The Headtorch Wellbeing Hour: Kate Goodger

**Amy:** At Headtorch, we are experts in workplace mental health, working at all levels in organisations towards developing a culture that really protects, promotes and supports people's mental health. I'm Amy MacDonald.

**Angus:** I'm Angus Robinson.

**Liz:** I'm Liz Clarkson.

**Amy:** And our colleague Nick is beavering away in the background doing all things technical to support us.

And today, of course, we have the amazing Kate Goodger as our guest, and the title of today's event is Are You in the Right Place? Principles of Performance. So I'm going to be asking Kate questions like, what are the principles of performance? And as a sports psychologist in the Olympic Games, what are some of the key factors that have held athletes back? At Laing O'Rourke, what's the approach to making sure that your people are in the right place?

Kate also has a couple of questions for us. She's going to be asking us these questions right here. How do you know that you are in the right place for you at work? A place where you feel happy, engaged, alive and satisfied. What are your criteria?

So we're just going to pop that into the chat and as Kate and I have our conversation do be putting your responses to that question into the chat and indeed any other thoughts and comments that you have and we'll come to those later on in the session.

Kate, it is an absolute joy for us to have you with us here today.

Kate is Head of Human Innovation and Performance at Laing O'Rourke. She was an Olympic performance psychologist for Team GB and has a PhD in athlete burnout. Formerly a PE and geography teacher, Kate is now one of the most experienced performance psychologists in UK Olympic sport, having worked with Team GB athletes and medallists at not one, but seven Olympic Games. Her reputation goes before her as a coach and facilitator with executives, leaders and teams, with clients including Lego, Morgan Stanley and Asda to name but a few. Kate is a sought after speaker in inclusion and diversity. At Laing O'Rourke, she's brought a critical focus to unlocking ingenuity at every level of the business, improving sustainable, high performance, wellbeing practices, and ensuring a business commitment to performance through purpose, values, and belonging.

Kate, it's... fantastic to have you here today. Please do introduce yourself with your mystery object.

**Kate:** Thanks, Amy. this is the first time I've been asked to do one of these, so I was very excited, trying to work out what can I present that is me, that would make me look cool to the audience, but is also a bit playful.

So what I'm actually going to introduce you to is, my friend here, Forks. So you'll see that Forks is a Lego Harry Potter item. So the reason I'm sharing that with you is I am a Harry Potter fan and whilst doing my PhD I had to bargain with myself to finish the thesis before I could read the final book.

That lasted about three hours because I just had to read the book before I did that. So I, I, I love creativity, I love imagination, I love ingenuity, so the Harry Potter books speak to me about that and just also are a precious time in my life. And the Lego is to do with having children, and, being reunited, with building and construction of the Lego kits and working with Lego at the time.

And one of the things that I do for my own wellbeing is build the Lego kits, because I don't really have to think, I don't have to talk to anybody, which sounds odd as a psychologist, I don't want to talk to people, but there are moments when you just want to have quiet space. So building Lego has been part of that. And behind me you'll see the consequence of Covid for me, so I did slightly lose the plot during Covid, in I built a lot of Lego kits, and some of the kits that you'll see there are original versions.

I started buying them on eBay, and when you realize you're staying up to 1am to buy a Durmstrang ship at £180, you realize you've lost it at that stage, so kind of bring yourself back. When introducing you to Forks, it was being able to see me really as a human so yes, I'm a practitioner, but what are the interests that I have?

So the creativity part, imagination, unleashing people, the family dimension is critical to my wellbeing, but also that conscious practice of wellbeing is something that comes every day into my life. So hopefully that's a bit of a a different introduction for you.

**Amy:** Fantastic, wonderful. I love the how it's almost, it brings pretty much all the strands together, doesn't it, through play, and how, when we play that is that great place to to zone out really, isn't it? Well, thank you so much for as I say for for joining us. So let's let's start with you know, are you in the right place? Principles of performance let's start with a baseline Kate. For you, what are principles of performance? Just so everybody's coming from the same place here today.

**Kate:** So the, the reason when we were talking Amy, about preparing for this session, I want it to be really practical. So in terms of what I want to try and share with your team here and the audience is, is things that I've used over the last 25 years that I've known work and are impactful and make a difference.

So everything I share with you is on that, that basis. And I think in asking the question of you know how do you know if you're in the right place? Sometimes we reach for these you know, highfalutin solutions, or the magic, or the silver bullet, or those kind of things, when actually first principles, when we talk about performance principles, let's start with first principles, and the first principle is, is this person in a good place within themselves? So when we think about the sport world and athletic performance, we often think about high performance. I'm less interested in high performance, I'm interested in high functioning, because if you're high functioning, that tends to lead to high performance. And how do we know somebody's in a high functioning mode?

When we think about decision making in sport, you might often assume that's down to the athlete and the coach, and they are principal decision makers. But there's one person that trumps them within an Olympic team, and that person is the team doctor, and that's because we will not put an athlete's health or wellbeing at risk and they will make decisions. And I've been to at least two Olympic Games where athletes have flown into the Olympic Village, are two days away from competing, and then are sent home because of the risk of injury. And that doesn't mean that an athlete doesn't have a say, they have a say, but it is about their health and wellbeing as first principles.

And we hear lots of examples where sport don't take that into account and push too hard, but the consequence is typically underperformance or a lack of sustainability to that performance. So you might peak once, but you never do it again. In sport, you're trying to peak again and again and again. So in challenging the audience here to think about are you in the right place?

