

It's the Vibe.

Talent

Episode 1

Internal Comms: Are you in the loop?

With Christie O'Toole from Salesforce

Ian Tyler

Hello and welcome to it's the vibe podcast series that is produced by Talent International. My name is Ian Tyler I'm the Talent International Group Chief Strategy Officer and what we're really keen on doing here is creating something which is called "it's the vibe" - so for our vision, we are all about building a better world of work for all and what we want to do is educate businesses both big and small as to how they can actually start to do this as well. What we're really keen to do is bring insights and hear from people through real life experiences and experts in employee engagement, communication, diversity and inclusion and a whole lot more. Today I'm really excited to be joined by Christie O'Toole from Salesforce and we're going to be talking today around a theme of are you in the loop; really talking about all things corporate communications.

Christie's been working as a senior manager for Asia Pacific as the comms and engagement specialist for over four years and prior to that works in San Francisco and virgin American Virgin Australia back here in Sydney understand that she's also got a little furry friend that may be joining us from time to time as we work through this and so without any further ado Christy thanks very much for joining us and good afternoon how are you.

Christie O'Toole

I'm really well Ian thank you so much for having me in for this opportunity I'm very excited to be talking with you.

Ian Tyler

Absolutely so Salesforce and a background virgin Virgin Australia over in the US as well I mean two very large very big organisations I could imagine in terms of wrangling the troops and communicating with clarity and purpose that there's there's no real know real easy way of doing that is there.

Christie O'Toole

It's just been such an amazing opportunity to work for these two brands and you know when I look back on my time at virgin so I spent six years in corporate communications there and it was so exciting so fast pace a lot of it was in the world of crisis comms where you know I was on the 24/7 media line awaiting journalists to call me and you know just a very high volume of comms and then when I sort of made the step into HR with Salesforce I thought oh like I'm a bit of an adrenaline junkie and I actually loved the thrill of the fast pace nature of the airline work and I thought I wonder if it's going to be the same and it really is I think in employee communications it is so fast pace and it is so exciting and dynamic so yes it is a challenge but I love the challenge of it.

Ian Tyler

Wow I mean fascinating when you think about those two businesses as well the culture of those two organisations certainly across the corporate world is somewhat this alluring aspirational thing that I





think many businesses would say “God wouldn't be interesting to work at a company like Salesforce and at virgin as well” but interestingly I'd like to talk a little bit about that certainly around Salesforce and the culture of Salesforce. So in your own words how would you describe the culture at Salesforce really enables communications to thrive.

Christie O'Toole

Yeah it's funny Ian 'cause when I think back when I was living in San Francisco I was working for virgin at the time and I had quite a few friends that work for Salesforce and they all love to an I just thought whatever is going on there like I have to be apart of it it's just the way employees spoke about it and now I'm one of those employees and I think that you know in my own words when I think about the culture number one is just values lead since the company started 22 years ago we've been guided by our four values; trust, customer success, innovation and equality. I know a lot of companies say this where it's not just something we put on a wall but I really do see those values come to life every single day it's how we make our decisions they are operationalized through the business my favourite example of you know that value of trust is actually the way we run out employee opinion survey so a lot of companies when they run a survey they will look at the results maybe in a closed office or closed zoom and then say OK what story do we want to tell about the survey this this year or however often you do it. At Salesforces we actually publish the results using our own technology it's a tableau dashboard that we use so everyone in the company can see the exact same information, it's the same level of access that the CEO has that a new hire has and that's just it's such an incredibly empowering part of our culture to see trust comes to life in that way so definitely values led.

Secondly I would say it has a real start-up feel and I know that that may sound not possible when you think about the fact that we have 60,000 employees like how can you possibly have a start-up feel and that was you know initially a concern for me in joining the company I thought how am I going to be able to take creative risks I'm worried about the approval process is like that was a real concern for me going into the company and it is the absolute opposite. I feel like I probably should have more approvals again but I get to do a lot of crazy things and a lot of fun things and I think again it comes back to that value of trust that we are trusted to make the right decisions so I get to have so much fun and really get creative in what I do which is awesome.

