

[Music] [Narelle] Well, hello Paula and thank you. Paula is our very first second, sorry, guest on our new podcast. A podcast with no name at the moment. But, hopefully, within a week or so we'll have a name. And the podcast is all about communication. And we're looking at five themes. It was four. We've changed it to five because we wanted to be positive. So we're looking at accessibility plus usability, plus divers, diversion, plus devotion. Devotion to communication in other words, plus determination really gives good communication. And Paula is, well, has many hats. So the hats that we're really hoping to hear about from Paula today is actually three of them. So Paula is a business coach. She has a great company called Boss Lady Skills. The second is Paula has a great virtual assistant company and we are clients. So, I'm speaking with a bit of bias here. And that is Beyond the Maze. And the third is Paula is a mum and a wife, a partner, a step mum, a daughter, a cousin, sister, brother. You know, communication in all of those areas will have barriers. If you don't take that step back and have a think about the words you use and the way you use them. So, welcome Paula. [Paula] Thank you very much. Thank you for having me. [Narelle] Any time. I love chatting to you. So Paula, for you, as I said, Paula, we are clients of Paula's with Beyond The Maze. So if we take it from, like if we look at the different themes that we're talking about with communication, what are the barriers that you see regularly in every area of your life that can be simplified by just taking that step back, having a think, and maybe doing things differently? Yeah. So I think, like in my space, where we're a lot, you know, a I live, breathe, work in the neurodiverse space. I have a son with ADHD, a husband with a ADHD, a step son. And I wouldn't mind betting my father would be ADHD as well. Um, based on what I see. So, and of course with our, with our work, you know, with our clients, we focus on that neurodiversity, and hopefully, you know, neurodivergent clients. So communication is really, really key there. And I have to teach my team you know, how to communicate with clients in particular, because, especially with ADHD or, I guess, any of the spectrum. There are different ways to communicate because the, the processing, you know, the way the brain processes information is different. And me having trained as an ADHD coach, I understand that. So being able to communicate that with my team, and then, you know, my team upon hearing will go, I don't really understand what that client wants. And I'll go, let's work it back. Let's, let's talk about what their outcome needs to be, and then work it back from there. So, you know, that's, that's, I guess, what needs to change. I think a lot of people need to sort of understand that. And know that, you know, neurodivergent are not. Everybody's brains process different. So, I think it's just taking that step back and understanding that people think differently. People do things differently. And if they're not doing or not understanding the way you're putting something across for you to take a step back yourself. And go, how do I rephrase that? Or, if you do, you know, if it is in the neurodivergent space, how do you restructure that? So, you can make it more understandable. in what you're trying to get across. [Narelle] Actually, it's really interesting because, obviously, I'm a mum of two neurodivergent sons. So, I know exactly where you're coming from. And I, actually, looking back, think my grandfather also had it. I know my father-in-law, I'm pretty sure my father-in-law has aspects of it. And what are the differences that you would do all the time with your child that you maybe would never have thought of doing before to ensure the communication is what you need it to be. [Paula] Yeah. So, first of all, I don't give him too much instructions all once. That was probably the biggest key that I had. And we do that, you know, for our clients. And it sounds quite simple, but the thing is, you know, the ADHD brain just

processes so quickly that if you're giving them all this information at once you just can't, you just can't focus on all of that information. So, giving them one step at a time and, you know, I've had to really find that I did that very differently. Yeah, because you'd say to your child in the morning, we're past that now, but going back, you'd say, "Alright. Go get your uniform on. Go get your shoes on! Go brush your teeth and brush your hair. And let's get out the door. And for any ADHD kid, that's like. woohoo, that's just, what are you talking about? It all blends in together and they do nothing because it just goes into overwhelm. So, I literally had to stop myself and say, alright, you need to go put your uniform on. When that was done. Now you need to go put your shoes on. Now you need to go brush your teeth. So really stage it out. So then it gives that, slows that kind of processing down to be able to understand the steps and what to do. [Narelle] So how have you taken that approach and applied it to your team and in your everyday