

Digital Workplace Impact



with Paul Miller



Episode 69

Take care, stay calm
and carry on in the
digital world of work

Transcript



“Digital maturity cannot be achieved without that grounding in business maturity, I think we can all agree to that. But the one thing that's been missing, both in the commercial and the cultural sectors – what I think's missing from the way we teach our kids; what we learn at the university level; what we learn as an entry level associate in any organization across any sector – is that we don't necessarily have the emotional skills to navigate communication and collaboration, both in the physical workplace and the digital workplace... One of the things that I do with my teams is the ‘elephant to dead fish and vomit’ ritual, which sounds a little off and usually, especially when I'm going into UK organizations, they're like ‘Oh, what is this fluffy American doing?’, but these are trigger words, these are words that either we can use to self-identify what is about to come out of our mouths or which we can use to help better understand or signal the behaviour of others.”

– Dr L Vargas, Digital Dragon Wrangler

Loss, excitement, empathy, humanity. Before 2020, these words were seldom associated with work. But this year has seen a level of emotion in work like no other, and it has opened our eyes to the importance of emotional connection within the workplace.

Paul's guest, Dr Lauren L Vargas, observed that business intelligence and emotional intelligence are key ingredients for digital maturity during her postdoctoral research. Since then, she has developed the framework “Take ‘CARE’ to be ‘CALM’”.

In this episode, Paul and L delve into this framework and explain how it applies to work, discuss the emotional impact of the virus on work, and share how we can move forwards to bring our best selves to work.

Paul

Today's episode is with Dr Lauren L Vargas, digital dragon wrangler... more on that later!

L's a really interesting person; we first came into conversation and business together when she had a senior digital role at Fidelity Investments in the US. She's also been doing a doctorate, which she's completed at the University of Leicester, involved with digital museums and we talk about that a little bit.

The conversation really is about the importance of emotional intelligence and emotional maturity and its role and alignment with business maturity if you're going to have “digital maturity”, so if you want to be a digitally advanced organization, it's no good just having business strategy, business maturity; you really need to dig into what we could loosely call the “emotional side” of work and, in a year like 2020 – although there's not really been a year like 2020

– we're all experiencing a lot more kind of "emotion" in work than I think we've ever experienced: loss, excitement, change, transformation, uncertainty. I mean the whole range: empathy, listening, humanity, etc. etc., and I think it's really brought to the fore the importance of having an emotional connection in work. We also talk about LEGO and "LEGO Serious Play" and L's model around that, so I hope you enjoy the episode.

I'm delighted to be joined by my guest today, Dr Lauren L Vargas, who is a "digital dragon wrangler", with 20 years' experience assisting organizations with their community and communication strategies. L is an independent researcher and consultant of Your Digital Tattoo as well as a one-by-one research associate with the University of Leicester in the UK, delivering a practical approach to building digital literacies within the specific museum context. Yes, that's right, museum context for UK and US museums – and it's an interesting time, an interesting year, to be involved with digital strategies for museums, I mean that's amazing. So L, has your work been taken over since you found yourselves sort of in the centre of the digital museum world... has this been like all of your Christmases come at once?

L (Laughs) Possibly *my* Christmases but not everybody else's! It's definitely challenged the sector to have a digital-first approach, which has always been a desire but now that's the only option with so many doors closed, so it's reimagining how they are communicating and collaborating with the communities that they're serving in new and innovative ways and so it's incredibly challenging but also quite invigorating.

Paul So what have museums had to do – and we'll get into our topic for today shortly – but what have museums had to do to adapt and how have you been doing what you can to support them?

L Well, first, remote work for museum employees was fairly non-existent before COVID and so the infrastructure was not necessarily in place for people to be able to communicate and collaborate from their homes, so working with museums to ensure

that they've got the right infrastructure but they also need to adapt new practices and processes to have that type of dialogue and communication.

It also meant that we had to find out different ways to redeploy or upskill those people that were in charge of front-of-house or visitor-facing activities and bring them into the back-of-house activities and how that communication and collaboration is taking place. So it's been a journey and they've had to accelerate this type of communication in a very short amount of time while, at the same time, scenario planning what it's going to mean when they reopen their doors and how or *if* the digital workplace will continue to survive and thrive in a more hybrid environment.

