

The Joy Factory Podcast - The Connection Cocktail Episode

2s Welcome to The Joy Factory, where we explore the art of happiness at work. I'm Susan DeFazio, your host and founder of Be Future Ready Today, where we develop toolkits that simplify our world of work and empower the how for happier and healthier outcomes so that people and businesses can truly thrive. Our podcast guests come from all walks of life, and today we're delighted to welcome Rebecca Maxwell. Welcome, Rebecca.

Thanks, Susi. It's great to be here.

Yes. Thank you so much for joining us. A little bit about Rebecca's background. Rebecca is founder and principal consultant at Perception Insights, a coaching and leadership development company that supports businesses, teams and individuals, deal with the inevitable bumps in the road and go further than they ever thought was possible to do that. Of course, we know that creating a mix of meaningful connections is hugely significant. So the theme for this episode, which is the Connection Cocktail, we're exploring how leaders create a potent blend of behaviors that is pleasing and palatable, as opposed to leaving a bitter or toxic after effect. Rebecca and I are going to chat about connecting to the wider purpose on each other, the impact to the business, and their sense of happiness. But before we get into all of that, I think you know what's coming. Rebecca, I'm going to start off by asking you, what does Joy mean to you personally before we get into the more business related things. What does joy mean to you?

Well, Joy, I think it's a really interesting word, and it does conjure up all sorts of kind of different meanings and I kind of thought about in two ways. So, on a flippant note, just kind of taking in the title of our episode today. For me, Joy is actually a perfectly curated spicy jalapeno margarita. I love it.

I wish I didn't have a coffee in front of me.

So that that was definitely my cocktail of choice when I was living in New York, and ideally with some really nicely cured ceviche as well. Most of my Joyful episodes actually probably do involve definitely food and quite often a nice cocktail.

And then if you connect to Joy, then you'll see absolutely. But more seriously, I was thinking quite deeply about Joy and what does it mean to me? And I used to think it was about those real highs, the extreme of wild delight, but now I don't know if it's an age thing or maturity or what, but now it feels to me Joy is actually about that warm contentment of everything being right in the world, a feeling of kind of being at home. Yeah. And, you know, having had that period as a digital nomad whom is something I've thought about a lot. And, you know, I think in essence, it is that feeling of peace and. 2s And contentment. So, yeah, I think that's what Joy is.

Yeah, I think 2s when we speak about Joy on the podcast and as we're sort of thinking about it, preparing for the episode, it really is a very simple question, but a very important one. And I think it is useful for us all to reflect on it as we it doesn't matter what age we we are. It changes over time. I agree with you, Rebecca. It does change over time. And it different 2s just through different sort of life episodes, as it were. 1s No, I like the sound of that. So next time you want to celebrate with a spicy margarita and ceviche, I'm your girl.

Oh, fantastic. Definitely have to do that.

Getting on to sort of the more sort of business angle in terms of connection. I know you've led teams at all levels, and I also know that you're really passionate about equipping leaders so that they can really *1s* build that positive culture and an ethos of trust. But what are your thoughts on how leaders can really build effective cultures where connection can really thrive?

I suppose thinking about it in two ways what helps them, but I think critically, what helps their teams create that connection. Because as human beings, we all crave connection. Even the most introverted of us are actually looking for that. And when we think about what is the role of a leader, the role of the leader really is to create that environment where people can be successful. It's about getting results. But as we all know. *1s* Increasingly its results are delivered by people. And if our people aren't effective, then our results aren't going to be effective. And there's really good research. *1s* I think intuitively we've known this, but there's actually good research evidence coming out of the states now that happier employees are actually more productive employees. Time like this of rising costs, recession and concerns about the global economy, anything that we can do that makes us more productive, whether that's a for profit or not for profit enterprise, these things are important. And then almost like that double whammy, we've also got this issue of labor shortage. *1s* We're almost at full employment. It is increasingly hard to attract people even when you set aside the costs of turnover. In our organizations, we want to retain good staff and if we can create the environment, the leaders responsibility for delivering results and helping people within the organization deliver those results, it is about what culture can we create?

