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Chuck: Welcome to ICology, the podcast dedicated to interesting people doing interesting things in the world of internal communications. In this episode, we have guest Nick Howard from Edelman Employee Engagement. If internal comms is your passion, then this is your podcast. Listen in.

Hello, this is Chuck Gose, your host. This is episode 18 of ICology and today we're going to talk about a simple word but a very complex word, trust. And trust is a critical element in our interpersonal relationships. It's sometimes a foundation of our relationships with people. But I also think it's critical, though maybe not as equally but still important in the world of internal communications. Trust can take a long time to build but can be destroyed or obliterated in a second. And perhaps this is why it is so important each year, Edelman releases its Trust Barometer, and it's a global view of the word "trust" across media, NGOs, government and business. And the value to communicators is understanding the concept of trust and how this plays out.

So think to your own experiences. When I've spoken about engagement, I've discussed my own personal drivers to what, when I've had, or what drives my employee engagement from a personal standpoint. And two of those are relationship with my immediate supervisor and belief in senior leadership. And I feel that trust is very much at the heart of both of those. And in a past episode with Jacob Morgan, we discussed the employee experience, and he described technology as the central nervous system of an organization. If this is so then I feel that trust is the backbone of an organization.

So today we're doing to dig deeper into Edelman's 2016 Trust Barometer and on today's show we've got Nick Howard, Executive Director for Edelman Employee Engagement. Nick, welcome to ICology.

Nick: Thanks Chuck, very pleased to be here.

Chuck: And happy to have you on. To kickstart things, why don't you discuss a little bit of your history with the agency and then what Edelman is focused in on employee engagement? In the past, we've had one of your colleagues, Christopher Hannigan on, but I want to get your perspective on this.

Nick: Sure, so I've been Edelman now for about four and a half years. I lead the employee engagement business across Europe and have a very specific role here in the UK to grow the business here and support clients here as well. Interestingly, before I joined Edelman, I was the communications director for the retail part of Lloyds Banking Group, a bank that your UK listeners will be very familiar with and one that like all companies in the financial services sector, had a crisis of trust some years ago during the great economic crash. And the experience there that really brought home to me how important trust is, not only for consumers and the general public and customers but also for your own employees as well. And it was one of the things that attracted me to Edelman when I joined here, because Edelman does a huge amount of work on trust that we'll come on to talk about just in a moment.

But for Edelman Employee Engagement really is about helping clients get the most out of their employees, helping their employees deliver their best and of course, exactly as you've described, a trusting relationship between the employee and the employer is one of the key factors in determining whether or not employees feel able to give their best.

Chuck: And I've been described at times to be a little bit of a pessimist about things but I do agree with you, I think that there's a lot of employees who do want to give their best, they do want to do the

best job possible. They're just not in an environment where they feel that it's valued or believed in or supported. So yeah, I agree with you from a trust standpoint about how valuable it is. And I know that some communicators are familiar with the Trust Barometer. When it comes out, they start digesting the numbers. But many are not. So without getting into the details and numbers yet, talk about what this trust barometer is and why Edelman reports it every year.

Nick: Yeah, so the Edelman Trust Barometer has been going for 16 years now. This global survey, about 33,000 respondents, is designed to measure people's trust in the four big institutions: that's business, government, non-governmental organizations and the media. And for the 2016 survey, we actually dug a little bit deeper into employee trust because we wanted to understand the extent to which employees trust the company they work for and whether that influenced their likelihood to be advocates for that company.

So do employees trust their employer and do they or don't they advocate for their employer?

Chuck: So let's start digging into the results then. What were some of the general themes from this year's Trust Barometer that you think would be important internal communicators and were there any shifts from, say, last year's report?

Nick: Yeah, I think three important things came out of it for us. One is a continuing trend and the other two are some quite alarming new findings. So the continuing trends that we've seen over many years now is that employees are very credible spokespeople for the company they work for. They are trusted advocates and they're trusted on a whole range of topics that we know are really important for consumers, things like what it's like to work at that company, the business ethics for that company, the working conditions, the way in which that company may respond to a crisis or a problem and so on.