Ian Tyler

I wrote it down as you were talking is that start-up vibe that you've got is with the with the values that you have the a really living and breathing in the organisation or more about that entrepreneurial empowerment give it ago yes yeah and I think that's critical for most businesses so for an organisation the size of Salesforce to still have that level of entrepreneurial give it ago I think is I think is amazingly commendable.

Christie O'Toole

Yeah it is amazing and it's so it does make our work I think really interesting because you know when you compare external to internal we do have fewer approval processes so we do get to try things out and test and learn and I think that it's expected of us but it's also what we what we love to do yeah back it.

Ian Tyler

That brings me on to something actually so when you think about that and how you communicate what if you found works well internally if you got any tips or tricks that you could share that really talk about this is this is one of the best ways of communicating that you found.

Christie O'Toole



I think you know it goes back to advice that we've heard before and that is to treat people how you would want to be treated. And so when I am working on a communications or communicating anything really I think OK well "how would I feel if I would have received that", if something is too long for you to read then your employees won't want to read it if something doesn't make sense to you then it's not going to make sense to your employees so I think really putting yourself in their shoes and saying OK if this landed in my inbox how would I feel.

So it's really simple but I do bring that lens to the work that we do it's really simple but just I think feel do models so anytime we are looking to communicate something what do we want employees to "think, feel and do" and it's three words but it is a really great way I think to align your partners. Obviously we're always working collaboratively across the business so we need to make sure everyone's in on the same page for those three things we do communicate and I think so much of this is you know knowing your audience not knowing your employees and our role is understanding them and being their voice so you know I think a real pitiful in this role is if you try to go it alone you know come up with things and then send them out without ever bouncing them off other people think that's where you know people can go wrong.

Ian Tyler

Yeah the sanity cheque the peer reviewed yeah yeah totally yeah absolutely just going back to something else that you touched on before actually like thinking about the importance of communication around culture and thinking about you know what the business does by way of you know the feedback surveys that you've got that I guess communication strategy which is so clear it's not curated it's really this is what it is this is what you said so we're going to put it out there that actually brings into focus those a couple of things that you've just spoken about which is that you know what we want people to "think, feel and do", how do we actually truly embody an entrepreneurial culture and what's the best way of communicating to embed culture and values which is total transparency and clarity. So it's more of a statement on the question but you know what for me is quite interesting is just to hear how you're still quite in invigorated by all of that after four years and it's not you know the same thing that you have Wheeling in Wheeling out month after month you know quarter after quarter you've got the ability to do something fresh and do something innovative and really be empowered to live the entrepreneurial spirit, which I think is fantastic.

So when thinking about businesses that you know maybe listening to this and you know they operate in a very global organisation or even more of a localised environment you know we gonna have lots of different types of organisations listening to this. So what do you think about managing across different regions given your portfolio is significantly does diverse do you feel that there are things that you have to do to support localised cultures in their communication style I mean can you bring that into focus for us a little bit.

Christie O'Toole

Yeah I think for me you know, you probably won't expect me to go this path with this question, but I am a big Oprah Winfrey fan.

Ian Tyler

Nothing wrong with being Oprah Winfrey fan.

Christie O'Toole

You know when I think about my philosophy for internal communications it has a lot to do with what she said on the last episode after 25 years on television and she reflected on what people all the speakers that she met with they had one thing in common they had this real sense of wanting to be



heard wanting to be seen wanting to know that their voice matters and so when I think about internal communications I think OK how do we do that scale so understanding those cultural nuances is so important 'cause if we are out of touch with language with what any sensitivities than our employees won't feel seen heard or that they mattered to us so that is so important and my team today so we look after Japan and Korea, Latin America, Greater China. So when we get together as a team we talk about what makes sense in this part of the world and what doesn't and I think that language is a big part of it you have to invest in translate in translations because if you are communicating in English and that is not the first language that's spoken then we've already missed something there so I think that that's number one.