work? [Paula] I think I use it every day as a natural now. Because it's just something that, you know, I've got used to, I guess I had to retrain myself because I reckon maybe I'm a little bit ADHD. I haven't actually been tested, but could be. So I kind of just rushed into doing things as well but if I take it back and step it back. Even down to goal settings for the business. You know, I know my end goal and then we work it back with both, and the team set goals as well. So we know the end goal and then we work it back over the business and what we're going to do week by week to get to that end goal. And again, that sounds quite simple, but we're all thinking ahead and we're all racing regardless of, you know, whether we're neurodivergent or not. Well, got too many things going on in our head, especially for mums. You know, and so to be able to break it down and go, right, this is what I'm doing this week. This is what I'm doing next week. And the team work like that as well. And then of course, within that, we'll have tasks that have really been things like that. They're checking off your checklists and stuff like that. [Narelle] And that's, that was going to be one of the questions I was going to ask. Well, what techniques do you use? Because I know for myself, I use tasks. I live with my task lists. My must do today, tomorrow's, my weekly tasks, whatever it is. So, you've incorporated that into your team. [Paula] Yeah, absolutely. So, we have, we have a program called ClickUp. And that program like, lays out everything. So there's a process. Well, we're in the process of processing everything. But there's a process for most things at the moment. And it actually gives you a step by step. This is what we need to do first. This is what we need to do second. And that's all right in the ClickUp program just to make it easy for everybody. And, hopefully it gives less mistakes as well. [Narelle] What about with your digital content, with the way you communicate via email? Anything in that method. Do you change your communication methods dependent on who the client is or how do you do that? [Paula] Well. Not really. We find that, you know, if we're emailing the client or, you know, we like. So for, everybody's busy. So, our brains are all taking in a lot of information anyway. So, I guess because it's natural to us. Because we live in that divergent space and we work in that neurodivergent space. That we're just treating all clients the same. So when we're sending an email or a message to somebody or things like that, like if it's a phone message, we've got a processor for a phone message where we actually put in, you know, who the client's name is, the phone number, and under that what they want. So, it's nice and straightforward, the clients can look at it. But then if we want to do we want to do more involved than just a phone message. And we want to bring something up with the client then we'll go point one. I was literally just sending email like 10 minutes before this. And I was like, right, I have these questions and theory. I have

these questions and updates for you. Point one, bang, point two, bang. So, I guess we structure it like that for everybody and it just makes it clear and concise as well. [Narelle] And the interesting thing with that too. It probably makes it more accessible because it's clear, because it's concise, because it's listed in order. [Paula] Yeah. [Narelle] It's much more readable do you find? And that you're getting a better response from the clients? [Paula] Oh, 100% I was just about to say that. The response from the clients is better because, you know, I mean, I don't know about you, but if I get an email from somebody and it's got point one, two. I will literally just go Here's my responses down below and I'll reply to that in red or capital letters or something. I'll actually address each point. So, I find if it's not done like that, things get missed and then you might ask them, you know, five different questions in a matter of two paragraphs and people forget to answer those questions. But if it's in dot point, they'll go through each point one at a time and reply that way. So, I find that they've made a big difference. [Narelle] Then, taking on myself and my business partner with both of us being blind. What are the differences that you had to think about? [Paula] I think being for us, you know, Vanessa, who looks after you, as you know, we had a chat about, you know, how we can make it easier. So we don't want to kind of, I guess, we'll probably do it for a lot of people. Remove the fluff as I say, you know, we just make it straightforward, to the point. So, it's easy to manage or if there's anything there being translated for you. It's clear in our writing. So, and that's how it we discuss just to make it easy for you. And then of course working with you guys and talk to you guys about what works best for you. [Narelle] And that is one thing that we've appreciated because you have come to us and said, well, how do you want it? And for us, as the client, that was a great question to be asked. Because you don't get asked that a lot. And