Employees are very credible spokespeople on those issues, as you'd expect. And those issues are things that influence consumers to trust that organization. But as a continuing trend, we're seeing that for a number of years. The more alarming findings that are new for the 2016 Trust Barometer are two things: firstly, we learned that about one in three people don't trust their employer. That's a big number. That's quite startling, actually.

And then the second thing we discovered that was also quite alarming is that there's quite a significant trust gap between executives and employees. About 64% of executives trust the company they work for. That goes down to 48% for what you might call rank-and-file employees, the ordinary people working in an organization. They're far less likely to trust their companies than executives are. I think that's quite alarming.

Chuck: Well, and what's interesting to me is while that employee figure is bad, like you said, the 48%, to me, that's not nearly as surprising as the executive number, to say that 64%. Why do you think that is? Is it that, in my, I would have thought that that number would have been higher. But is there really that much of a lack of trust? What's your reaction to that?

Nick: See, I was also somewhat surprised and I would have expected, like you, that the most senior people in the organization might have a higher level of trust in the company that they work for. But I think what it goes back to is something that you said right at the start of this call: how important trust is, how difficult it is to create but how easy it is to destroy. It's a very valuable commodity and I think what we're looking at is a broader crisis of trust, if you like. Because the data that we see about employees is very similar to the broader data that we see when we're looking at the general population and their trust within those four institutions.

Chuck: Mhm. And not to overlook the 48% figure of the rank-and-file employee, because I say that the real damage with that, and you touched on it briefly as well, that people see their peers as the most credible spokespeople. So if half of the organization doesn't really even, doesn't have that trust built in yet they're seen as the most credible, what can a communicator do to impact this or change this? Or is there anything that a communicator can do here to help improve this 48% figure?

Nick: Yeah, I'll give you a quite general answer to that because I don't think there's any one specific thing. But I think in general, when I look at a lot of internal communications efforts, I think they're missing one critical component, and that's an outward looking aspect to them. Far too many internal comms programs and channels and content only focus on the organization itself and they forget about the most important person in the organization, really, which is the customer. And the advice that I would give to every internal communicator is think more about the customer and the interaction between the customer and the employee and how through your internal communication work, you can really improve that interaction.

What's the support that you can give to your employees to make them feel much more comfortable advocating for you as an organization when they're interacting with customers and with other stakeholders, of course, friends, family, neighbors and whoever else they come into contact with.

Chuck: Well, and I think, and again we're, we've been leaning into this topic here, this has a huge impact on employee advocacy and brand advocacy on the internal side. And that's obviously a topic that I think now more and more communicators are focusing on and maybe putting some plans around. But I want to find out from you, how does Edelman define employee advocacy?

Nick: I think for us it's quite simple, actually. It's employees who feel proud to talk about what they do. And having worked for a bank myself for quite a few years when banks really were persona non grata and were the focus of a lot of public anger, I know what it's like when you meet people outside of work and they ask you what you do for a living and you say, "Well, I work for a bank," and there's that sharp intake of breath and people look at you as though you've done something wrong. And you don't feel proud to say what you do for a living or to talk about what your team does and what your colleagues do and so on. And actually, it's quite embarrassing.

We think employee advocacy is the opposite feeling to that. You meet people for the first time and they say to you, "Who do you work for?" You're proud to say who that is. You're proud to talk about what you do, what your colleagues do, the value that you bring, not only through the products and services that you deliver but the value that you bring to society, because what you are there to do is more than just create profit. You're very proud when you go home to your family, to your husband, to your wife, your parents if you're still living at home and you're proud to talk about what you did during the day. That, for me, is employee advocacy.

What that actually looks like, of course, in practice can take many different forms. And I think it's really interesting now that quite a number of organizations are starting to look at how they support their employees, not only with the conversations they have with friends, family and customers but also how they support their employees to advocate for their employer, to advocate for their company over their social media networks as well. I think we're seeing some really interesting developments there.