Yes, you said in one of our previous conversations, I think, which it really resonated with me, you talked about the environment being similar to the weather. So how do leaders really start to think about how they create the right weather conditions? What are the traits that you've seen? Really good examples of that,

I suppose the thing that stands out, good leaders who have got this idea and this understanding that it's about the weather that we make for our employees, that we're creating the environment that allows them to be successful. The kind of traits that I often see are *1s* first and foremost a willingness to be yourself *1s* and to allow others to know you, because that creates this huge amount of trust. And we all know that trust is fundamental in building relationships and in creating safe spaces for people to work. So leaders who are willing to be themselves and can consistently do that as well, so that there is a degree of safety within that for their teams. I think that's one thing that stands them out. *1s* I think another is the ability to listen. And to listen in a way that is more than just in a non-defensive way, but to listen to the bad as well as the good and to be able to really think deeply about what they're hearing. So it's to listen for understanding rather than to listen to respond or for defensiveness.

Yes, *1s* I'm listening. *2s* Because so often we listen to respond. I mean, listening is a real skill, isn't it? I mean, *1s* how do you cultivate that? If you're listening to this and *1s* you're thinking, okay, I really need to work on my listening, what are the kind of tips that you would give to folks to help them improve that skill of listening?

I think, first of all, to actually to understand that the road. There are different ways of listening and to catch yourself when you find yourself listening, to respond or listening to defend. *2s* When I'm working with clients, a lot of what we talk about is, okay, let's notice what we do. Let's notice when

we start doing this thing that we've decided we don't want to do. Let's notice it to begin with, 1s and then having developed that kind of awareness, that consciousness of the thing that needs to be changed, we can then start on working to change it. So the first step is always just notice, to understand that there are different ways of listening and to notice when we are able to do it and when we're not able to do it. Moving into that space of listening or understanding, it's about employing curiosity. It's thinking about what do I understand from what's just been said to me? What don't I understand? Where am I making assumptions? What's the question that I can ask that takes me too deeper into understanding? There's actually an exercise that I play with teams sometimes when they're working on, particularly when we're working on communication and 1s interconnectedness and relationships within teams. And we do an exercise that helps people understand this difference between listening to respond and listening to understand. And 2s one of the instructions they get is to ask the next question. So when you hear something, rather than move the conversation somewhere else or respond, ask the next question and see what happens. See where that conversation takes you. Okay? And it's incredible to see the depth that some of these conversations get to in actually a really short space of time. We usually do it over the the space of ten minutes. 2s And 1s I think it's employing curiosity and also acknowledging and this is critical for leaders, I think acknowledging that we don't have all the answers.

Yes, I think that's sometimes really hard for leaders because 3s they're expected or they feel they're expected to have all the answers, being in that that leadership position. And I don't think anybody has all the answers to you.

No, absolutely not. And for me, that was probably the turning point in my career when I realized actually, a I don't have all the answers and B nobody actually expects me to have all the answers and then see people like it when they're given the space to help come up with the answers. And for me, that's one of the connections that as leaders, we should be thinking about. I said we're all human, we crave connection. If we're thinking about creating this culture in work which can create happiness, which allows people to create their own happiness. Thinking about what kind of connections are we creating in there? So one of them connection into the organization, feeling like I am part of something, but more importantly, feeling like I am a valued part of something. So I have a voice, I have a contribution to make and people are listening to me. I think that's one of the connections. 1s I think there's another couple just while we're kind of on this theme and we maybe can develop it, another couple of the connections that I think are part of the leaders toolkit for creating this environment. It's thinking about how do we help people in our team connect with each other? We know that relationships are some of the things at work that make it work well. So connection to each other and then also connection to purpose or meaning. 3s Not only some people are very lucky. They work in a job, in a role, in an organization where they are absolutely connected to 1s the purpose and the meaning. They're aligned, their values align, 2s their own personal mission and life aligns. We're not all that lucky, but there is still work that leaders can do to create that connection of meaningfulness for team members so that they can see where what they do fits in.