I know, like, as a daughter, people will hand paperwork to me regarding my mother's care. And I look at them and think, well, I actually can't read the paperwork. So, that is an issue. Well, for me, but in that neurodiverse world and with assignments, homework, all those things. I know as a mum, it caused me a lot of headaches. What about for you? [Paula] Yeah, well, we're extremely lucky. The school my son goes to is very, very supportive. And they have wonderful processes in place to support that. So he has a learning support teacher who he meets with regularly and goes through all those assignments and things that have been assigned to him to make sure he understands, to you know, what is being asked of him and how to lay it out. And they also, you know, they submit drafts all the time and all that sort of things. So, I guess we are really lucky in that respect. And I don't really have a lot to do with it because the school takes care of it. It's just great. But before we did move to the school, it was, it was harder because they're support, it was there, but it wasn't as there as it is now. But, so it was kind of, I had to break it down for him. So, I really had a like a, it was only primary school. So, it wasn't too bad. But he had an assessment to do or assignments to do or something. We had to go through it and go, right. Okay. Let's just start with this point first. Let's work on that. Don't worry about the rest. We'll get to the rest next. So, I had to be more hands on with that. [Narelle] Yeah, if, I found it quite interesting with my kids. Mind you, we're talking, my kids are all around 30 now. So we're talking 15 years ago, minimum. The biggest thing that my kids really struggled with was when they were asked to write a story. [Paula] Yes. [Narelle] Because my kids could not write a story. Once I could get the teachers to understand that they couldn't write a story, I had the best response. And that took a bit of communication and sitting down and explaining why they couldn't just write a story. Because one of them has

no imagination. To him what he sees is it. So in the end, he used to write about the AFL game on the weekend. And he wrote every play of the game for the whole 100 and whatever it is minutes. And the poor teacher would get this huge essay or whatever it was of every play. Akermanis kicked to this bloke and Akermanis did a somersault. [Paula] Yep.

[Narelle] But it actually worked until the teachers changed. And then, we kept having to go back to that point of communication again and saying to the new teachers, this is what it is. And I'm hoping that that's gone now for the school kids today. Because it's such a much more common. I don't like to use word, common. But it's more known about is probably a better one. [Paula] I think it's more understood. [Narelle] Yeah. [Paula] The better word, but. Yeah, look, we found the same thing. It was a couple of times had to go back to the teacher and go look, he, you know, he just doesn't. He gets what we're trying to do is just to think differently. But I think there was one instance and I had to take to the teacher and he had to draw something like a house with ten windows or something like that. So, he drew ten houses with a window. [Narelle] Yeah. [Paula] So, the only result was still saying he was still showing the understanding of ten. It wasn't quite the way that they asked for. So, I said to them, well, it's still kind of right. Because your end result, the outcome we wanted was to show the understanding of the number ten. And that's what he's given you. So, just interpreted it differently. [Narelle] And that's what it is, isn't it? Communication and what we're talking about is also all about perspective. People's perspective on it. And if it's not, if people, people if they think outside the square and, as you said, take that step back. gee you learn some stuff, don't you? [Paula] Oh, definitely. Absolutely. [Narelle] And it's even in like, I watch you run meetings and things. And, the confidence that you do it with. But the ability that you have to get the message across plainly, it is a great method. Because again, that is breaking down a communication barrier. [Paula] Absolutely. [Narelle] Yeah. And I think for me and for, you know, anyone in my situation, even down to the tools that you're using. So, can you tell us a bit more about Slack and how you found Slack? Because that's actually quite an accessible tool. [Paula] Mm. Yeah, it is. I don't remember how we found Slack actually. I think it was just probably just a conversation I was havng that other VA's or came across it on platform or something like that. But, you know, we find Slack really good. And that's really how we communicate with a lot of our clients. And that's sort of, and that's how we went. And I was saying before is in the phone message. We're going to send those three simple lines. And it just makes it easy for the client to go, Oh, there's a message there. Okay. What is it? Oh yeah. Phone message. That's cool. That's what they want. I'll give them a call back. So, yeah, it is a really good tool. And there's so much more