Chuck: Well and I think, too, from an advocacy side, it's somewhat easy to monitor on the social side or to point to those channels. I think the more challenging ones for communicators is just simple word of mouth and conversations that happen. And those are the ones that you can arm employees with information and general sentiment but you really can't track it. So you've really got to hope that you've armed them with the right information. And there's an article that you wrote recently that you shared, I thought this was really interesting, that employees are more likely to advocate for their employer when their CEO has something to say about and meaningful involvement in societal issues.

And they said, you shared, in fact, 8 out of 10 people want this from their CEOs. They want their CEOs talking about societal issues. Some people would view this as risky but is this a situation where the risk outweighs the reward or the reward outweighs the risk?

Nick: I would say it's risky not to do it, to be honest and there's a couple of reasons for that. So firstly, it's not only employees who are saying that they want that from their CEO, it's the general public who are saying that as well. And when you think about it, that makes sense, because your employees are

the same people as your customers, essentially. So it's quite natural that they would want the same sorts of things from the most senior people in the organizations that they deal with. So that's the first reason why it's risky not to do it.

The second reason why it's risky not to do it is there's a chance you might get left behind because other organizations are really starting to take this seriously. You look at the big multi-nationals who've really taken a strong stand on this and I'll name a couple of Edelman clients: Unilever, PepsiCo, Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan, PepsiCo with their Performance with Purpose. Their chief executives, Paul Polman, Indra Nooyi, are really forward-thinking in this area and they've made a very clear stand and they do things that really demonstrate their commitment to bringing a new kind of value to society.

I think many more CEOs are starting to feel the same way. They're really starting to take action on this. If you're an organization that doesn't do that, the chance is that you'll be seen as someone who's been left behind and an also-ran, essentially and people will wonder why your chief executive isn't also out there getting involved in some of the big issues that society is facing.

Chuck: Well and I see this as, this is really from a geographical distance here, it seems like Richard Branson is probably a great model for that. To see him routinely speak out and share his opinion and whether employees seem to agree with it or not, they seem to respect him taking that stance.

So in the same article you share, which is obvious but I think it also, it further extends this discussion around the role that trust plays in employee advocacy is that people who trust their CEO are more likely to recommend their company as an employer, which is huge in there, when people say, "Oh, should I come work there?" Or recruiting, that's a big part. And also recommend products and services. Everybody, you could argue this, they have a sales component to their job around talking about what their company and helping that company grow.

So this does go back into the advocacy discussion a bit. But when it comes to aligning employees with their CEO and building that trust from a communications standpoint, is this a visibility issue? Are people not aware? I know they know who their CEO is but do they really know who their CEO is or is it a messaging issue to where what content communicators are sharing just isn't resonating with employees?

Nick: I think it's both, to be honest. I think it has to be real. This can't just be a propaganda exercise, essentially. It can't just be stuff that you talk about. It has to be things that you actually do and you have to be very thoughtful about what your CEO gets involved because it has to be something that for him or her is a real passion and something that they will take active involvement in.

But of course, you also need to share what the chief exec is doing, why it's important, why they feel it's important, the impact it's having and why that ties in very well with the impact that you want to have as an organization in society. Yeah, trust is about what you do, not only what you say. So you need to do it and talk about it to bring it to people's attention.

And actually, I'll just go back to an interesting point you made at the start of your question, and I completely agree with you, that a number of findings in the Trust Barometer are obvious when you think about them. The logic that you follow around this is what causes employees to trust their chief executives; if they trust their chief executive, they're more likely to advocate for their company; if they advocate for their company, consumers, customers, so on are more likely to believe them and therefore more likely to buy from you. All of that's very obvious. And I think what's interesting about the data that we now have is that that's on the table. Nobody can deny it anymore and it's time for people to start taking action on it, I think.

Chuck: Well, I think you're right. I think it is obvious and I didn't meant that as a negative, I meant it as this is something that now communicators can take and lay out to people to show that it's not just something we believe, it's now something we know.

Nick: Show the proof.

Chuck: In the HR magazine article that you wrote, you'd published, I thought this was really great, seven ideas that communicators can use to build employee trust and advocacy. So I thought if you just wanted to quickly run through those seven ideas...

Nick: Sure and these are all pretty simple things, actually. And I don't think every organization needs to do all seven of these things all at once. But I do think they're a very good start and they're something that people should be thinking about right now.