It's a question which points to the first principle of performance, which is, health and wellbeing for people. But it also points to a second principle and lots of people with my coaching describe me as somebody that maybe asks a question and with that question I effectively punch them in the face.

And then the next thing I do is I give them a cuddle. And what they mean by that is I create accountability. I create responsibility, so when we think about health and wellbeing first principles, the second principle that I would give alongside that is people taking ownership and accountability for their wellbeing.

So that's about the choices that we make. They're not always easy, but it's really important that when we're working with individuals, we look to create options and choices for individuals, simply so they can make better choices that serve them.

**Amy:** Yeah, so your question punches people in the face.

Tell us a bit more about that punch.

**Kate:** That punch is around it coming from sometimes a place, for them, of objectivity, sometimes a place of an alternate perspective. Oh, I hadn't thought about that before. They're typically questions which are framed in accountability. So it's not a question they can avoid, that they could run around.

So it might be, for example, an executive venting about the team, and I'm really frustrated with this individual, they have just woefully underperformed and I need to tell them exactly how it is. So what's the kind of question that might punch somebody in the face? It's a simple question of how might have you contributed to this situation?

Or how might you be wrong here with what assumptions might you be making? So those are the kinds of questions that I think stop individuals, and they don't always necessarily like them, but I think it helps people to sometimes simply get out of their own way, by using my space of objectivity to give them the chance to step away from emotion or fatigue or whatever they're undergoing.

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely. So let's, spin back to, um, the Olympics, your involvement in the Olympics. What sport or sports, for example, tell us, first of all, were you involved in?

**Kate:** Yes, I, I worked for a group called the English Institute of Sport, and there's a Welsh one, a Scottish one, and an Irish one. So essentially how your lottery funding works in supporting elite sport is a pot of money goes to UK Sport and each of the respective Olympic disciplines.

Badminton, athletics, bobsleigh, summer and winter, they will look for service providers, or they can be through the Institute. So in the Institute, I worked for them for about 10 years, and I worked with so many Olympic sports. I probably can't name all of them because they're within the Institute system, but just wonderful experiences in

boxing, bobsleigh, curling, athletics, badminton, taekwondo, equestrian, canoeing, sailing, a whole raft of them. And what's wonderful in them is the cultures of going into different sports. so my first Olympic outing, was with the junior squads in sailing, and it was one of those where I really didn't understand the cultural elements.

So I turn up in my cagoule and my Clark’s wellies, thinking that'll keep me dry, and the team were like, no chance. So they put me in a dry suit. People know what one of those is, you go in and you get zipped up across here. However, it was tango orange, so you were definitely going to spot the psychologist in tango orange.

And then as we go out of Weymouth and we're on the sea, the skipper at the time says, oh, I wouldn't have worn those wellies, and I had no idea what he meant, but effectively, if you wear Clark's wellies, which are fairly tight fitting on a sailboat and you go overboard, you're not getting back up again, because your wellies are not coming off.

So then I immediately went home and bought some sailing wellies to suit that. The curiosity and the joy for me around sport is just the different demands that might sit with a discus thrower that has to wait to compete versus a footballer or hockey or a rugby player that's constantly moving versus a tennis or racket sport player who's waiting to receive somebody else's performance then go again and go back and forth.

So yeah, lots of wonderful different sports and incredible people that I've worked with and in truth some miserable beggars. So I'm just going to be clear, you've got inspiring people and you've got people that are just hard work which is probably the same as everybody on this call. They have people that they love working with and people that are more challenging, I'm sure.

**Amy:** Absolutely, and You know, you're, you're bringing your expertise to a raft of different disciplines there. What was the common ground, in terms of those key factors that were holding athletes back?

**Kate:** I think we will, we'll talk a little bit about this, in due course, but I think some of the, the commonality, again, kind of first principles of performance is, is really understanding what meaning the sport had for them in their lives, because so much of that then was wrapped up in identity, self worth etc. and when you're working with, with somebody that is wanting to go to the Games and somebody that says, I think, I think I should go to the Olympics, that's the next move, versus somebody that says, I just want to see how good I can be. I love this sport. You know, why would I not want to go to the Olympics?

That's two very different psychologies. I feel like I should. So there's pressure there as I'm doing it for some reason, some gain that might be outside of me, versus why wouldn't I? How amazing is this kind of opportunity? So I think, as with all of us, you know, our sense of meaning and purpose and what matters to us is, is such a guiding principle.

And then more often than not, and it's the same today when I'm working in, business environments or in medical environments, it's often about the skill level. So the commonality becomes that we don't allow ourselves time to practice these skills. So classically, I see that in businesses in difficult conversations.

You know, so if a business wants me to go in to do a talk, there may be something motivational or they say, actually, could you help us have the difficult conversations because none of us enjoy doing that. But it's about developing a skill set that helps us to manage our emotions, regulate ourselves, but also create the environment to help others to manage their emotions as well. So I'd probably start with those as common things in terms of what's the meaning? Why is somebody doing something? And then alongside it, what are the skills that may be in deficit or need growing because they might be causing an individual to get in their own way really?

**Amy:** Yeah, amazing transferable skills, aren't they? So what, just sticking with, you know, the sports, how did you help? How were athletes helped to break through,when they came up against obstacles in, in, in that respect.

**Kate:** In the kind of first times you start working with an athlete, it's very much, I guess, like strategic planning or business planning, where you want to know where you're heading.