So what you're saying there, it goes beyond what I've heard you talk about before, 1s about being valued and connecting. 2s It goes beyond the hygiene factors, doesn't it? Like pay, reward, all of those things that are so important, but it's going much, much deeper than that.

Yes. Oftentimes organizations, when they think about trying to create a good environment for their staff, they actually focus on those hygiene factors. I think it was Herzberg talked about them. And it's pay conditions, the environment we work in, the tasks we do, and the people around us. And yes,

they are important. If they're wrong, they're going to adversely impact. 1s But getting them right doesn't necessarily create that positive environment you're looking for. It just creates not a negative one. So the opposite of unhappiness is not happiness. It's not being unhappy. And if we want to create that really productive environment, we need to do something more. We need to think about what are the things that actually allow happiness to flourish and grow? And again, it's not the leader's role to create that happiness. But if we think about it in terms of the weather, 1s it's our role to create the climate, to create the environment in which that happiness can be.

Yes, 2s I think the other thing as well we've talked about listening and curiosity and the power of asking good questions and more questions. But don't you think that from a leadership point of view 1s yes. You have to be able to be open but in a way that feels really connected and authentic to yourself as an individual. Because I think people can really spot when somebody's being shallow or inauthentic. 1s That's an art for leaders, is it not? That balance between being comfortable enough to reveal themselves and in that sense, a little bit of vulnerability, but also what they stand for, what their values are, integrity, all of those sort of things. I think these are important, don't you think? Absolutely. Yeah. When I'm talking with people about what is it about culture that you think makes the difference? 1s And for me, it's a culture. It can be lots of other things, but at heart, if it's a culture that celebrates difference so that people feel accepted and that whatever the talents and gifts that they bring to an organization, they can see that they are valued. So celebrates difference and oozes trust.

I like that because if you've got an organization that oozes trust, most things are possible.

Yes. 1s We trust each other enough to say when we get it wrong. We trust each other enough to say when we don't know. We trust each other enough to work through the hard times together. And we also trust each other enough to take the risks for the good times that we can see. This whole culture that oozes trust, I think, is to me, it's critical to highly successful, high performing organizations. And if the leader's role is anything, it's creating that environment. And we know that trust. 1s Trust is between people. Trust isn't this other thing over here? And you can define it? Yes. And you know what to look for.

Yes. But if it's about people, then creating an environment where people can be themselves 2s is the first step in creating that trust. Because if we're constantly trying to be something else, then we're putting too much energy in to that. And also other people won't ever quite know what they're dealing with.

Yeah. 2s There's got to be a consistency. If you were thinking about a recipe or trust, from a leader's point of view, if they were sort of self-reflecting and thinking about how they present themselves in a way that they can help themselves and others kind of lose this trust, as you've said, which I really love, what would you say would be the main ingredients to that?

Well, luckily, somebody actually has done some work on this, and there is a company based in Philadelphia, in the state, and they came up with a formula for trust. Okay. And it's a really useful one, I think, for when we want to try and understand what goes into building trust and also think about how we can respond when we get that gut reaction that maybe the trust is not quite there. Right. So they talk about there being three key elements that go to building up trust and then one thing that can dilute that. So if we if you think about the three things to begin with, they talk about trust being a combination of credibility. 2s So do we know what we're talking about? Does our expertise stand up when we say something? Is it more likely than not to be true? And actually, 1s are

we honest enough to say when we don't know? These are all things in the credibility line. The next ingredient is reliability, right? So do we actually turn up when we say we're going to turn up? Do we do what we say we're going to do? Basically, are we dependable? Yes. And then the third ingredient is something that they call intimacy. 1s It can also, I think, be integrity as well. So it's really about how much do we let people see who we are, right? Or do we have a front up the whole time? Are we wearing a mask or defense all the time? 2s And some of that's important so that people know who and what they're dealing with. 1s But it's also the more that we can do that consistently, 1s the easier it is for other people to know where they stand with us. 1s And you'll know yourself that if you're in a situation where you can't quite tell which way the wind's blowing, if you're not quite sure what reaction you're going to get, it's actually really hard to trust.