So firstly, start by thinking about your employees and your customers in the same way. For too long now, we have treated employees from an engagement perspective as the poor relation to customers. Internal communicators, we should not accept that. We should make sure that the quality of the way that we engage with employees is as good as the way in which we engage with customers.

Secondly, we've got to support our leaders better, help them be more engaging so that they can engage employees and build trust. And in particular, just as we've discussed, really help the leaders, in particular your chief exec, describe to employees ways in which your company is a positive force for good in society.

Thirdly, make sure you've got that positive force for good at the heart of your story. Develop your story in a way that is easy for employees to remember and repeat. Share it with employees and help them to share it with the outside world.

Next, help your employees bring that story to life with real examples, real proof points and of course, we all know that the best proof points for any company story are about employees and the things that they're doing. So really identify your employee heroes, the ones whose actions and behaviors truly demonstrate the value that you bring to the world.

The fifth point that we've been making is give your employees the mechanism to share that story. And this goes back to the idea that we talked about earlier, Chuck, around making sure that not only can they have conversations with people, that perhaps they've got the technology, the platform to be able to share your story and the examples that bring it to life across their social networks.

The sixth point that we make is around tracking employee engagement on an ongoing basis. So listen to your employees continuously. You made a really great point early on that it's difficult to know whether employees are doing some of the things that we want them to. Are they really having those conversations and advocating for us when they're speaking with customers, friends and family? You won't know that if you're only surveying them once a year. So find ways of listening to employees consistently, continually seeking their views and engaging them in a conversation about who you are and what you stand for and why you're a great organization and the value that you're bringing to society.

And then finally, make sure that your communication team is really fit for purpose. The structure, the capabilities, the skills that may have been relevant five, six, seven years ago may not be so relevant now. So have a really good, hard look at what it is you're trying to achieve, all of the sorts of things that we've been talking about today and ask yourself, "Is my communications team really helping me deliver on that or do we need to think about restructuring, refocusing how we actually operate?"

Chuck: Yeah and on two of those points, I want to just add some commentary on the last one and the first one, I'll start with the last one. I think that as we see with a lot of internal communicators can get stuck in a rut, both on an individual basis and on a team basis. I think your guys' idea around even looking at, are we structured in a way that we need to be? Now that it's 2016, this structure might have existed in 2006 or 1996. So is it time to revise our team?

And back to your very first point, I had mentioned in the intro about the conversation I had had with Jacob Morgan. You had talked about a little balancing and making sure you've got the right focus on

both customer engagement and employee engagement that really echoes the conversation that we had with him about the employee experience that, I believe that so many companies are focused on the customer experience and rightfully so, but they aren't recognizing, in my opinion, that the employee experience is very much the bedrock of that. Without a great employee experience, your customer experience is going to be faulty.

Nick: Absolutely. And I think it's worth remembering as well. And here's where internal communicators and people who are involved in employee engagement can have a very positive and worthwhile impact in the business. It's worth remembering that value is created for an organization by the people who produce what you sell and the people who buy what you produce. And that's your employees and your customers. They are the ones who create value for your business. So really focusing on those two groups, in particular the interaction between them is a way of really unlocking that value. Trust, of course, has a huge part to play in that.

But I think internal comms people should be much more confident about the impact, the positive impact that they can have on the business and they should be much more open and comfortable talking to those other colleagues in the business who are responsible for the customer experience.

Chuck: Mhm. I agree 1000%. Now Nick, I don't know if you have a crystal ball or not. You might. If you do, awesome, if not, just pretend. Do you think now that trust, is it going to become a bigger conversation within companies? Is this something that communicators can begin having leadership conversations about as we see the importance of it growing?

Nick: Wow. I wish I did have a crystal ball. I really hope so, Chuck. I think it's one of those topics that has been known about for a while but has been left unsaid because there hasn't been a great deal of data around it.