I think that there are different styles throughout the countries that we operate in for me when I was getting to know the India business I did notice that it is a little bit more formal there so many of our employees there refer to our CEO's mam so learning that and making sure in our communications we need to refer to her as mam is something that you haven't crossed my mind. You know I think Aussies and Kiwis we see through the fluff, you've gotta tell us how it is and if we just present you know a rosy picture to Australians and new Zealanders, I think they want they want to know what's really going on, so yeah again I think understanding the differences is so important.

Ian Tyler

Yeah absolutely and you know with that in mind if you found that different things outside of translation work better be technology delivery of the message when and how you deliver the message I mean what are some of those things that you might see in different markets that we just may even work here but we just used to it in a different way.

Christie O'Toole

Yeah I think it's really interesting when we look at our live events and for me when I run the one for A and said I want to see live conversation all throughout like I want to see employees making jokes, having fun, banter and it was really interesting 'cause our team was sharing the results from a recent allhands they held for Japan and Korea and it came through the feedback that some of the employees felt that it wasn't respectful to the leader that there was live conversation happening while he was presenting.

And I just thought that was such an interesting insight because like I want people to be chatting while the CEO was speaking here to me that's engagement, but again it just shows it's different so you know we need to be listening to that feedback.

Ian Tyler

Yeah so it's a difficult balance to get right it is just no right way of doing it because different folks "different strokes for different folks" as the saying goes do you get the notion though of I've always struggled personally with being in a conference or whatever and someone's throwing up a Twitter handle and a jump in you do kind of sit there and you're on your phone you look around the room is like is everyone listening or are they actually just sending the WhatsApp hey what's for dinner tonight or whatever you know ordering a pizza, where you go it does make you wonder are they listening are we getting cut through so it's a difficult one so difficult.

Christie O'Toole

It is an I think when you hold a virtual event these days you have to assume that your audience is multitasking no it's just if you think they're going to be glued to the screen for an hour you know you're wrong you probably wouldn't be and I actually was chatting to our head of marketing here



Leandro Perez in about how he thinks about events and he gave me such great advice he was like think about the TV commercials when you're watching TV there always louder so when you're planning an agenda you have to think of OK what are those moments where we're going to shift the content grab the attention again like we have to consistently re engage people so it's been really interesting to get better I think with virtual events.

Ian Tyler

Absolutely well think about that right I mean we we're all over that, I mean this is recorded too, what our listeners won't know is that we can still see each other yeah and there's only so many times that you can get up and start your day and end your day we've looking at people in the little square on the screen without it kind of being a little bit fatiguing and I think there's so many businesses all over the world somebody said something to me last week which I think summarises this really well which is and the whole COVID situation around these types of virtual events there is a saying that you know all in the same boat and this particular person corrected me and she said "we're all in the same ocean, we're all dealing with different things at different times and some people have really thrived in this environment and other people are going I absolutely hate it and I've got this fatigue but when we are all impacted by the same thing but some people do actually prefer this and the fatigue isn't necessarily there for them", but you know how do we get that right in in this modern world certainly a technology company that you know is the world leader in digital and cloud based communications and CRM and other technologies that you guys take to market are all about success from anyway.

So how do how do we think about how we can make these types of virtual events more engaging for team members that may actually just be feeling a wee bit over this this scenario right now.

Christie O'Toole

Totally I think we have such an opportunity to be smarter and get better I think that through last year we thought you could pick up the same working week the same events and just do them virtually and I think this year we are smarter we know that that's not the case so I think that we overall we have to be more intentional around our meetings. Trailhead is our free online learning platform and we've just come out with a new module that's all about how to hold and mindful meeting and just really simple tips there which you're awesome.