Yes, it is. Well, you withdraw, don't you, because there's almost like a fear of the prevailing wind. Is it going to be a blast, a chilly blast, or or what? So you you shrink, I suppose, as an individual, don't you?

Yes, absolutely. So these are the three things that they've identified build up trust, and leaders can reflect on this for themselves. What am I doing to demonstrate this to other people? What am I seeing in my team that allows me to know whether am I ready to trust this particular person in my team? And also, from a kind of a cultural perspective, what am I doing to enable people to see this in others, to test this out in others, and to build this for themselves? So these are the things that build up trust. 1s There's also one thing that they identified that can dilute all of that trust. So that all this hard work that we've done in building up credibility, reliability, and letting people know who we truly are can all be diluted if there is too much self interest in the equation.

Right, okay.

And that's either self-interest or the perception of self-interest. And my company's perception insights, and it's very deliberately that because often what other people see is what they react to. 2s And if we're not aware of that, we can end up going off on the wrong tangent. So this perception of self-interest is a really interesting one for leaders to be thinking about of what am I putting out there? 2s It's fascinating. Trust. I once was at an event in Henley and Henley Business School and there was a chat there who keynotes, and this particular event was all about customer satisfaction, employees sort of getting insights. It's what you do. But he said, forget all of those surveys. If you like, just ask one question. And that one question is 1s do whoever it is, your consumers or your workforce, do they trust you? And I thought that was so important. But given 1s your role in what

you do, your business, do you think organizations delve deeply enough into understanding 1s perceptions around such an important topic, around trust itself? What do you see in the marketplace, Rebecca?

I think sometimes organizations are scared to go into that area. It's a really challenging question to ask and to hear the feedback on do you trust the leadership of your organization? 3s And interestingly, if the environment isn't safe enough for people to give you an honest answer, you're not going to know.

Yes, that's true.

I think the organizations that understand how to do it best are the ones who are having constant conversations with their workforce. Okay? So they don't need to ask the question do you trust us? They can ask all sorts of other questions. They can have conversations, they can be open to, I think open to feedback, open to hearing the bad and the good.

Well, this kind of circles back about listening, doesn't it? Asking really good questions but not really listening to a much deeper level and asking really good questions. So that whole thing about listening and conversations, questions, they're all inextricably linked, aren't they? And they're that sort of regularity that you have to do with being constantly curious.

Yes. And it also links back to the humility of leaders understanding that they're not necessarily the smartest person in the room on this particular issue. They may be on something else, *1s* but the. *2s* The leader who is able to engage their team in solving the problems rather than delivering the solution. As leader, I think they are the ones who start to create this environment where their team can feel a connection into the organization, right? So *1s* they know that they actually have a say. They know that their experience and their expertise is valued. They know that they will have the opportunity to give ideas, to have their ideas listened to and considered. And for me, that is actually an important part of this connection. Cocktail for leaders is creating, making sure that that connection potential is there for their teams and that they know that it's real. It's not just, okay, we've got a suggestion box, or Once a year we're going to ask you what you think, or we're going to do our employee survey and then we'll come up with all the reasons why what you tell us is wrong. *2s* But it's having those continual conversations and asking people, what is it you think that we do well? What are the things that we've succeeded in? What are the things that have been harder this year? *3s* Where are we going wrong right now? What could be better? So actually asking some of those hard questions and then asking the next question. So that's interesting. When you say that, what do you actually mean? Yes? Or what was it about that that didn't work for you? Asking that next question again and engaging that curiosity

I'm thinking about you talked you've spoken about earlier about *1s* the labor market, *1s* the labor shortages, as it were. But there's also another element here where we've got four plus generations in the workplace. *2s* How would you encourage or guide leaders who are actually having to think much more about and I don't like to stereotype with generational differences because I think that can be a little bit misleading or even dangerous. But how would you *1s* sort of guide a leader to think about how they create connections across those generational *2s* cohorts, as it were?