Paul And I suppose I'm imagining you've been trying to provide some kind of stress relief for them almost too because you've got a lot more immersion in this area that, as you say, is really not culturally normal for museums. Has that been a sort of reassuring voice?

L I hope so. We, at the One by One project through the University of Leicester, have really tried to use the last three or four months to not just work directly with our research partners between the US and the UK, but also to open up our community to have free resources, free events, where we are more of a digital guide into the unknown, helping them brave the wilderness in this new digital workplace, this new way of working. I always had the intention when I moved from the commercial sector into the cultural sector that there was so much that I could bring from my former experience into the cultural sector. I didn't realize how quickly (laughs) that experience would really come into play where it would be truly relevant for the success and the impact of museums – not just to ensure constant communication with the communities that they serve but also for their very survival. The reimagining, the reframing of their business models is now taking place and it's because there's that digital-first strategy.

Paul Yes, it's amazing, and are there any particular examples or experiences that have stayed with you from your experience in the last three or four months?

L Fifteen months prior to COVID I was embedded in the Museum of London as part of a former phase at the One by One Project, and while I was embedded there, it was all about, as I just said, introducing the digital workplace and figuring out different ways to work out loud and connect physical employees. And I got the most amazing note from one of the employees about three or four weeks into the COVID situation when the physical museum doors had closed and they said: "Had you not taught us how to work out loud, how to use technologies that allow for this communication and collaboration, we would have not been as successful as we have been in keeping our communities up to date and trying to stay *relevant* in the midst of the chaos."

Paul Yes, and that's something that certainly I've heard so much during COVID: for the organizations that put in the work into digital transformation, digital services, ahead of COVID, it's really been so valuable and obviously there's now a kind of ramp up, particularly amongst smaller organizations, to improve that. It must be really good to hear something like that from the Museum of London?

L It is, but at the same time, I would just say that for all of those organizations, those cultural organizations, that didn't have that chance to ramp up, the emotional toll of trying to reconcile a new way of working with trying to plan reopening their doors in this shifting normal has been incredibly challenging. So, just trying to keep that in mind as we talk about what comes next and just be, you know, cognizant that we're working with other humans that have so many different personal and professional needs that are clashing right now – so it's just trying to find empathy to deal with the changing situation.

Paul Yes, and it's so interesting when you think about it because obviously everybody's struggling with, I'd say, the *physicality* of work, the digital experience of work, people going back in some

countries to offices that are now open, only to find that there's not many people there and therefore the experience is significantly different. Or that people are, you know, fine going *back* to the office but they don't want to go from where they live *to* the office and it's, I'd imagine, in the museum sector, where the physical experience of being there is such a part of the DNA of the experience, how to kind of navigate that.

I remember seeing examples over the last 10 years where there's been digitization of different parts, you know, particularly – you'll remember the name of that incredible place in Iraq that got destroyed by ISIS and then there was a digitization of the area – and it felt to me like something beautiful was being reclaimed out of the physical destruction. It's almost like you can destroy the physicality of it, or damage the physicality of it, but you can't destroy *it*; it's going to kind of live on in a digital world – and I suppose that's trying to broaden the idea of what a museum is.

L Indeed. I mean we're facing a bit of an existential crisis of “What is a museum?”. And I think that these conversations have been coming for a long time but now that we've had so many different factors come at the cultural sector over the last four months, I think we're now taking that question and said answers or discussion very seriously.

Paul Yes, and by the way to people listening, this is not a podcast about museums and the digital side of museums! It's just because I'm so interested in that aspect of your work L, I wanted to just touch on that. But what is the thread that's been running through your career? Because you weren't always involved in museums? And we'll get into the whole LEGO CARE, CALM part in a moment.