So what's the vision? What's the goal? What's the dream? What are we heading for here? So it's interesting the number of people I come across still in sport and also in the business world that actually aren't clear on the outcome, or they're not necessarily certain of how they might measure that outcome.

So it seems to be clear, but actually when you dig a little bit further. So again, the starting point is to understand what's the objective here in the goal that we're trying to achieve? And often with athletes, we would talk about a dream versus a goal. So one of my mentors for 10 years was Professor Steve Peters, who wrote The Chimp Paradox, which is an incredible model, and it works phenomenally with individuals. And Steve made that distinction between a dream and the goal. So a dream is what gets us out of bed in the morning. It energizes us, it inspires us, and that would be a gold medal as an example. And then the goals are how we go about achieving that. So that's much more of a process focus.

So once we know where we're heading, what we then get into is the process focus. So what are the things that we need to do to achieve that time, to achieve that medal? And as we start to unpack the process, then we start to see where the blockers might exist. So for example, in slalom, canoe, or in bobsleigh, you've often got a course that you are navigating down that might have key features that are challenging.

So you begin to unpack where might the mental challenge come? and agree the skills that need to be in place there. Sometimes the skills are actually the off the water piece. It could be about lifestyle, it could be about, pressure that they're putting on themselves, or sometimes the skill is on the water, such as managing fatigue.

How do I maintain my focus when I'm fatigued? So it's a planning process. So ideally we want to get ahead of stuff by periodizing our plan through to that key event. So you have the key event in the calendar. Just as you do with a strategy, an end date, and then we work backwards from there. So Amy, that's the ideal thing, and then there's the reality that happens, that we get an injury, or the equipment breaks, or we lose somebody in the team, or any one of those, and then it becomes about intervention design. And the intervention work for me is based upon one key currency, and that is relationships. If I don't have a relationship with that athlete, and it's the 11th hour, and I get wheeled out to work my magic, I'd probably say good luck to myself and good luck to them.

So the relationship part enables you to bring challenge, which sometimes you need in those moments of pressure, where you have an athlete, and I had one in a sprint canoeing, we're in the London Olympics. This is the way the lake goes, and for anybody that's ever been down at Dorney Lake, the crosswind does this.

So it's going across. So if you are drawn in lane 8, it is a slower lane than lane 1. It just is. So our emotional side might complain if we're drawn in like lane seven or eight. It's not fair. Everybody else is getting a better opportunity, but the relationship I have with an athlete is being able to provide that objective mirror again that we have a choice here.

You can either choose to take your paddle in and go home and miss the Olympic final, or we can get on and try and deal with it. What's the best way of us dealing with the crosswind to be on the front of the blade? Okay, how are we going to do that? So when you're working in this intervention moment, it's about relationships and line managers on this call will know that around their teams.

If you know your teams well, you'll know when to have that conversation with Bob or possibly to delay that conversation to later in the week when you know he's got more headspace.

**Amy:** So the depth of relationship is, is absolutely crucial, it's really about being adaptable in that moment then and being able to have that conversation about the options.

**Kate:** About the options, and sometimes my role is simply the playback for them. If you've done your work well, the meta skill for athletes and us as human beings, irrespective of any walk of life, unless you're antisocial, that's the only time this doesn't count, and it's the meta skills.

Are we aware of the meta skill of self awareness?

So are we understanding, in tune with, and know who we are and what we require? Which goes back to my question before that, do you know what the right place is for you? What does it look, feel, sound like? How do you build that into your working week, but also how you're showing up for others. And there's a fantastic book called Insights by Tasha Eurich, Dr. Tasha Eurich, and she's got a fantastic TED talk where she talks about the seven principles of self awareness, the first four focused on knowing, and understanding self. And then the last three are about how do we show up and impact the world. We tend to focus on the first four, but not on how we're showing up for the rest of the world.

So the skill I hopefully have started with an athlete or anybody that I'm working with is on self awareness. And here's the punchline if you and I were even now in retirement, if Usain Bolt was to race against you and I, Amy, even if I piggybacked you or we got on a moped, we're probably not gonna beat this guy.

But in terms of the self-awareness part, there are some people that simply have limitations on self-awareness. They are simply not self aware, and it's typically the team session that I go into and the team leader says, I am the most self aware manager you're ever going to meet. And you just quickly look around the team and you look for this expression.

Because they're not changing that level of awareness, so psychological skills, we can all grow them, but it is to a greater or lesser extent. The most wonderful athletes that I worked with, were those that worked hard on self awareness, but really put the work into that, because that's a game changer for people, becoming truly aware, but it's hard work.

**Amy:** Absolutely, how do you help, the manager within, you know, a more traditional workplace setting than, than Olympics, how do you help that manager to become more self aware?

**Kate:** I think some of the, and this will feel really common to people, so you'll be, you've turned up to get something different here and I'm going to repeat some of the messages that you know, but let's not underestimate them.

I think, more self aware and, managers do a couple of things really, really well. One is they ask versus tell. And I love the simplicity of that language. It's not mine, I've nabbed it from somebody else, an Australian colleague. And it's the idea of asking questions, rather than giving answers.

Sometimes it's, it's right to make the call and to intervene and to offer the solution, but it's that curiosity, it's the inquiring part. And that... skill of asking questions of people, and asking good questions of people, and knowing what are your best questions that you ask people. I said at the top of this, I might ask a question like how could you be wrong here.

I've banked over the years a set of questions that can be really helpful in unravelling things, unpacking things, and actually once somebody's talked through it, oftentimes they'll get their own solution. And you might be thinking here, okay, well what are the killer questions, Kate? It doesn't have to be something such as challenging assumptions, like what else could be true here, or where might you be wrong?