We've always had difference in the workplace. *2s* I think the generational differences are probably starker these days than they were when maybe you and I entered the workforce. But there have always been differences of experience, difference, of background, difference. You can come from two neighboring towns and have a completely different experience in the background. *5s* So that's always been there to deal with. I don't know that we've necessarily dealt with it particularly well as leaders previously. I suppose one of the things is making sure that there is simply the opportunity for our teams to connect, to talk with each other. So there's the physical opportunities for it. And that's as important, if not more important. In the days where we continue to have remote or hybrid grid working, *1s* it's easy to engage around, task *2s* the multitude of zoom teams, whatever meetings that we have to do the job. What we've actually lost out on is some of the interaction around that. So over the last few years, I've been working with leaders to help them think about, well, what are some of the other connections, the other opportunities for interaction that they need to create? Something as simple as having a virtual coffee break together, where people can just drop in, having some of these

conversations, where they practice asking the next question and they work out what they don't know about each other. So actually encouraging and creating the physical space for that, I think, is part of it. But also doing work on that kind of that other side of successful cultures, of appreciating difference. 2s Teams that are alike, get on much better together. Right. Teams that are different and understand that they are different and understand what those differences are about are actually the most productive ones. Really? Yes, absolutely. 2s Spending time working out. What are the differences between us and this team and what do those differences mean that we bring that's different, 2s not just appreciating, but actually celebrating those differences and thinking about how do we play to strengths? How do we bring in this external perspective and talent that may not be obvious in the job description that actually is critical to understanding both the solution and sometimes the problem itself. 1s So creating the space for people to get to know each other allows some of those differences to become more apparent and then creating the safety which comes back to trust the safety to explore what those differences actually mean. This is all part of the critical leader role, right? And there's a number of different kind of structured mechanisms you can do for that. I know, I do that work with teams. But also there is just this physically creating the environment where people are naturally curious.

Yes, 2s I think that it's really important and something you said about particularly in this hybrid 1s working environment that we've got. But also, I think as the pressure can build to deliver sort of tangible business results and by that I mean whether it's outcomes driven that are customer centric or public centric or revenue, whatever it is, I think that we can often focus on the task more than we can focus on the individual. So you really have to be quite deliberate in a way that doesn't feel contrived but you practice it's like getting good at anything, isn't it? You have to practice taking the time to be curious to asking those questions, don't you think?

Yes, all leaders, if there's one thing that they do in terms of reflection, reflecting on what is the balance of time that I'm putting on the task, what's the balance of time I'm putting on the team and what's the balance of time I'm putting on the individual and how is that imbalance? Is the one area that's neglected completely or dominating completely and what does that mean in terms of the outputs and the outcomes that we're creating together? So, yes, 1s it's. I do a lot of work with the disc methodology and disk for people who know it splits the world into faster and slower pace styles, but also into a split between task and people focus. 1s And for leaders understanding this about themselves, understanding is my natural preference to look at task or is my natural preference to look at people. That's really important because we risk having blind spots if we don't understand where our brain just automatically goes. Yes. So it's important for them to understand that about themselves. And then the next layer of kind of development is to understand that other people see it differently. And what does that mean? And actually that's one of the tools that I quite often use when I'm helping teams think about this concept of difference. 4s Sometimes it's an easier route into understanding that our different preferences are different experiences, are different cultural backgrounds. It can be an easier entry point into that conversation if we're using something slightly more neutral like the disc methodology. Right.