L So I started my career as a public relations and marketing communications practitioner, working primarily in regulated industry, and what I found is that I was a comms person who loved numbers and who loved communities and trying to analyse different trends and patterns to best serve communities. And in 2004/2005, I really started to experiment with how to use digital as a means to connect with internal

and external communities, to be that digital bridge between the organization and the communities it serves. And I found that the more I worked with communities, I found that they were a means to enable digital revolutions, digital transformations – and more of my work was less on community management and more on “How do we enable the right technology, the right processes and the right structure to allow a very connected and collaborative work environment, one that breeds multiple perspectives and thinks not just inside out but outside in?”. And so now, after 18 years spent in the commercial and private sector, I've pivoted my focus to the cultural sector. So it's not that I'm doing anything *different* per se – I now have more of an academic lens to what I do, but I still consult. But thinking about communities as a means to understanding digital transformation, to understanding digital activity within the cultural sector, is now my primary focus, both research and consulting.

Paul

That's great, and the thing that sort of sparked my interest and why I wanted you to come on the podcast – apart from my own personal experience of having every time I've met you, I've just had a fascinating conversation and I struggle to categorize you; you're somebody who seems to kind of defy that and I like that. It doesn't stop me still trying to do that though! But it was the article that you wrote on Medium called “Take CARE [C.A.R.E, capital letters] to be CALM [capital letters, C.A.L.M]: Emotional intelligence is key to achieving digital maturity”. This was a really interesting formula: EI (emotional intelligence) plus BI (business intelligence) equals digital maturity, and you got to this using something called “LEGO Serious Play”, which I've heard of but I don't really know what it is, so tell me how LEGO Serious Play got you to develop this formula.

L

Well, for the past several years, I've tried different ways to get people to find different means to communicate with one another – and when we are trying to design a community, when we're trying to design a digital workplace, it can tend to go down, you know, the process route or the technology route, and there's no bridge between the two. To get people to free themselves from the

boundaries, from the shackles of process and technology, I like to use LEGO Serious Play as a way to develop a shared language, to develop an interpretation of what we want to achieve. So it's basically using LEGO in a facilitated way to be able to communicate with one another what are our individual aspirations, goals. Then, how can we build a shared landscape or a shared model of our approach? So you can use LEGO Serious Play to tackle so many different issues, but I've used it in the past to unlock digital transformation, and communication and collaboration challenges, and I've been using it specifically within museums, especially during COVID – in a virtual way – to be able to unlock what is the emotional cost of trying to take a digital-first approach in a sector in an organization that doesn't necessarily have that embedded in its DNA? How do we get people comfortable with these approaches without introducing the tech first? So, when I made the transition from the commercial or private sector to the cultural sector as an academic, as a post-doc researcher with the One by One program with the University of Leicester, and I was embedded in two different museums, I kept being asked: “Well, what makes museums different, how are they different? Come up with something that's unique for how museums are facing this challenge”... and I really struggled with that because at its basic level, you know we may be talking different types of different technology stacks, but we're talking about human problems, human challenges, human behaviour, and I was trying to find different ways in which to provide the scaffolding as a way in to better understanding how we can design our infrastructure, how we can design our digital workplace, how we can take more of a digital-first approach within museums.

I came up first with the CALM scaffolding (and I do love a good acronym – I suppose, after nine years with the Department of Defense you speak in acronyms!). CALM stands for: **C is for collaborative**, so it means how do we engage openly and transparently, how do we take an anticipatory approach, how do we

plan more effectively using those agile methods and take a data-informed approach to building feedback loops.

The **L stands for letting go of command and control**, taking a more leaderful approach, locating and enabling leaders at *all* levels for developing that sense of shared decision making and accountability. Then **M stands for being mindful**, making the time and space to reflect on information and decisions.

That CALM approach can be applied to any type of digital activity or challenge. Now, when I started to implement that scaffolding, what I found was is that you needed additional emotional intelligence, emotional skills that grounded the approach – and I found that we had to take *CARE* to be CALM. So, CARE meaning how do we communicate? **Communication** proceeds collaboration. How do we make implicit the explicit? How do we express what we mean?

A stands for adaptation. How might we find ways to learn from the past to inform our present and plan for our future? How are we able to pivot as needed? How can we build more of a resilient skin, a **resilience** strategy? How do we think about strategy governance and human-centred approaches?

