okay with that.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:37:15] We've spoke, we've actually spoke recently. Very recently is one of the. If you can make it work. It's one of the benefits of working remotely. it's very difficult to jump in when you're on screen. you know, a lot of these platforms only allow for one person to talk at one time, which means everyone else is listening for the first time they'll really listening. And so they're not trying to suggest a way forward. They're not trying to. As you say, share their opinion of why that didn't work or why would work better if you did it differently. They are having to, they're having to focus on the screen and having to focus on what you're saying.

[00:37:57] They're having to listen to what their colleagues are sharing. And I think, I think it has been one of the side effects of having to work like this that has really, really brought out another level of, of sharing as teams.

**Beth Stallwood:** Definitely. And it's really interesting. I remember early on in the pandemic when everyone was kind of moving on to online and being in some conversations and things where for the first time people and leaders, especially were talking about, you know, their family and you were seeing their life beyond work and it's opened up, I think, a more, full human approach to how we see people at work and not just what they like when they come into an office or what they like when they come into, their place of work, which, you know, lots of people, they work in offices and lots of people are at work, doing jobs now in person. so there's so many different ways of looking at it, but I totally agree there are, there are some benefits to doing things online, there are some benefits to having that space. The challenge for me is always. Are people actually listening or are they doing their emails or something else at the same time? So it's about how do we focus that attention as well.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:39:13] That's, that's very cynical. I will say we haven't had any instances of that festival. We have genuinely had teams for whom. I think there's something about obviously the work we do is so important, especially in these times because we're almost giving people time to pause time to just. Regroup reset, reframe and you know, it's all done in a very sort of, you know, carefully crafted, facilitated manner.

[00:39:53] So it just, it just opens up the conversations that, you know, rightly or wrongly, we all say we don't have time for that in the normal day to day. So this oasis that we can create for teams. And I think that's why people haven't been multitasking in the background. They've, they've relished that time together to just take a moment out and think, do you know what?

We've worked really hard and we've had some great results, but now we need to focus on this. And it's just been, it is, you know, we were talking about joy. It has genuinely been a joy to be part of.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:40:32] Great. And there's things to be learned from that. Isn't that as well, I loved your term there, like create a little oasis where people can have those conversations as leaders out there listening right now, if you can create an hour a week where you do that and you replicate that and everyone comes together and you share some stories in a really lovely space, safe space, you will be creating joy for people.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:40:54] Yeah. Yeah. And for yourself and for yourself. Yeah,

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:41:00] I'm just thinking about, something you said a little bit earlier about, you know, finding that space to experiment, to let people try new things. And that balance that I think is out there. And this is the, one of the, again, the challenge of the tight rope of leadership is you want people to be able to fail because failure is where innovation happens and where you did growth and all the great things.

[00:41:19] Yeah. But you want people to be able to go through that process and your business to still be successful. So you're trying to balance those two things. And one of the things, again, I wonder about is like the micro experiments, the micro failures, the little things that won't make a massive

difference, but where it brings you that experience of going through the process of failure and understanding how your resilience is there and understanding what it teaches you but with the balance of this, isn't going to cripple our business for the next five years in a difficult time when we're already struggling. So it's one of the small things that people can be challenged on that, that they kind of safe to fail way of thinking. And I think there's always some things you can work out there but again, all of these things just take a little bit more thinking than the obvious.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:42:07] Yeah. I think there's a couple of things there for me, Beth. I think one is. You're absolutely right. We have to find ways to fail safely, but I think one of the worst things we can do as leaders is, create, pretend projects, pretend failures. you know, if, if we're going to really, learn from this, it has to be.

[00:42:32] It has to have some value in the process. We can't, we can't do something that is hypothetical on the sideline because, you know, we're, we're not going to really learn from that. And, and, you know, so, so don't, don't make something up just for someone to be able to have a practice, gives them something real to get hold of it and try.

[00:42:52] And, you know, in the whole scheme of things, you know, when. You know, even, even if we look for, for things to try that are on a slightly bigger scale, very rarely what we do will be catastrophic to the business. It might, it might cause a bump in the road that we weren't anticipating, or, you know, we're not looking forward to dealing with, but ultimately it's probably not going to be catastrophic even in these strange times.