Okay. 1s Gosh. 1s There's a lot here and I think over the years, certainly in my working life where leaders weren't really necessarily expected to form 1s a connection, you were there to serve the business and the leader as opposed to anything else. That has changed significantly, hasn't it

has. 1s Certainly my perspective on it is that it has. 2s We're so used to seeing Hierarchies in a kind of a pyramid form with the leader at the top and everybody supporting on all their work, feeding up

to the thing that the leader is delivering. I actually think I'm not alone in thinking this certainly isn't my kind of innovation. It's an inverted triangle with an inverted pyramid where the leader is actually the person who's supporting the organization to be successful and creating that culture, creating that culture that celebrates difference, uses trust, allows happiness. ^{2s} To form at work allows people to be happy in their work. ^{1s} I think that's, to me, a critical responsibility.

As I think about this conversation and as we sort of draw it to a conclusion, we could go on for hours here, couldn't we? But I think that your point earlier about as human beings, we all crave connection. I mean, it's innate in us. It doesn't matter if we're introvert or extrovert or ambivert, as I now understand. ^{1s} There's another theme there. But really for leaders, whilst it can perhaps seem a little bit overwhelming, I'm going to replace some of the things that I've heard you say, which I think has helped me as an individual, but as a leader, it's really about that self awareness, isn't it? And thinking about the amount of time that you devote to the task, to the team and the individual and being able to reflect on that and be honest about it. So there's that sort of one takeaway, as it were, and then there's this ability to listen, but to truly listen and create an environment where people are encouraged and feel safe enough to give you a truthful answer or to go into ^{1s} areas that might be uncomfortable, they might be unpalatable. So it's about listening, curiosity. And ultimately, I think, what I've heard you say, Rebecca, and it's not rocket science, is it? But trust is so important. And then I love the way that you were able to sort of break down trust. And again, for leaders, it helps them think about, ^{3s} am I credible enough? And credibility doesn't mean having all the right answers, does it? But am I credible? Am I consistent? Can people rely on me to ^{1s} do what I say I will do? To be trustworthy, all of those things, but also to create a level of intimacy that is, of course, appropriate, but that true connection to people where you're interested in them and what makes them comfortable and satisfied beyond just the task. ^{2s} These are some of the things that I heard you say. Is there anything, as I sort of my way of kind of summarizing, is there anything you would like to add to that that you feel we haven't explored in the way we should have done?

I think not so much we haven't explored in the way we shouldn't, although these are all huge conversations and we could have multiple episodes on them. I think the one thing for me to take away is that for leaders to think that equipping your staff is not just about making sure that they have the right equipment or the right skills. It's also that they have the right environment to work in and that that didn't environment is one that allows them to ^{1s} connect to other employees, to connect their work into the direction, the vision, the purpose of the business and also to connect in a way that allows them to feel part. So not just that their work feels part, but they themselves feel part and valued in an organization. And that actually that's the leadership role.

Yes, ^{1s} I suppose ^{2s} connection to me is celebrating those differences or maximizing on those differences and similarities, particularly when we're working across different cultures, different time zones and so on, creating that right environment where you can really ^{1s} the task is almost the byproduct, don't you think?

Almost, yeah.

Well, I have thoroughly enjoyed our conversation, Rebecca. I hope you have too.

Absolutely. It's been great fun

and as you say, there's so many more layers to this. I'm sure we could talk more and we'll have a separate discussion about perhaps some other themes that we can explore. But for now, Rebecca, thank you very much for joining us on The Joy Factory and this episode of The Connection Cocktail.

Thank you for having me. You're welcome. We hope you've enjoyed our conversation on how leaders create a potent cocktail for connection. And for those of you who want to connect with Rebecca, you can find her on LinkedIn or through the website for Perception Insights.

Please join us on the next episode of The Joy Factory where I'll be chatting with our next guest and discovering their thoughts about how we connect and create happiness for ourselves and others.