It's not sexy, but it's vital work and sometimes it's only key individuals that have a chance to design and inform those particular processes and resources.

And then finally **E stands for empathy**, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another and that is needed to create those safe spaces, so we have to take CARE to be CALM in order to build a digital ecosystem that everybody feels that they have a place to contribute, that they have a role, that they have a connection with other humans, and what I found is, throughout my entire career, digital maturity cannot be achieved without that grounding in business maturity. I think we can all agree to that but the one thing that's been missing, both in the commercial and the cultural sectors – what I think's missing from the way we teach our kids, what we learn at the university level, what we learn as an

entry-level associate in any organization across any sector – is that we don't necessarily have the emotional skills to navigate communication and collaboration, both in the physical workplace and the digital workplace, so how do we make it easy for people to understand and not take for granted that they should already understand how to navigate, how they make sense of what's much more than just infrastructure but the inherent, the implicit and the explicit practices and processes that make up whatever type of digital workplace you might have.

Paul

Yes, I think this idea of empathy – as you say, we've understood that if you want to be digitally mature as an organization, you need business intelligence, you need business maturity if you like, you need a clear strategy, you need to understand what your processes are, and so on. But adding in this emotional intelligence is I think a really innovative way of thinking about it, because it strikes me, you know, putting that into the setting of what I see organizations struggling with at the moment, which is, there was a point in time in March when most organizations were turned upside down, either because they were involved in essential key work and they were then put into frontline roles, essentially keeping society functioning – obviously this started in January in Asia and then progressively moved westwards – but the other effect was that, in other organizations, the physical workplaces closed and everybody was sent home. And we're here in July, x number of months later, and basically nothing's gone back to normal and is unlikely *ever* to go back to normal, because we're discovering that normal has now gone. So it strikes me that, and we've heard about issues – for instance, I was hearing about a large law firm, where they've got their cohort of younger people who are used to being mentored in a kind of physical sense, coached in a physical sense, but they're now seeing the partners they report to maybe in their homes in France, round the swimming pool, or just in very nice places in the UK, and meanwhile they're possibly living at home or still in shared accommodation. Their dream job has become this kind of endless round of Teams meeting or Zoom meetings or whatever meeting,

again and again. There's a real level of loss, grief, confusion. People are becoming more productive, yes, because they've got a lot more time than they used to because there's no commuting involved but, you know, without the emotional intelligence to add to the business intelligence, there can't be any digital maturity as you say – and have we really let in the emotional impact of this virus on work?

L I don't think so, not yet. I mean this is a time where everything is so uncertain, right, and our personal and professional worlds are colliding and there is no break and there is this need to blend not balance – and to blend not balance means that we have to have very set boundaries and it's very difficult as a practitioner in *any* sector to put up those boundaries if you feel that you are constantly needing to be online or just show that you're busy so that your job is not put in jeopardy.

At this point in time what we need to realize as leaders, as managers, as guides in any of these digital workplace environments, is that people are feeling pressure to be active – and not active in the sense that they feel like they can find that safe space, that corner, where they can be more productive, but there's this emotional pressure that they have to deliver because the world is so fragile right now. Their careers, their lives, are fragile and so we have to take that into consideration when we're asking people to not just *do* their day jobs but to do their day jobs in what might be or might *seem* a completely foreign environment – and that means we've got to cut each other some slack. So if we use that CARE and CALM as scaffolding, then hopefully we'll be able to communicate and connect with one another at a human-to-human level and then figure out how we can bring our best selves to work and that each person has a different threshold – and as leaders we're struggling with the same emotions, that same emotional toll. So what can we do to start to create these safe spaces that we may have cultivated in the digital workplace prior to COVID, if that existed, but it's now no longer just that hard line between the organization, your professional life and your personal life. We have

to be able to accept that there *is* no hard line. That there is a lot of grey area, a lot of liminal space, that space in between that we have to navigate and the only way we're going to do that is together.