Some really simple questions that make a difference is... And what else? And what else? And tell me what else? So just asking those things forces an individual to give you more, rather than jumping in with solutions. So if somebody's ranting, because a project hasn't gone well, let them vent. Say, right, let's go for it.

Okay, what else? Are you done yet? Okay, let's go again. And asking them what else can make a difference. And then also, you know, not feeling like we have to solve things for an individual again, by asking questions like, okay, so what are the choices? Look at your options. But what else is on your mind here?

So the power in really effective managers I see is in asking those questions. That's really a key skill and I think the other key skill I would talk to is intentionality. So being intentional. What do we mean by intentional? So it can be creating that time for a person when you know they just need the space.

And we know that's logical sense, but we often don't. We need to get something off our desk so we get it off and we'll spend five minutes with Bob. But being intentional in terms of questions, in terms of being present, intentional with our listening. I think I heard you say that. Can you just give me an example, so it goes back to questions.

But it's really making sure, listening is about, does this person feel understood? That's the best definition of it. So I think intentionality in this day and age is so important because of the pace at which we're working and that's the contrast for me in business to sport. In sport we have a fixed event, you have this lovely schedule, you spend a week preparing and then you go.

In the business world you're on it all the time and those hours either side of the day are also challenging that you sometimes are having to perform in other time zones as well if you're on Zoom calls etc. Questions and intentionality I think are helpful.

**Amy:** Absolutely, super, super powerful. We often advocate the, you know, Nancy Klein stuff that creating that time to think that space and using questions or silence, actually to encourage the individual to come up with, their own thinking on, on the matter. So I'm guessing in terms of those managers that are less self aware, it's actually using that same process, with those people that perhaps just need a bit more support in learning to be more aware of their, their team's needs and understandings.

**Kate:** Can I add a piece in there, Amy, because this again is a difference I see in the sport work compared to business and I'm kind of grappling with it a little bit myself, is that I think, In sport, people run towards, chase down, are obsessed by, are unhappy if they don't get feedback. A performance isn't finished until the feedback or the evaluation is done, and we would have a, a pole vault runway, which is an inverted runway, and we would get real time feedback. So they jump over the top and then there's immediate feedback three seconds later, because the video replay is there.

So we have such incredible technologies to help with feedback, but it's really interesting, I work with executives now, and I say, when was the last time you got some feedback that was really meaningful and rich for you? I don't know, four years ago? It might even be eleven.

What I mean by feedback is not a 360. You may have some fabulous systems there. My concern sometimes with the 360 is it's a bit vanilla. and... we're after feedback that is meaningful, that is rich, and that has an affect with you, in some way effects a change for you. So I love just leaders that lean in and ask for feedback.

So in that session, I think I may have spent too long on that detail. What was your view? So don't say, give me some feedback. What did you like? Because again, they're vanilla questions. Ask those questions of, Bob in the last month, what have I done that's helped you and what have I done that's got in the way?

Those kind of questions. So I think feedback is an absolutely great tool that if you're testing your awareness. Ask for feedback, and those that say they're truly self aware, and it might be people on this call, I would challenge you, when was your last piece of feedback? How are you measuring your impact on others?

And that's whether you're a leader or a teammate, it doesn't matter. We each have an effect on other people, but pushing the feedback part would be incredibly a gift for us.

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely. What about you? Who gives you meaningful feedback?

**Kate:** In the, in the early days of working with athletes, the feedback was really easy.

Did they come back? And sometimes the best feedback is going to come back. But I, what, what's, I love the question at the end of sessions with a workshop or one to one with an individual, I might ask a question around the theme of, of what we've talked about today. What was most helpful? What resonated? What's the one thing that you're taking away? And it is really astounding that I think it was this really wonderful, intelligent, smart stuff that I talked about over here, and they actually say it was this thing over here, and just it puts your ego in check when you think you've smashed a session, but it also, for me, is incredibly enlightening because the value of the question is not just what was important to the person, but the fact it was important to that person.

So that gives you a whole lot of territory to go into in terms of what was it that resonated? What made the difference? What might you now do as a consequence of that? And all of those questions are gearing up a person to commit. Because the worst kind of coaching sessions when you think it goes great and they go, yeah, yeah, amazing.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And really what they're saying is, yeah, that was amazing. Now I'm not going to do that. Yeah. Yeah. It's nice to go, what you do when you come back the week later and they say, yeah, yeah, I would have done that, but I've got this, this and this. That's a point you need to call that early, because is that person prepared to do the work to make the change.

**Amy:** But there's something, isn't there, about the individual talking themselves about what it is they're going to do differently. I think that gives us more ownership when we say, I'm going to do this. as a result of that, I'm going to do this. I don't know. What do you think to that?

**Kate:** I think it's very true. I think what you're alluding to is they're just maybe unpacking, even within the conversation, some assumptions we might be making ourselves.

So just taking the time to ask those small pieces. Yes, it's just good discipline, but we can rush on thinking we need to cover more ground or we need to get a great new idea, and sometimes it's the small consistent steps and something to make sure we really understand what's going on. And I think that's maybe the error that we make, we think we understand, but actually we don't. so yeah, really good.

**Amy:** At Laing O'Rourke, what's the approach that you're taking to make, to help people there be in the right place?

**Kate:** Somebody said this to me recently, and I was very proud of this because I hadn't thought about it at the time, but I'm apparently the head of HIP.