And if you look at the data that people collect through employee engagement surveys, for example, often the trust dimension isn't really in there. So I think that people get that trust is important but because there's been no measurements around it, it's been left unsaid for a while. Will it become a hot topic, will it become something that internal comms people talk about more? I really hope so and I really hope that the data we collected through the 2016 Trust Barometer helps that. We'll be doing the same thing, I hope, next year and hopefully be collecting even richer data and I really hope that will help people. So my answer is, I really hope so.

Chuck: Well and we could have another day long conversation about the questions and data people get from employee engagement because of the surveys. Because a lot of them are rubbish, because I think they're asking the wrong questions or aren't really driving any improvement or any validation. And that's why, honestly pointing back to some previous data points that, I like that, I don't like that that's 48% front line employees trust their company but I know that that data's true, that it doesn't say 90%, it's not 95%. It's a low number. So to me, okay, that's an accurate portrayal. And I think so often with engagement, companies aren't presenting an accurate portrayal because they game the system or there's some other incentives around it.

So I think that as you talk about trust, that's not something that can really be faked. It's not a "fake it 'til you make it" thing, it's a current right now. And I think a point you made earlier, too, around the companies that have got, it's not that the annual survey is bad, it's just that we can do better and we don't have to just wait for that once a year to ask employees at that point in time. There should be that feedback from employees all year long.

So I agree and I agree with you, too, that I hope that trust does become, some of the companies begin asking themselves. Because I think there could be some very awkward conversation.

Nick: Well I think so. My challenge to any internal communicator would be, what would you do if you were standing in front of your chief executive tomorrow morning and he or she said to you, "How are our employees feeling right now? Do they trust us? Are they advocating for us? Are they saying good things about us when they're speaking to their customers?" And how would you answer that? And

based on my experience, most internal communicators, not through any fault of their own but because they don't have the information, wouldn't be able to answer that question.

Chuck: So again, Trust Barometer is a great report. I've been following it for a better part of a decade. Read it when it comes out. It's not just, and that's what I like about it, it's not about communications. It's just, there's so much impact that it has on communications. So I think it's something communicators should learn more about, so direct listeners to where they can go to learn more about the Trust Barometer as well as other Edelman content?

Nick: Absolutely. You can find all the information that you need on Edelman.com. You'll find links there to the Trust Barometer in its entirety and also to the employee-specific aspects to the Trust Barometer. And if you want to know more about what we're doing in employee engagement, you can follow our employee engagement Twitter feed, that's @EdelmanEE. You can follow my Twitter feed, I'm @NickMHoward. You can connect with me on LinkedIn and I'll be more than happy to share all of our insights and findings with you and communicate with you if you want to have a conversation.

Chuck: Well and I will say, I have mentioned before, Christopher Hannigan was on an earlier episode. There's a lot of really helpful content that Edelman is producing. You don't have to be a client to be consuming this. It's a lot of great thoughts, great information, presents, I think, a very realistic view of it and hopefully this will get communicators to reach out early on, to start to mature a little bit more and become a true business resource to their companies and not just a communicator putting messages out there.

Nick: I'll tell you a funny story...

Chuck: So now we're going to jump into our lightning round here, so it's really just a chance for our listeners to learn more about you, Nick. Like I said, there's a lot of communicators that listen but we've got other business leaders, business owners so they're trying to just get better communications and connect with people. So the first question I have for you is if you were in a band, what instrument would you play?

Nick: Well, I already play the guitar very badly, so I don't think a band would let me in based on my performance. I'm enthusiastic but not very good.

Chuck: What is your go-to karaoke song?

Nick: It would be, "Waterloo Sunset" by the Kinks, who are a great '60s band. It is my favorite song of all time. Again, I would sing it very enthusiastically but probably not very well.

Chuck: Well, that's obviously a great band. I don't know that I know that song so I'm going to have to go look that up. What is a book that you recommend every communicator should read?

Nick: I won't recommend a business book or an advice book or anything like that. I'll recommend something a little bit differently, and it's my favorite book and I read it first when I was very, very young. It's actually a very old book. It's called *Cider with Rosie* and it's the autobiography of Laurie Lee, who was an English poet and novelist, and it's set at the turn of the last century, so it's pre-World War I and it describes Lee's youth growing up in the English countryside.