Paul So, just taking this example of the law firm, how could your model help them because – and it's not a criticism of them – they're struggling. You know, it's not the most digitally adventurous sector in the first place and so how can the model help?

L Well, there are several questions that I give organizations or teams that are trying to understand the scaffolding. I ask questions about how they're communicating and collaborating before COVID and then right now. It's getting to: "Do we understand what each other *does*?" We think we do because we pass that person in the hall or we know exactly what their title is! This is a time where we need to reintroduce ourselves to one another and then start to narrate our work and, you know, you don't have to have all the bells and whistles of the digital workplace to make that happen; it's simply asking and informing your fellow colleagues: "What are you achieving this week?", "What did you do last week?", "What are the obstacles that you're facing?" "Narrate to us what you're doing and why you're doing it."

That way we have a sense of place, we have a sense of where each other is located, because when we're behind a screen from one Zoom meeting to the next, we feel unmoored, unanchored and a lot of mental fatigue trying to place that person, to place that challenge, to place that activity somewhere – and unless we're having those really explicit conversations, then it's difficult for us to make that mental leap while we're trying to, dare I say, "perform" on a Zoom call.

So it's first understanding *what* we're communicating to figure out *who* we need to collaborate with. It's knowing, as leaders and managers, that everyone is stepping up right now, that there are decisions that have to be made, that we can't necessarily have complete oversight of, so do we have the trust in our process, do

we have trust in the individuals in the roles, to be able to let go of that command and control? Can we develop that shared sense of decision making? Well, you can, if you have that open workplace, that open communication – and part of working out loud is to demonstrate to others exactly what you're facing, what you are doing. It helps to build that empathetic approach, because without that, we're making assumptions, we're telling ourselves a story about all of the people we work with – and that is a very dangerous place to be, because that is what starts or promotes, or may influence, a toxic work culture. And when we talk about how culture takes effect or impact in the digital workplace, we have to be super super in tune with all of the different levers that are implicitly or explicitly excluding our colleagues. So, in a normal digital workplace environment, or, let's say, prior to COVID (laughs), we saw that there was a vocal minority who dominated the majority of workplace conversations. In this environment where we are now *all* digitally or remote working, we can't let that type of balance continue. So where do we start to maybe take a step back and take more of an active listening approach, letting *others* narrate their work, *others* ask questions? And that's going to take more than just the leaders, more than just the managers, but we're all going to have to be guides and brave that wilderness together, so we may pass that baton from one activity, or from one moment, one day to another, but this model, this framework, is just to take stock, to take audit, of how we're communicating and collaborating today and finding ways in which we can surface all of that activity and address it out in the open.

Paul

Hmm, yes. It's so much about empathy and listening. What strikes me is that normally organizations, faced with this sort of crisis, would have some version of “all hands” meeting. There'd be like, “Okay, we need to get all the top 50, 100, 500 managers together. We need to bring them all to place x over three days”... like we used to. You know, it would be, “We need to get together” but, of course, the “get together” option is either impossible or only partially possible, and throws up a whole bunch of other issues. So

it's almost like organizations are trying to work through these challenges in real time... I mean the analogy that comes to me is where you're swimming and there's a set of rocks that if you run out of speed you could just go over and hold on to the side. But this time you've just got to keep swimming... and hope you've got the strength, the stamina, the backbone to make it.

And I certainly know for myself that, if I was going to have my "corporate word of the year", it would be "empathy" or "listening" – and I think that there's been this *humanizing* of work. I know so many organizations that started off, particularly when the virus was in the Far East, with a sort of western developed society kind of mentality of "Well, we know things are going a bit pear-shaped but people have got to get on with their day job" – but then they started to realize the stress that people were going through and actually started to say, "Just tell me how things are going" and people obviously then started opening up about the strains and the difficulties. And I decided that, within DWG – there's about 120 people now – that I would have a one-to-one call with everybody in the company. I'm only going to do two a week, so it's probably going to take me the rest of the year, or maybe a bit longer – I might have to accelerate that thinking about it! – but it's really just to kind of say, "Look, here's what's going on, but tell me what's on your mind" – and just hear where each person's up to. I wouldn't have done that before and I think that in a time of difficulty where you want to develop digital maturity and you've got the *business* intelligence, the emotional intelligence, as you say, isn't being the leader who's got all the answers, it's actually developing a more empathetic and human organization, in real time, without those kind of rocks to cling onto. Sounds quite scary that, doesn't it?