So Head of Performance, which is kind of cool, but I have this job title, Head of Human Innovation Performance, which is just really a cool job title, which says everything and nothing, but essentially it's a privately owned, major projects construction company. So when you think about things like Hinkley Power Station, or the Leadenhall building, or Tottenham Court Road, Everton Stadium, and they're the kind of things that we are building at this time.

And in truth, I'm not really sure how I ended up in construction because it was not a conscious move out of sport, but what I was really captivated by was the founder and his vision that we still build things in the same way that we did a hundred years ago with similar tools. So from a health and wellbeing perspective, the consequence of working your career in construction is significant.

We have chaps that are 50 years of age and they can't get down to play with the grandkids and they know they've got to work for another 10 years. So there are as I'm sure many people here will know, significant physical wear and tear is a result of construction, but from a mental health perspective, our suicide rates are two a day attempt suicide in the construction industry nationally.

And that is because of the macho bravado of the construction industry, but also the hardships of living away from home, isolation, financial wellbeing, literacy, a transient work environment. So coming into Laing O'Rourke the vision of Ray O'Rourke, the CEO, was to change the industry and continues to be to change the industry.

So bringing somebody in like myself, leftfield, is that I think very differently to engineers and construction people. And what he was interested in was the human innovation, not the technology part. We use technologies to help with it, but how could we unlock for people? And he set the challenge from the beginning around how do we start to think about health and wellbeing differently?

And really the cornerstone that we've taken is to think about not just achieving high performance, but how do we achieve sustainable high performance. And in the simplest terms, our model is how do we help people to balance capability? So if you've got these wonderful skills in an individual... or making sure they were appropriately skilled, because sometimes anxiety, stress comes from being, doing a job that you're not actually capable, haven't been trained, alongside capacity, which is the internal resources, our energy, our wellbeing, in order to be able to use those capabilities.

So in, in Laing O'Rourke it's been about redesigning how wellbeing is thought about, and also just trying to meet the challenge of a very traditionally focused Industry, but that's at a massive scale. So it's somewhere like Hinkley at the peak point, there's 5, 000 people working there, but they're only there for a fixed time and then they'll go off and do other things.

So I was really captivated by that challenge to the, the human in construction because we are so outdated with our approaches.

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. But being that agitator that I know, that I know you are, and yeah. Okay, well, listen, lots of people have been putting things down in the chat.

Angus, you've been sifting through the chat there, I know. What, what questions, comments do we have from folks?

**Angus:** We've got a really nice, comment there from Lindsay Morgan, you know, Lindsay, a friend of ours. so her, her comment on your question there is, I know that I have added value at the end of the day and that I am valued in return.

**Kate:** Love that, the simplicity of that, and Lindsay, I really love it because you, you talk to what is in fact not psychology, but biology. You know, that need to feel valued is much more than something that it feels nice. It's an imperative within our system and I think you have hit upon something which is so easy to provide to others, appreciation, recognition, saying thank you, and how much it can lift somebody,

but also being compassionate enough to give that to self at the end of the day. I love the simplicity of your definition there. Thank you.

So actually let me just remind folks, if you haven't seen it, these are Kate's questions to us all.

How do you know that you are in the right place for you at work, a place where you feel happy, engaged, alive and satisfied? What are your criteria?

And somebody's written being able to have creative conversations in a safe environment. You talked a little bit about that already, Kate. You got anything else to add there?

I think it's, it's simply the reflection that we now, talk about psychological safety in much more open terms. And I wish I'd known about it 20 years ago, because it wasn't a thing that we ever looked at, to be conscious about, and an aspect of psychological safety that I focus on that maybe isn't regularly talked about is, is the fact that what Amy Edmondson is communicating is that really what we're doing in every situation, and we're doing it a thousand times a day, is we're making a risk calculation.

And that risk calculation is, you know, with Amy, do I feel safe here? And we've talked before, and so I feel this is a psychologically safe environment, but when we're in dialogue with somebody, a facial expression, a quick look at her watch, or picking up her phone, they're all communication signs to, I might be losing somebody in this conversation here.

So, psychological safety, I can't remember his name, but he has the best quote on psychological safety I've ever come across. He simply says, the only environment in which you are truly psychologically safe is when you're dead. And I think that's really powerful because psychological safety is never done.

It's ongoing. We are wired to test, am I safe with these people? That is a default mechanism within your neuropsychology and biology that you can't overturn. But what you can do is become incredibly self aware around that part. And ask yourself, do I really care what that person thinks? Sometimes it's okay to say no,

and if I do really, really care, is that about me or is that about them? So I think it can be liberating to recognise interpersonal risk is our biology in action, and then to ask ourselves, when we feel unsafe, where's the source of that risk or lack of safety? Yeah,

**Angus:** it's an interesting, if I could come in, it's an interesting point there on psychological safety.

There's an article in The Economist this week about, it mentions psychological safety, and that being the number one thing in a high performing team. People being confident in speaking up and voicing their views. I thought it was a really, really interesting article that they placed that as number one, the first thing.

**Kate:** So really, it's a couple of years old now, but there's a great book called The Culture Code by Dan Coyle. And again, it's one of those books I'd come across before, and he talks about three principles across the high performing teams that he interviewed. And what's interesting for me is the sequence in them.

So I think the first one is this, this sense of family and, you know, do I feel a sense of belonging to people? The second is, do I feel safe is there a future with me? And the third is purpose. And we often start with purpose, but if I'm busy watching Angus and seeing whether he values me or not, there's no chance we're going to focus on purpose.