to Slack. But we've only got a free version. So I think with the paid version, you really get so much more out of it. But we don't need that. But, you know, you can, we put our videos in there and automatically transcribes it for us. And. [Narelle] Does it really? [Paula] Really. It does. [Both talking] [Narelle] That is great. [Paula] It just comes up. So, and this is the free version. So, yeah, it really does. And then, you know, you can, when you're talking about accessibility, you can, or I've got online notifications turned off because there's just way too many of them. But you can have them on to a pop-up or have a sound when they come up. So, there's all different ways you can work with Slack to get it to work for your, for what you need out of it. [Narelle] Yeah. Okay. With Slack and with the other tools that you use, do you or are you able to change background colours and things to cater for people with colour blindness or other tools, you know, other issues like that like acquired brain injuries, where they have to be

very, like the, the methods and the technologies, the tech, the techniques, not the technologies with the listing and things are great for people with cognitive impairments, neurodiverse, people like me with my vision impairment. You know, it's very succinct. But again, when you're looking at colour blindness, you're looking at say, dyslexia, tools like that, tools, impairments like that. [Paula] Yeah. [Narelle] The tools that you use, have you tested to see how that goes? Have you tested text to speech and things like that with Slack? [Paula] Um, I haven't. Um, although text to speech is Slack? No, I don't do that. Um, the background colours I'm pretty sure you can do this with Slack and a couple of other tools that we've got. But I think it's only like, if you want to change it to the white background or the black background. I don't think there's anything beyond that. [Narelle] But that's all you need. Really, that's all you need. So, it's interesting. So, even a tool like that, that you're using still provides most of the accessibility you need. [Paula] Yeah, that's right. [Narelle] And then, yeah, I just find the whole thing interesting to be honest for, okay, I'm passionate about it. Cause it. But it's what I love. I just like the way if we can break down the communication barriers. [Paula] Yeah. [Narelle] If we can open it up to everyone. Then everyone has a better chance, don't they? [Paula] Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And look, with I'm, as a, as a VA, I'm obviously exploring the world of AI at the moment as well. And there's so many things on AI that was going to make it a lot easier. Um, with accesiblity for sure. [Narelle] Like what? Can you give me some ideas? Because I haven't done much yet on the AI. [Paula] Yeah, so there's one. And I'm actually talking about a couple tomorrow. I mean, there's one called, so pictures and things like that. There's one called Mid Journey, which is actually used to just for platform. And you can actually put in there, you know, if you're looking for a particular picture. So, I don't, I think just for different speaking too. I'm not really sure. But you can put in there, like if you're looking for a particular picture that's got a horse in a paddock. And it's a white horse in a lush green paddock or something. And you can put in there, Umm. You know, create me an image of a white horse in a lush green paddock. Um, we will use something like that. And within seconds, it'll give you that image. Umm. It's obviously most of it will be original and things like that. So, there's those sorts of things. I'm pretty sure there is a sort of speaking to you too. Um, there's also, um, there's one where you can create a , DID, D I D, it's called. That one you can actually do. Definitely can do text to speech on that one. And that will create even an avatar that will, and look that avatar looks pretty human like. A bit scary. Um, and they will, they can actually like being put on the website and talked through it all. And all that sort of thing. So they're probably the two main ones I can think of right now off the top of my head. But, um, but yeah, it's just opening a whole new world of different things. [Narelle] It is. It's absolutely crazy. I got to admit I cheat a bit because that's how I get my ideas for my blogs now. And then I just change it and reword it to what I want it to say. But that's always my starting point is I start with AI now. Where do you see your business and your work with people in regards to digital accessibility in the future. In regards to, um, because as you said, you are in the neurodiverse field. What techniques and what are you going to be introducing in the future to make your business and your communication methods more accessible? Not that I think there's a lot you can do because your communication is great. The way you do it. [Paula] Yeah, I think. It's something that we're always working on. And, you know, like, well, our future plan's obviously, to work with you guys to get us more accessible on our websites and other things that we do in front of you. And things like that. So, it's definitely something that we're always