L

Well yes, if we're swimming individually. But we're not swimming individually, right? Because, if we have trust, I can take a break and maybe you're helping support me and helping me tread water while I'm struggling with something – and then I'll do the same for you. You know, we've gone on away days, we've gone on retreats to do

that type of bonding, but let's be real, when we come back to the physical office does that trust resonate? Maybe in some cases, or maybe a few key individuals make that bond or that connection, but what does that connection look like across the entire group or the entire body? How can we start to embed rituals that allow us to open up a bit more, to be more vulnerable with each other?

So, one of the things I do with my teams is the “elephant to dead fish and vomit ritual”, which sounds a little off and usually, especially when I'm going into UK organizations, they're like “Oh, what is this fluffy American doing?”, but these are trigger words, words that either we can use to self-identify what is about to come out of our mouths, or we can use to help better understand or signal the behaviour of others. So, “elephant” means, you know, how many times have we been in one meeting to the next where we keep circling around that issue, that elephant in the room? How do we signal what that is?

“Dead fish” means how often do we keep going back to: “Well, 15 years ago this happened, so therefore we can't do this.” How do we recognize that this dead fish is haunting us? What can we do to call out and signal these types of conversations that are usually emotions that are buried.

And “vomit”. Right now, this one's really important, because it's difficult for us to transition from Zoom meeting to Zoom meeting – and especially when we have our little critters or kids that are vying for our attention! It's difficult for us to get in that professional mode, so sometimes we unleash, or “vomit”, our emotions, and we don't have any safe way or safe space to redirect that conversation or to take a step back and to go offline. So we, as leaders, we as managers, we as colleagues, need to recognize these *unspoken* issues that are hindering our communication and collaboration. A simple check-in about “How are you feeling today?” “What is happening right now?” “Do you need a couple of minutes?”. It's just being clear with our words, so that we can practise being better listeners – and that's the key, whether it's Zoom meetings, Teams

meetings or just working in an asynchronous fashion. We've got to cut ourselves some slack.

Paul

Hmm, yes and I think what you said, “We're not swimming alone”, is a perfect and beautiful way of putting it. You know, in times of challenge, we need each other; we need our communities as we've discovered – and when you think about an organization, it is a community and can function like a community, and they come in different levels of health, different levels of richness, diversity, etc. And I've certainly noticed that what we've seen with a *lot* of organizations, and I think in a way that surprised even themselves, is that they've responded to the crisis by doing things collaboratively with maybe competitors, other organizations, cross-fertilizations – who cares who owns the IP, let's just make sure we share – and so that kind of spirit of working through things together, I think has really surprised organizations.

And I think they've also been surprised at their own social conscience because then, you know, when we were not even adjusted to the virus, you then had Black Lives Matter, and organizations pretty much didn't hesitate and immediately started saying: “This is where we are, this is where we're not, this is what we need to be doing”. You know, I was on calls where people were saying: “Well, so and so's not here because they're on a protest march” – and it just became part of what was going on. Now, it's not that long ago that major organizations listed on the stock market would never have had political, social agendas like that, so there's a sort of revolution going on in the way that organizations think about themselves.

But one of the things that strikes me is that you're almost kind of pointing to a role that maybe doesn't even yet exist, which I wrote down as “digital therapists”, “digital counsellors” – and, let's face it, within the organization, there's lots of emotion. There are issues around kind of well-being but we need people who are responsible – and you get it in the agile world a little bit – people who are not leading the squad but are actually responsible for the, if you like,

the well-being, and it feels to me like we need people inside organizations in those kind of roles. Does that make sense?