I also think that and I'm sure you probably heard these terms asynchronous and synchronous like what needs to be in real time and what can happen in a more offline environment and that's really exciting and you know we are obviously experimenting with slack and I'm even thinking about my team, I've got a team member in Singapore and a team member in Brazil, it's really hard for us to be on the one call so how can I think about the updates that I share with them, like do I do a quick video message so they're still hearing from me and the hearing from me in the same way and then when we do get together how do we make sure that time is really meaningful and is a good use of our time.

So I think that we're still learning but I think that you know we're getting better and using our technology in a way that suits us and not letting it run our lives it's I heard this term it's like how do we hack it back and take back control so I think that's interesting.

Ian Tyler

Yeah well yeah it's very interesting I need to learn a bit of that for myself I think that's really you finding though that when you think about these cultural diversity's that obviously that we've touched on already and how people want to consume information that you finding that different





people wanna hear different things specifically. When I think about your CEO and or your regional CEOs all across the business what is it that teams in different locations actually want to hear. We touched under the formality piece but I then messages around that like the as you said the Aussies in the Kiwis have gotta just give it to me straight back you know good news or bad news I don't care just give it to me but what are you hearing from different pockets of the globe around the business like yours that wanna hear something about what's going on or what the CEO has to say or the senior leadership group has to say, but what are people wanting to be informed on?

Christie O'Toole

Yeah it's interesting I feel like there are some universal themes that people want to hear from their leaders no matter where they are obviously I'm still learning and if there may be pockets where that is a little bit different but I would say across the board I think people want a clear sense of purpose so like why are we doing this work why does this matter and helping our leaders to clearly articulate the why is a really important part of our role and I think that that why message may be a little bit different from location to location.

I think that yes that that what's not working aspect is I do find that to be very much an Aussie/Kiwi thing, so be interesting to chat to our team to see you know is that as much of a focus as it is here. But I would say again universally I think employees want to plan I think especially now there is still so much uncertainty in the world and how can we make sure that our leaders are holding up that north star and bringing everyone on the journey and again I would say that is universal for us all.

Ian Tyler

Yeah yeah absolutely and you know just thinking more broadly about that like you can have these weird and wondrous scenarios in businesses where are you didn't know about that piece of communication, "but we case sent it on a slap channel, in an email no doubt there was a WhatsApp group somewhere", what's the best mediums in you guys finding that you can get cut through because honestly, I'm communicating with people in lots of different locations as well and if I didn't pick up that one particular piece of communication through their preferred mode of consuming that comms, then they don't know about it. But like how are you guys tackling that what's the best way to get cut through on making sure that everybody knows what they need to know when they need to know it.

Christie O'Toole

Such a good question and we talk about this a lot and I think the best thing we can do is you know clearly define our channels for our employees. So it's about taking a step back and saying where you are in your part of the world or your team these are the key channels and these are the ones you should really keep an eye out for. So if you see an slack that that Channel is in bold and it's a broadcast channel yes definitely go in and cheque that out so I think being really clear on that Channel strategy. I think that you know we use our marketing cloud product to send out our emails and we still get really strong engagement with that.

One communication we actually started through covert last year is called the daily it's a daily email that we send to 60,000 of our employees and you know you probably would have thought OK last year that was time to over communicate but it is still here and we are having so much fun looking for ways to add dynamic content to this one email so there is like an incredibly powerful way to scale I think across a large organisation so if we want to target something that you know only employees in India see 'cause it's only relevant there we can do that through marketing cloud so that email is definitely cutting through





I'd say the other thing that has been really interesting for us is that in one of our recent surveys we asked employees where do you get your most valuable what's your most valuable source of information at the moment 75% said it was their managers, which is crazy right.

Ian Tyler

The humans are communicating as well how good.

Christie O'Toole

Yes the humans are communicating so that was like a lightbulb moment for our team to say OK so if leaders are the ones communicating with their teams how do we make sure they have the right information at the right time so I think you know tapping into our people leader community is really important as well.