sort of thinking about. And every time, you know, we might have a new challenge thrown at us with another client. Um, to go, oh, we hadn't thought of that. So, then we look it other ways to think about that. I mean, AI is definitely going to make a difference for us in our business. For sure, which is why, you know, we're having fortnightly meetings around AI now. And having a look where we can implement things umm, more accessible. More, you know, we'll ask for better with our communication. That's what comes down to AI as well. So, I think that's going to send us in a whole, another direction I feel. But definitely, you know, we we want to be known and I think we've got a fairly good reputation at the moment as, you know, being that neurodivergent understanding. We, you know, our practice is got that understanding of neurodiversity. So, I think that's just working away at that and keeping, and chipping away and making us. We do have people come to us and say, hey, you know, I've been told that you guys know how I work. [Narelle] Yes, we do. [Paula] So I'm just getting that reputation, building that up. And then we think we're going to do other, you know, like, since I was a teenager, I've always had something to do in that disability space. So, moving more and more into that space under the NDIS and, you know, any, all of those sorts of areas. There's a bit of my passion. [Narelle] One other thing that I've been meaning to ask you, because I know you have people from other countries working for you as well as VA's. How do you find the communication barriers there? Do you find there's, like, with changes of wording, different meanings for the same word? What it, what do you, if I, how do you deal with it? What are the barriers? How do you deal with it and what are some successful outcomes from that? [Paula] Yeah. So, we've definitely had to adapt there as well. So, we've got two team members in the Philippines. And all of our other members are here in Australia. But yeah, there is definitely some, you know, I guess for the Australian, aussie slang, is a big, hard one for them as well. And English is their second language. So, we've just found that, you know, we have to slow down we've got a couple of girls talk really fast. So when we have meetings, we're like slow down. Even I have to bring myself to slow my speech down sometimes so they can pick up on it. But what we did adapt to probably a couple of years now is we did, we did videos for them. So, rather than getting in a call, zoom call and saying, this is what I want you to do and showing them everything we want them to do. Where they only probably picked up maybe a quarter or half of what we want them to do. We would do just a video now. So, it saves our time because we can do that video there and then. Send it over to them. And then they can just stop and start as they need to, to see what, what needs to be done. And of course, I mean, they've been working with me, for three years now I think it will be. So, you know, they've, they've learnt in those three years as well, you know, how we like things done and all that. But, yeah, initially, I think it's just adapting and watching their faces as well. When you see them, you like it. They probably didn't get that word. So, then you, yeah, say, oh, I can never say that. Did you understand what I just said? I just don't guide from their body language. And go, I need to rephrase that myself. So, I'll go and rephrase it. [Narelle] Actually, that's an interesting one because the video was not one I had thought of. That's a really good technique. And it's such a simple one, isn't it? It's a simple thing to do. And it would save you a lot of time do you think in the long term? [Paula] 100% because I mean, we do that basically across the board for our whole team, not just the offshore team. And we always say, and if you want to show somebody how to do it, record it. Because they can then take their time to watch it. They get you, you're always there for questions anyway. But it's more about them taking time. Because they might have a video on one

screen and they're actually doing a job on the other. And they can stop that, go do the job, go back to the next point. So, it is a really good concept and it saves so much time. [Narelle] What advice could you give other business owners that are looking at doing what you're doing and breaking down the communication barriers? [Paula] Yep I think just definitely, well as I was just saying, video. Video things, because that makes it easy. But also like just, like, making things simple. And for anyone. I just think because, you know, if we just do it and things in dot point. There's a less. There's less things that we'll get confusing, less misinterpretation of things. And just easier for people to follow. [Narelle] Excellent. Thanks Paula. Thanks so much for your time. I can't tell you how much I appreciate that. And thank you for all everything that you do do for us on a daily basis. You and the wonderful Vanessa. So, thank you. [Paula] Not a problem at all. [Music]