L It does, and I've always considered that as one of the hats of a community manager. I think now what we're seeing is we need that community manager even more and that there are different levels. There are different types of community managers, but it's that community manager that is going deeper, that is establishing that human connection, that can read between the lines of the text – those are the people we need to multiply and make sure they are embedded across the organization. And how do we do that, not just at an organizational level, but a team-by-team level? So that we have those anchors, we have those bowies, that are spread across the organization, so that nobody is sinking, nobody is drowning.

Paul It feels to me like some new kind of – I mean you used the word “rituals”, let's call them “processes” or ways of doing things – in a way, saying not just “How are you?” but really kind of “How are you getting on? How are the family?”. And I notice people saying “Stay safe. How's your family doing?” and so on. And, you know, I was on a call with somebody at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) this morning, and my first conversation – and it wasn't a manufactured thing – was “How are you doing? How's your family getting on?” and so now I'm hearing about the two daughters back from university and how they're getting on, etc. – and, you know, I wouldn't have had that conversation before. But it feels to me like we need some new kind of organizational rituals that would allow people to kind of share more about themselves in a way.

L And that means that we have to rethink what *professionalism* means, right? Because so often we've had that wall, that split – and a lot of times a physical wall, right – that splits our work lives from our personal lives... and we have to dress a certain way, to conform a certain way. I mean, Paul, you've met me; my hair's a different colour every time you meet me, I'm covered in tattoos. I used to have to cover those up and report to work in a suit every single day for the majority of my career. And yet now, you know, I

wear T-shirt, jeans, all of my tattoos showing, and the craziest colours in my hair. Does that impact the way I do my job?

Absolutely not! And, you know, does the fact that I work remotely, signal or signify that I can't work with other teams that are not within the same country, within the same time zone? Absolutely not! We have to break down what we thought was “professional”, because to connect with one human to another, without performing, but with actual connection so that we can work better, quicker, faster, more efficiently as a team. We've got to break down the standards of professionalism.

Paul Yes, and I mean the word “professional”, when I think about it, first of all is a word that I think only sort of developed at the beginning of the management trend at the beginning of the last century – and obviously its definition keeps evolving. And, to me, “professional” means, you know, we're going to start on time, we're going to end on time – certainly inside DWG. And that doesn't mean people can't change things or explain that they're going to be late, and things like that, but, you know, generally, I like meetings to start and end on time, so that to me is about professionalism. Where people are, what they've been doing, what they're wearing, etc. etc., I couldn't care less.

L You are not the norm (laughs)!

Paul But what you're saying is that actually these things are becoming more normalized.

L Yes, yes.

Paul The C-suites have got their kids at home and everybody else, and so consequently that becomes that. Is there any organization, I'm just thinking, that you think has been, if you like, handling this emotional intelligence, business intelligence equals digital maturity – that you think handles this well?

L I honestly don't know. I think we do a lot of official HR and communication and collaboration training, but the blending of all

skills *together* and how they work in tandem other than your annual HR type of training, I haven't seen that yet.

One of the things that I'm working on right now is a “periodic table of skills” to mimic the actual periodic table, where each element has a different weight and it interacts with other elements in a varied way – and I'm trying to think through what is that business maturity? Those business skills? Those digital skills? How do they work together and how do they work or perform at even greater levels when you have certain emotional skills combined? And so, I'm trying to think through those combinations and then, through that research, trying to look outward and see or find organizations that are attempting to build that resilience, to build those muscles, to combine all of those strengths, to shore up any of the weaknesses that might be embedded in their current DNA. So right now, that's an open question.

Paul Yes, and I think in a way, I don't think I've spoken to one organization that wasn't trying to live by these often kind of written-down mission and vision statements and, you know, rules of etiquette, that hasn't found that they've been humanized through things this year. That doesn't mean that there aren't organizations that I haven't spoken to who *haven't* done that, but I think there's a kind of understanding that you've got to keep adapting, you've got to keep listening. I actually think that we're going to have to let in things about grief, loss, shame, you know ... was it Brené ...?

L Brené Brown?

Paul Brené Brown.

L Yes (laughs). She's my hero!