And the reason I would recommend it to anybody is I think it's one of the most beautifully written books in the English language. And if you want a brilliant example of how language can be evocative and beautiful and create pictures in your mind, then I think *Cider with Rosie* is perfect. It is a truly wonderful, beautiful book and I would recommend anybody to read it.

Chuck: Hm, great recommendation. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received and do you remember who gave it to you?

Nick: Yeah, so it's a piece of advice given to me by a former colleague who has been something of a mentor to me over the years, and gosh, about, crumbs, 10 years ago or so, he and I were doing a number of executive interviews for a piece of work we were both involved in, it was a piece of merger and acquisition work, actually.

And as we were doing these interviews, he gave me a really great insight into his interview technique, which is that every time you are having a meeting with a very senior business leader or you're interviewing them, whether it's over the phone or you're sat in front of them, don't use it as an opportunity only to get information from them. Because if you do, that's useful to you but it's not terribly useful to them. Always make sure you give them something back. Give them useful insights, something that they didn't know before, give them a different perspective on something that they've told you. Because if you do that, they'll want to see you again and you'll get another opportunity to be on the call with them or sit in front of them and they'll value your opinions.

And that was a fantastic piece of advice that I've shared with lots of other people since then. And now, whenever I'm sat in a room with a chief executive, I always try and give them something that they weren't expecting from me. I try and give them a piece of information or an insight that they'll find valuable and therefore earn my right to meet with them again.

Chuck: Well and I think that's a great piece of advice, because that's something as communicators look to build relationships with their senior leaders, that's probably something they haven't thought of. But I agree with you, that they probably rarely get people giving them information. They're usually the ones always disseminating out and giving people the answers, where it probably does help to build that relationship if you've given them something more to think about but also prepared it, it wasn't just an off chance conversation but you've come forward with information for them. So I think that's brilliant. Brilliant advice.

What is a tool that you rely on to make sense of your world? This could be an app, a site, a hammer. We've had, past guests have mentioned yoga, some people have mentioned their calendar, some have mentioned Spotify. So what's a tool that you rely on?

Nick: My wristwatch, I think. I can't remember a time in my life, even going back to very early childhood where I haven't worn a wristwatch. And on the very rare occasions when I've left the house in the morning without putting my watch on, I've felt completely lost throughout the day. So, and I look at my watch far too often. I do it all the time to check the time but also to check the date. But without it on my wrist, I feel adrift.

Chuck: Hm, that's interesting. What is a final piece of parting advice that you want to share with listeners? Again, we have a lot of communicators that listen to the podcast but also business owners and business leaders. So what's a final piece of parting advice from Nick?

Nick: Sure. Now I think a lot of communicators view internal communication or even external communication if that's what they're involved in, they view it as an end in itself. And actually, I don't believe that that's the case. My advice to anybody involved in communication is that communication is a means to an end and certainly when you're thinking about employee communication, it's one of the ways in which you can influence employee actions and behaviors. And I think what communicators can do that is really powerful is firstly remember that communication isn't the only thing that influences employee behavior. You've also got to think about leaders as role models, people development, recognition and all of those other things. And so firstly think about that.

But secondly, recognize that although communication isn't an end in itself, it's a driver of behavior, if you like. It can also act as a very powerful linking mechanism to all of those other drivers of behavior. So internal communicators are in a brilliant position to link together different parts of the organization so that everybody is working together as best as they possibly can to influence what employees do in the workplace to deliver brilliant products and services and a fantastic customer experience.

Chuck: Well, we're coming to the end of the podcast. Nick, I want to thank you again for being a guest on ICology and sharing your story as well as some of these findings from Edelman's Trust Barometer. Again, it's not just solely focused on communications but has such a great impact on it and hopefully it can help build a conversation for communicators who begin having inside their organization as well as use trust as a way to build their relationships with senior leaders.

ICology is a listening post for communicators. It's a place for them to hear stories from professionals like you, Nick who can inspire them to be better communicators, because I think we can all be better communicators. Please follow ICology on Twitter @learnICology to pick up show announcements as well as other IC news. If internal communications is your passion, ICology is your podcast. Thanks for listening.