So, you know, the more literature that's coming through on psychological safety, it's because of work. And again, I really love this description, which is that at work, you're doing two jobs. And the first job is putting the pencils into the pot, and my job is, how do I look when I'm putting the pencils in the pot?

Does Amy think I'm competent? Does Angus think I'm a good team player and I'm a nice person? So we have this split attention. If we don't feel like we're in the inclusive environment, the sense of belonging is so important to us. So if we don't feel safe, it's really simple, you will be suboptimal because our brain cannot cope with it any other way.

yeah, and I think what's coming through more and more, it's powerful. The only caveat I'd add to that, Angus, is that I think people have missed, again, a further feature of Amy Edmondson's work, that psychological safety isn't about it being easy. If anything, you're pushing the edge of performance here, because I'm going to give you some candor, I'm going to give you some direct challenge, but it comes from a place of deep care.

So the teams that are truly psychologically safe fall out with each other, have disagreement and then are able to align afterwards because that respect and focus on collective safety is there. So yeah, it's definitely not pink and fluffy. If you get psychological safety right, then you are more uncomfortable not saying something.

**Angus:** I think it's a tough, gritty thing.

**Amy:** Yeah, it's very, it's very tough and very gritty and it's about It's about taking the person out of the problem, isn't it? It's about seeing the problem for what it is rather than aligning it with, with, with any individual, right? Yeah. there's a comment here. I have phenomenal relationships where I am now.

I've come through a very toxic culture and bullying environment. There isn't an, an amount of money that would make me want to move from that safe, supported environment I have in my current role. Wow. Whoever that is, congratulations.

**Kate:** And whoever that is, it sounds like that's one of your criteria for what helps you be in the right place.

The quality of my life.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Angus:** So it's a nice question there from Kathleen Harkins. so, Relationships are... pivotal. What if you need to build a relationship with somebody you don't like?

**Kate:** It's always easiest for a psychologist to say there's a couple of things that I'd be curious or to ask more about. I'm curious about the fact that you don't like this person. And that's okay, because sometimes we just don't like somebody, and that's all right. versus, actually, I don't like this person because there is a trust issue here, which could be a big blocker, and or, disconnecting our values.

And I often find that's the silent assassin, almost, if there's a misalignment with values. So it's worth checking what the dislike is about, and don't dismiss it, maybe try and unpack what is it. I worked with a headteacher once that was massively falling out with their deputy head, and we thought, what is it?

She goes, it's her laugh. What? Yeah, the way she laughs, it's horrendous. Everybody focuses, it's so embarrassing. So it wasn't about the laugh, it's the attention being drawn, and then you unpack it. So it's worth exploring that, but if there is... somebody where you, you recognize we are not going to be best pals here.

I think where I would encourage you to take the attention is what's the outcome we're trying to achieve and really clarify exactly what that is. And then the conversation becomes around, can you align, can you connect on that outcome? Are you agreed in that outcome? And if it's an outcome where there isn't a set project, but it's in how we might work together, then it gives you both a reference point so I'd be encouraging you to consider what it is you don't like, and is it you just need to get over yourself in case of the headteacher, or there is something there that is about a values conflict, but is there common ground around what's the outcome that you're trying to achieve?

What would be a successful outcome with this individual? And the only other piece I would add is, is that people often say this person is just really difficult. They're really, really hard to work with. What I do is just hold you to account in terms of what feedback have you given them? But sometimes we have a conversation with them to say, you're really annoying me because you talk over me.

How might there be a way of getting into a feedback conversation? And that might start with you asking for some feedback first. So I'm sensing there's some challenges in our relationship, I'd really like to know what you think, and ask for feedback. Then you can maybe get permission to give feedback there.

So a few things to play with there, maybe.

**Amy:** Yeah, definitely. Thanks, Kate. That's, that's brilliant. Thanks, Angus.

Let's hear some of your top tips then, Kate. If you could just talk us through these. Your first one, what matters most?

**Kate:** So what I wanted to give people listening in is kind of a set of questions to explore.

And these questions can be used for self and or they can be used to start a conversation. And sometimes working with others, leading teams, managing teams, being part of a group or organization, the way forward with relationships is just to start the conversation. You don't have to fill the space, but maybe being given somebody that time to fill it with what's on their mind.

So what matters most goes to what I talked about at the beginning, which is meaning. What's meaningful for this person? So it's not necessarily a purpose, because purpose sometimes is overwhelming. I haven't got a life purpose, something's wrong with me. Not necessarily. It oscillates in our life. we have children, our sense of purpose changes.

But what gives people a sense of meaning and why is that important to somebody? And I asked this question to a group of engineers last week, and this clever chap, Mike, says, I'm in this job for the money! And the room is laughing, and I said, Hang on, Mike. So why is the money important to you? Well, it's important to my family.

Why is it important to your family? I want to give my kids different opportunities to what I had. There's his meaning, there's his purpose. So, the money part. So, really understanding what's meaningful for somebody and what helps people to feel they have meaningful work or a sense of purpose. So, being able to ask them that, but also helps to understand what the priorities are in a person's life.

So, when we ask what matters most, what's at the top there, and that speaks to values also.

**Amy:** And it ties in with what you said earlier about, you know, it's never just one question, is it? And it's what else, what else matters and what else matters? Because we're, I always say we're, we're a bit like onions, there's lots of layers and it takes some time to get to the heart of it, doesn't it? So what gives and takes energy from you?