[00:43:20] So I think it's keeping things in perspective as well. Yeah. And, you know, you said at the start, yeah, we haven't, we haven't been able to recreate that, that moment of crisis where we will come together. Well, actually sometimes when things don't go right, that is when we come together.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:43:35] Yeah, that is true. And I think you're right. People can, people know when something's fake and they don't, they don't engage with it as well as when it's something real. If you know, if you know that actually it's fake and therefore if you fail, there's no problem. You're not really putting your whole heart into it, right?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:43:51] No, there's a, there's a big old safety net underneath you. And, and actually there should be some sort of safety net. There should be some way of, [00:44:00] you know, there should be some obvious exit strategies. if things are getting a little bit too hot to handle, if you're, if you're trying things out, but you know, if it's not real, then actually you don't get the benefit of understanding what that failure means, but also you didn't get the benefit of seeing the, the achievement if you get it right.

Because it just has, no, it has no value add, it has no context and, and what we're trying to do as an organization. So it has to be, it has to be something that, that matters.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:44:33] Yeah. Right, right. we're coming towards the end. I've got a few questions for you. Are you okay for me to quick fire them at you.

**Jo Smallwood:** You can quick fire at me. I can't promise I will quick fire back.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:44:52] Question one for me. It's for you personally, as an individual, what is always guaranteed to bring you some work joy.

**Jo Smallwood:** think I feel very privileged as a coach to be able to have some amazing conversations with some amazing people. And I never come out of the coaching session not having learned something, not having shared some really fantastic moment with, with, with the coachee or whoever I'm chatting to. And I think what I've learned more and more is, you know, there's conversations that we're having now. Have such relevance and such importance to how people are then continuing the rest of their day, the rest of the week and actually, you know, just the, the ad hoc conversations that sometimes spring up during the week, you know, you and I regularly catch up. You know, I try to plan time in my diary to, to sort of just have what we're calling virtual coffees with people, that have no agenda. No, you know, no purpose is just checking in, but I almost, I can almost guarantee I leave those conversations, feeling that I've taken something from them and something very, very insightful, something very important and it does bring me joy.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:24] So again, it's making you making time for those conversations as well. Isn't it? And the ones without an agenda without a business purpose and, you know, humans need that connection and being able to have a great conversation with somebody can bring you such joy. So wonderful, what book are you currently reading?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:46:43] Being part of your book group, I should say the book that we ...

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:48] Say the honest truth, Jo here.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:46:51] So it's not that one. It's Think Like A Monk by Jay Shetty.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:56] And how are you finding it?

**Jo Smallwood:** It is a fascinating story. If you don't know about him, he's he dropped out of, he was working in city he'd always sort of, been connected to his spiritual side, but he dropped out of the city and went to be a monk for four years. And then, by mutual agreement, you know, that was never going to be his life story. So he then, but he's now applying some of those monk like disciplines to sort of helping leaders and helping anybody who cares to, to read about him, and it's just fascinating. It's just fascinating his approach to, values. And actually she's a sort of, you know, really, really taken on a different perspective I suppose. So, yeah.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:47:53] Great. I think I might have to get that on the book read list. Next question for me, what's the best or most useful bit of advice that you've had in your life that you always come back to?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:48:06] Hmm. Actually there's probably two in there probably from the same source. So if I'm Greg Mckeown who wrote Essentialism. They have both been learnings since locked down for me. So the first one is if you don't prioritize your time, someone else will. And I think we all, we are a little bit laissez-faire with our diaries and we let people, put meetings in and we let people sort of carve out big chunks of space when actually we don't always really challenge if that if that matter time is needed or if we're needed on that meeting or what our role is at that meeting. So

I think there's something about, prioritizing your time and not letting others dictate it, but the other piece of, Piece of advice I took from his book was, how important it is to protect the asset.

The asset being, you, you know, how, how many, and it comes back to what we were saying earlier, but how much time do we allow in the day? To really, to really look after ourselves to apply a bit of self care. And, you know, if you don't protect the asset eventually, you know, cracks will begin to show and, we will, we will not be performing in the way that we want or, or others expect. So I think that was, that was a real, real moment of clarity when I read that.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:49:40] Such a good bit of advice there and to think of yourself as the asset is, it probably seems a bit strange to people, but it's so true in business that you are actually quite important. And, and how do you look after yourself, in the right way.

And the thing about the diary is great advice because it's so true. If you don't control it, someone else will, and they will not control it in the way that you would want it. Absolutely.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:50:01] No, absolutely not.

[00:50:04] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:50:04] Okay. Nearly final question from me is what is one super practical bit of advice that you would give to our listeners that they could go and do right now really simple do tomorrow, do the next day build as a habit that would help bring them some work joy in their lives?