Paul Right, so the whole idea that we say we want the whole person to be part of the organization... I mean it always strikes me as crazy, you know – you're paying somebody a certain amount of money and you want a nice little slice of that human being! Well, that doesn't really work in the world that we're now in for quite a long time, I think. I mean, I miss my colleagues and I'm happy to say

that. You know, I said to the person I was speaking to at the UNHCR, "I don't want to live in a world where I never ever get to meet you again physically, Mike" and he went 'Yeah, me too' – and I don't think he was just being polite! But I think trying to talking about these things that have maybe been taboos, a bit like the elephant in the room, and actually scaling the emotional maturity of the organization, because I think that then becomes a resource for the organization – and I have heard these things coming from quite a wide range of well-known organizations, saying that they've been really proud of their organizations and the way that they've stepped up during 2020, so that's kind of quite encouraging really, isn't it?

L It is, it is. When you know that you're working around other humans (laughs), that feels incredibly comforting, but we need to realize that there's so much more work to do and, while there may be pockets of that, especially in the *larger* corporations or the corporations that are now moving to that digital-first model, these are new muscles that need to be developed.

Paul And it strikes me that we've always dismissed these things as sort of soft skills, haven't we – which I've always found quite a degrading term – but, actually, when the digital workplace becomes the essential workplace, and you're developing more digital resilience, digital maturity in the organization, if you don't also develop the capacity to be a more emotional, more human and more empathetic organization, you're going to be at a kind of real weakness.

So, the question I always like to end with L is: What's your perfect working day?

L Well, there's no such thing as a typical day for me, but I do have my own rituals, so I begin and end my day with books. So I read three or four books a week. I have a mix of fiction and non-fiction, so I usually start my day with non-fiction, end my day with fiction. I catch up on news so the first couple of hours – and I usually start my day between four and five a.m. – I do a bit of exercise and then do reading. Then I don't check my email right off the back. I do

- prefer to do my deep work in the morning, so if it is research or writing, I do take the first several hours to really dig deep in those particular areas and then the rest of my day is meetings, email, that constant communication – and where I cannot be tethered to my physical desk, it's a really good day!
- Paul Wow, wow! And you've got your kids at home with you?
- L Yes, a 16-year-old and a 10-year-old.
- Paul So, I'm thinking, L is just really, really disciplined... are you really disciplined?
- L I'm incredibly disciplined, yes (laughs).
- Paul Right, now most people when you say, "Are you really disciplined?", they go, "No, not quite as disciplined as you'd think"... but you are really disciplined, okay. And you get up at four or five o'clock in the morning. What time do you go to bed?
- L Usually around midnight.
- Paul Oh, you're not one of those people who needs hardly any sleep are you as well?
- L I am. I wish I could have sleep. I'm an insomniac, so that's probably why I read so much. I'm very good at compartmentalization but, you know, I do love a good Netflix binge!
- Paul Right, okay, so what was the last thing you watched on Netflix?
- L Ooh, well, I can't call it a binge... but *Snowpiercer*, I've been catching that every single week and I will not miss that; it's been absolutely amazing.
- Paul Okay, okay. So just to share, I don't know why I'm asking you what you watch on Netflix... but we watched *The Morning Show*, which was on Apple TV.
- L Oh yeah, that's a good one.
- Paul Have you seen it?

L Yes, definitely yes.

Paul Yeah, that was really, really well made. Actually we spent most of the lockdown not watching any TV at all and eventually now, well, as we seem to be emerging out of it, seem to have started watching more of it. But, that's impressive and I love the idea of you starting your day in that way and ending the day in that way. L, it's been wonderful and – again, as always – delightfully surprising.

L Thanks, Paul.

Paul Digital Workplace Impact is produced by the Digital Workplace Group, a strategic partner and boutique consultancy supporting more than 100 leading businesses and public institutions to advance their intranets and broader digital workplaces through benchmarking, research and practitioner expertise.

This is Paul Miller wishing you well until next time.

Listen to Episode 69, Take care, stay calm and carry on in the digital world, at: digitalworkplacegroup.com/dwg_podcast/take-care-stay-calm-and-carry-on-in-the-digital-world-of-work

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