**Kate:** What I hear often in the working week, people are like, Oh God, I've got to get through this week, I've got the week from hell. And then it takes us into the month from hell. So again, going back to knowing what helps you to be in the right place, it's useful to think about your week in terms of energy.

Monday through Friday we have a peak trough recovery, so our best days physiologically and psychologically are Tuesdays and Wednesdays because our energy flow is different then and it gets worse as the week goes on. But being able to just take stock and recognising what are the things that fill me up, that energise me, that activate me?

And it might be time with certain teams, or on a certain project, or going out to project sites. But knowing, within yourself, what are the things that give you energy. So my working day starts with exercise, principally because I will not do it at the end of the day. The start of the day is best, but also it energizes me for the day.

But also asking critically, what are the things that are taking energy from you? So if it's a conversation that I'm avoiding, then maybe have that conversation. If it is a teammate, well, we need to get to the feedback. Let's get to some of that. But people consciously thinking about how are you managing your energy during the week, and the balance between spending energy and recovering energy. But sometimes we get into difficulties from a mental health and wellbeing perspective because we're not taking care of the fuel tank. You'll be ineffective for others if you're not taking care of that.

**Amy:** What is your support crew? Tell us about that.

**Kate:** We talked about should this be who is your support crew, but I've intentionally done it as what is your support crew because we're in a world now where we have different families, connections, dimensions, etc.

I'm coaching somebody later in the week and their principal support crew is their dog. And that matters for them because actually they, they didn't become a parent and they, they nurture and they mentor and they do that in work, but they wanted to do it elsewhere and they do it through a dog and they've never had a dog before.

So what is the support crew is about who might be in that team, but also really understanding what is the support that you need? Sometimes it's a place, and spending time there. Sometimes it, it's about how you are organizing your time and where you're spending it sort of parallel to the energy part, but understanding what is it that you need around support.

People often talk about more senior levels of leadership being quite isolated and quite lonely. So the challenge I would put to you is, so who are you drawing upon where it is isolated and lonely? Because you won't function well if you're feeling that, so who can you tap into? And it's about network and mentors.

and thought partners and organizing that. So sometimes we're not proactive enough around our support crew and we suffer in silence. So actually doing dedicated work in terms of what does that look like for you? And then who might be the key individuals? And do they know that they're in your support crew?

**Amy:** What drives you?

**Kate:** This is a great one in that we can think of this question simply about motivations, aspirations, and it is, you know, what do you want to achieve in life? What would success look like for you? What's important? It's is all of those questions, but also recognizing sometimes what your drivers are, and your yearnings. So if your drivers are to be helpful, to be part of a great team, to think that your contributions are valuable, you know that is actually quite rewarding for you. Sometimes that can be an overplayed strength. So you take criticism really personally. You might over communicate something and stop others being involved in the conversation.

So when we know what our drivers are and what our yearnings are, sometimes when things don't go our way we're able to really challenge ourselves. Is that about me or is it about the circumstance? And it also helps us to make those life choices. Is this role the right place for me? If I take this promotion, does that serve those ambitions and drives that I have?

And you don't have to be ambitious. If your drive is to have a stable, comfortable life where I enjoy it, brilliant. But do the work on understanding what your drivers are.

**Amy:** Great. What expectations are serving you?

**Kate:** This is a really common feature around high performing or high achieving individuals, but part of the reason why they're so good is because they have these exceptionally high expectations of self.

And it's useful to challenge those because perfectionists... pleasing, having to prove, can be our own worst enemies, as we know. But again, what we can do is extrapolate and impose those on other people. So again, a headteacher that I worked with, his expectations had led to a disconnect with his wife. What were the expectations around?

The sock draw. What now? Yeah, the sock drawer. So she wasn't organizing his socks in the way that he wanted her to, and I simply said, how long have you been married? 25 years. How long has this been an issue? 25 years. Okay, so where's the gap in expectation here and how do we begin to challenge ourselves?

So recognizing sometimes when we're frustrated, anxious, stressed, and we have those emotions, it can sometimes be in the expectations we're having either of ourselves, and or others. So I would challenge people to think about are those expectations realistic for themselves and also are they helpful? And equally to recognize when you might be placing expectations on others but the cue is when we get hit with those emotions, hit pause, start with what are your expectations.

Whereas immediately we think that person's an idiot. Hold on, before we get to that, that may be true, but let's recognize what expectations do you have here? What's realistic? What's helpful?

**Amy:** Exactly, and let's realize we can all arrange our own socks. yeah, so what is success and failure for you?

**Kate:** Again, going back to the first stages of working with somebody, and what's the outcome we're trying to achieve.

And once we know what the outcome is, then we start to explore the meaning. And one of the ways we do that is, what does success look like for you? And asking an individual to define that. And sometimes you can see that they're defining it in terms that are beyond their control. Others will approve of me, it will have been worth all the sacrifice. I'll approve my capability and we know them on territory where identity and worth is probably connected to performance. And the failure part, I again only realized this more later in my career, but we, we often think about Olympics and performance being, hijacked by emotions like anxiety.

And for sure, that's a major emotion that we work with. The one I found to be more detrimental, more damaging, more hard to recover from, and just one I wish we never experienced anywhere, and that's shame. And that's because when we think about failure, we move from I failed at something to I am a failure, and shame, as we know, is, is when there is something wrong with you. So actually spending time getting people to really understand what would success look like here why are they your criteria of success? What, what difference would that make for you? Sometimes it's the criteria for success that's a challenge for us and it goes back up to my question on do we know we're in the right place.