Ian Tyler

Yeah absolutely and providing people with the right kind of toolkits you know the ones that yeah that one on one communication really well is great but you need to do one to many and leaders need to learn how to do that better as well, would you agree?

Christie O'Toole

Totally I think one to many and the 101 communication is so important as well and it's it's really simple for us to do that you know it's it could be as simple as providing a one slider leaders this is everything that we need you to talk about this month and again like you said templates can be quite magic in these settings.

Ian Tyler

Basic stuff which I'm now I'm almost going to contradict myself here because the basics are clearly standing the test of time you know getting consuming information based on my leader great one page template great all these different tools and channels that are available to people which is again fantastic what what's the future of comms in your world and I'm really throwing you a bit of a curly one here, but what is the future of employee comms as well as more broadly corporate comms do you think, what's on the horizon?

Christie O'Toole

I mean I think if you look at how people are consuming information in their daily lives you know we look at Twitter Instagram we need to be communicating in the same way to our employees we know that there is I heard someone say today "information tsunami" and I think that that is the case for everyone at the moment so how do we distil it and make it really succinct.

And one example of this is just a new series that we're working on here and it's like it's called 2 minutes with so say "two minutes with Ian Tyler", really quick video to help get to know you because we know that employees aren't crossing down the hallways like they used too so how do we create those moments of connexion for people I also think about to that point is just keeping it really informal and where we can like we say how can we add a dose of fun and I look back in my when I first started in corporate comms and we would start our emails with "dear team" and now we would say something like "hey" and so it is much more formal informal and you know with slack I'm using emojis and GIFs as part of my job. I never would have thought I would be sending out coms with like Seinfeld GIFs but I love it and I'm here for it so how do more of that, how do we be more engaging?





I would say the other really really important in looking to the future is that nothing can be static you know the days of the Internet being this clunky thing that you have to update like that that has to be behind us and I think that covert showed us how important it is to keep maintainers say sense of a source of truth but at speeds, so if you produce an FAQ and you lock it as a PDF by the time you share it'll probably be outdated. So that has to be live information that you're sharing with your employees and I think that that level of speed is going to be a big part of our future.

Ian Tyler

Absolutely I couldn't agree with you more I think that's an excellent tip for anybody listening to this that can start small and as they grow mean those types of things I think are invaluable, I think that's great.

Look I'm really keen to kind of wrap this up where we are right now I think that what you've provided here are some really nice anecdotes seems real specific insights around how businesses can really lean into this and kind of beg, borrow or steal some of these types of ideas that you've been gracious enough to share with us. So for anybody listening to this you know, companies big and small, what would be your kind of final takeaway that people can really grasp onto as if nothing else you know why should we bother investing in this anyway?

Christie O'Toole

I think that you know those words internal communications for me it's just it's really about talking to people and we don't know what is happening in peoples lives but if we invest in this we get the opportunity to light up the hours that they do spend at work and you know that is just so amazing that we get the opportunity to make our employees feel seen and heard and valued help them to feel pride in what they're doing. All of that is important because it flows onto our customers as well and there's a great quote by Tiffany Bova who's our chief growth evangelist at Salesforce and she says the;

“fastest way to get customers to love your brand is to get employees to love their jobs” and we get to help them to fall in love with their jobs so it's not just a nice to have for your culture it's important for your company as well.

Ian Tyler

That just gives me goosebumps couple of things from my side I'm absolutely delighted to have spent this time for you to invest this time with us very gracious with it as well so thank you very much Christine I'm keen to ensure that if anybody wants to hear anything else about what you've heard today we will be coming back to our audiences globally around some tools and some tool kits that will be able to share for our listeners and if you've got any more questions or you'd like to know more you can get in touch with Talent via our website or you can reach out to us directly on LinkedIn so without any further ado Christie O'Toole thank you so much for joining us and yeah it's been an absolute pleasure.

Christie O'Toole

Thank you for having me. It's been so fun.