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:50:24] I, I think. We've been doing this with teams recently in different, workshops with LinkedIn. But I think there's something about, I don't know, check in every morning with yourself or check out every evening when you did both, if you want. But I think there's something about checking in in the morning, just saying, okay, where am I today? How am I feeling how my energy level? Because if we do that moment to check in in the morning, It means we take on the day differently. So if we've got things during the day that we know are going to bring us huge amount of pleasure. We can, we can prioritize those. If we're not feeling great, we can say, okay, well that's the bit that I'm really gonna enjoy that I'm going to make space for.

[00:51:12] And I'm going to really, you know, invest in and if we're feeling okay and particularly strong, then suddenly you think, yeah, I can take on, you know, something today that, you know, it's been hanging around. It's been on my to do list for awhile. so I think checking in with yourself, being honest and being okay if, you know, if you're checking in, in the morning, Yeah I'm not feeling into that. I'm not feeling that great. That's okay. And it just means that you allow yourself a different perspective when you take on some of the tasks. And I think alongside that, to not read the other day, and I can't remember where it was, but yeah, they were talking about to-do lists, which I love, I love a good to do lists.

[00:51:55] But they were saying that there should be a list of the side of it, which is not to do, but to be, so we're going to do these things, but in doing them, I'm going to be there. So I'm going to be calm. I'm going to be mindful. I'm going to be curious. and I think that just adds a whole new dimension to your day.

**Beth Stallwood:** [So it's kind of setting your intention for your attitude towards the to-do list and your behaviors.

**Jo Smallwood:** You know, if you've got, if you've got some tricky things on the to-do list you'll to be might, you know, might frame those, you know, so if you've got a difficult conversation to have, it might to be patient.

To be, to listen more, you know, to be an active listener. It, you know, it's sort of, like you say, it's sets your intention. It gives you a, a dimension against which to do the task. and perhaps we don't, we don't give enough thought to that. So I would say my piece of advice is check in with yourself either morning or evening and just, you know, just have a moment to think where you're at and, and add to be to your, to do's.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:53:13] Love that advice. I think I'm going to start thinking about that one. And even if it was something like to be kind to yourself while you're doing it, you could really build in that self care as well as the things that other people need from you as well. Yeah. Great advice. Yeah. Thank you, Jo, for sharing, all of your thoughts, your insights, from what you're learning in your role and your background and it's been amazing to have a conversation with you. Where can our listeners find out more about you and your organization and your thinking?

**Jo Smallwood:** So Maier has a website, [www.Maier.uk](http://www.Maier.uk). That's probably as good a place as any. We share or that all our blogs [00:54:00] or what we do about us, who we are all on there, but there's also a page at the end, which is news and insights, which is what we're up to.

[00:54:07] And that's where all that blogs are and, you know, they make for a fantastic, and I'm not just saying it obviously I'm biased, but they make for an amazing read. Cause we we've kept this sort of blog piece up throughout the whole of lockdown and it just reflects. Where people have been on this journey and, and continue and obviously we've had, we've had great access to some fantastic chief execs and their teams, all of whom have been very open and honest in sharing their own experiences, how they're feeling about all of this. So, so well worth, sort of, a little. Meander through those, if you've got time. So they're on our website, but they're also shared on LinkedIn and I can be found on LinkedIn if people want to contact me.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:54:54] Thanks so much for joining us today, Jo, I'm looking forward to our regular catch that they always bring lots of joy.

**Jo Smallwood:** [00:55:04] Absolute pleasure. Thank you so much.

[00:55:08] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:55:08] Thank you for listening to the Work Joy Jam, with our fantastic guest, Jo Smallwood, there are so many little bits of advice and nuggets of brilliance I'm going to take away.

[00:55:18] But a couple that I'm really thinking about after that conversation is around the leader's role. And if you already leader, if you're a manager, if you're somebody out there responsible for the people as this idea of creating a little Oasis for how the team come together, talk and shadow that reality in a really open, able to be vulnerable, able to say, if it's not great, kind of a way.

So that one for me has really stuck with me. And the other one is. When Jo talked about where she's hearing people reference joy and she talks about it, and it's most obvious sense is often where people have come together, perhaps even in unexpected ways. So maybe that's something for us all to think about is how do we come together in those unexpected ways as a way of creating some

more joy. Thank you so much for listening to the work joy jump podcast. You can find out more about work joy on our website, which is [createworkjoy.com](https://createworkjoy.com). We're also on the Instagram, which is @createworkyou And we'd love to hear from you hear your thoughts on the podcast here, what your doing, what actions.

So do you tag us and tell us and show us what you're up to. Thank you for listening.