We typically run into our working week and we kind of fit things into the diary but we don't think about connecting into our drivers, our sense of meaning, where we find energy etc and we get to that working week and we can feel like a failure because we didn't get through the to do list, but have we really thought about what's the one or two things I need to achieve this week, rather than 18 different things?

So success and failure is a massive trigger for so many other things, and just taking the time to really work out what would success look like here, and it links to expectations, realistic or not. So lots of these questions here will interplay with one another, and the challenge I would put to the audience here is, when you're thinking about are you in the right place, how do you go about answering something like that?

It's using these questions, but it will ultimately be can you define what the right place looks like? When have you experienced it? We had somebody there talk about toxic environment and relationships are really important. So that is a criteria, but it's on each of us to know what is that best environment for us.

You might not be able to change your job today, but it is your accountability to take that lunchtime walk. To make a difference, if that's what you need, but we're not sometimes taking the time to really consider what we need, and then when we get into resentment and blaming others, we have to hold the mirror up to ourself in those moments.

**Amy:** Fantastic. Thank you so much, Kate. I have a few rapid fire questions for you now. Are you ready?

Kate, what does vulnerability mean to you?

**Kate:** Being brave, being courageous, and simplifying further, particularly for the work domain, it's leading. I think vulnerability is leadership.

**Amy:** Wonderful. What little thing do you notice, zoom into, celebrate every day?

**Kate:** My family. yeah, I've got preteens and every day I'm getting an education. So, the gratitude of having a family.

**Amy:** What message would you give your younger self?

**Kate:** Oh, good one. all things pass with time.

**Amy:** Nice. And what message would your younger self give you?

**Kate:** Oh, my younger self. I guess if my younger self was seeing the life I've had, she would say we've been blessed. And she would probably say she's relieved. A friend once said to me, what you worry about in your 20s when you're 30, you should think, what? And then when you're in your 30s and you get to your 40s and look back and think, what was I worried about?

So each decade you tend to worry less. And at age 50, this is an exceptional time in my life because I have worked out what's important, what matters, and where I don't want to waste energy. And I think unfortunately for younger people, it takes life experience to give you that. But the more we can talk about podcasts like this and mental health and wellbeing gives them permission to earlier give more self care, and I think for my younger self, I didn't do that well. I made choices that didn't serve me, and at 50 years of age, I can see that. I wish I could accelerate that for others.

**Amy:** Nice. I loved it. We're blessed. That's just beautiful, beautiful. So what do you say to leaders that use only plasters, lip service to workplace mental health and wellbeing?

**Kate:** It's a lot of things I say, Amy, in my head, and then there's things that I come at it from the basis of performance and I'm in a position of credibility, I think, over the years of learning what works and what doesn't, but I do rely on talking to physiologically, biologically, what are we designed to do?

And if you want people to be optimal, these are the things that are needed versus the suboptimal side. So the reason I touch that, some leaders, I think, like logic, rationale, evidence based research, that's one avenue I go down. And the other is actually to ask them questions which are related to their impact.

And, you know, what do you want others to say about you? If I asked one of your team to describe your what would they tell me? And sometimes we can't ask them those questions, but sometimes they're to go after, because most of them want to do a good job.

**Amy:** Absolutely. Kate, thank you very much. I'm going to hand over to Angus now.

Thank you so much.

**Angus:** Thank you, Kate. I, one of the things that I love about what we do is the fact we get to meet incredible people and hear incredible things. So thank you, that was absolutely fascinating. I really, really enjoyed it. The fact that you're high function, high performance, high function leads to high performance.

And then the number one principle is health and wellbeing. Ask yourself, is this person right to be here at all? I ride motorbikes and I've done advanced training on those motorbikes, which are quick. And, the very first question you are asked are, are you in a fit place here right now to do this at all?

Yeah. Are you mentally okay? Are you physically okay? Number one principle. So thank you. It reinforces what, you know, what I take away from that as well. And also that bit about ownership and accountability for your own wellbeing. It's so important. It's a big message we drive as well. Yeah, take responsibility yourself.

It is, it's all our responsibilities and we should all realize that. So, thank you very much. it's been such a pleasure having you on the Wellbeing Hour and, you know, hopefully we will see you again in the future.

Thank you.

So the next Wellbeing Hour is with Chas Howes. Chas is currently a radio presenter who interviewed Amy fairly recently and he is also former CFO of Superdry. So that is on 11th December, at 12 noon and we're looking forward to hearing Chas. I think it's going to be another interesting one.

Coming up in the Headtorch world, Amy and myself are speaking at the Professional Speakers Association in Glasgow. and that is a paid event. So, the link is there if anybody wants to come along. It is a masterclass, we're talking about who's in charge, energy, and to deal with life's ups and downs.

As I mentioned, we've got Chas on the 11th of December. 25th December, we have Sue Sanders. Sue is Director of Learning at, Motorsports UK. And, I think that is going to be a really interesting one, especially being a motorcyclist, I'm really looking forward to listening to Sue. And, please follow us on LinkedIn.

Please also subscribe to the podcast channels. We now are on Spotify and Apple and all these things, so please subscribe to those, you'll get the updates on them. We'd love to hear more about your journey in terms of workplace mental health and wellbeing. So again, get in touch, we can take you through what we do with senior leaders, people managers and frontline people.

So, get in touch if we can help you at all. And there we go. One o'clock on the dot. So thank you very much, everybody. Thank you very much. Thank you so much, Kate. Thank you, everyone. Enjoy the rest of the day.