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The Digital Access Show: Communication, Accessibility and Understanding

Introduction

Narelle: Good morning. This week's episode of The Digital Access Show, I want to go back to basics. The basics of good digital accessibility is good communication. If we don't have good communication, it doesn't matter how structured the content of the website is. The message isn't getting across. To help me do that, I've asked Allan Parker, Director of Digital Access Solutions and founder of Peak Performance Development, to come and talk more about exploratory, digital, productive communication. Thank you so much, Allan, for coming on.

Allan: Narelle, as always, it's a pleasure and a joy to be with you, particularly when you want to explore the importance and role of interactive communication: how we make it productive, expansive, exploratory and easy. Allan, for coming on.

Allan: Narelle, as always, it's a pleasure and a joy to be with you, particularly when you want to explore... the importance of... the role of interactive, communicational conversation. And how do we make it productive, expansive or exploratory? And the other E that I'd like to add, how do we make sure it's easy? We don't have to work hard to get access. We don't have to work hard to... be able to receive

Plain language and meaningful words

Narelle: That's it. I've been at a couple of summits and different things, Allan, and all I'm hearing are trendy words: inclusive, empowered, person-centred. To me, it's just making it more complicated. and different things, Allan. And do you know what? All I'm hearing is those... trendy words. Inclusive. Well, if you're inclusive, aren't you being exclusive? Or, I can't think of all of them. And to me, it's just making it more complicated.

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: The trends. What's... a better way to

Narelle: What's a better way to communicate, Allan?

Allan: What you've raised is important. Too often, we go to a meeting, conference or website and hear habitual words that are short on understanding. They sound good, but we're left wondering what they actually mean. to a meeting or to a

conference or go to a website, and find a variety of things? And, in fact, let me write a couple of them.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: One of them is, you flagged... what I call habitual... words that are short on understanding.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: Yeah, so they sound good, but we're left going, I wonder what that actually means. Yeah?

Narelle: Exactly, Allan. And when... a person is missing one of the five senses, or has a disability, whether it's, it doesn't matter what it is, it doesn't matter.

Allan: No.

Narelle: If you don't understand the way it's being used, it's waste.

Allan: Yeah. I'm going to use one of those words.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: Yep.

Allan: And one of them... that frequently turns

Examples of words that need clarity

Allan: Common examples include empower, engagement and accountability. They are big, nice words, but what do they actually mean in practice? better engagement, is another one.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: In the world of business, transaction is, how do we ensure accountability? And they're really Empowerment is a meaningless term unless I can actually access what is being provided. It also assumes that I am not already empowered. Empowerment is a meaningless term unless I can actually access what's being provided. Empowerment assumes that I'm not empowered.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Empowerment could mean a whole variety of things. We've got to get better at We need to use words that are meaningful and tell people what we are actually talking about. person what we're talking about? So, if we look at your screen behind you, you've got The Digital Access Show.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: Yeah. It's digital. We know what that means. It's about access. It means can we have ease of entry, ease of availability, ease of connection?

Narelle: Ease of understanding.

Allan: Ease of understanding. Now, if I'm using that sort of word, it sounds good. You could interpret it as one thing. I could interpret it as a completely different one.

Narelle: Yeah. And it's driving me crazy, Allan. And I'll throw one more at you. Person-centred.

Allan: Oh, person-centred. Lovely. Person-centred.

Narelle: I know it's two words, but I hear it all the time. Person-centred, choice, control.

Allan: Yep.

Allan: And I would say,

Being considerate

Allan: Rather than saying person-centred, I'd use the word considerate. Step into the other person's shoes and consider what they might be thinking, needing or feeling. person's shoes, and find out and consider what they might be thinking, needing or feeling.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah. If we use common language. And the other interesting bit, being a linguist, I'd go, if we'd only increase the number of verbs.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Instead of nouns. See, digital access, access is both in that sense a verb and a noun.

Narelle: Yeah, it is.

Allan: Access, it's a thing.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: It's actually an action.

Allan: It means I can get into. Yeah. It means I can connect with.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: It means I can participate together.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: And if we were just to get into... pulling our language back to describe what we're talking about, not big words that generalise and can mean anything.

Allan: If we do--

Narelle: Yeah.

Narelle: Every word you've written up is a marketing term.

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: It's not a people term. It's not a communication term, is it?

Allan: Yep. Now, going back to your people-centred.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: That's, you know, it's become very common, that one.

Narelle: I know.

Allan: I'm sort of saying... people-centred, is it about you and me having a better relationship? Is it about you and me actually connecting with each other? Is it about you and me having rapport, and feeling comfortable, with each other? Is it about you and me giving enough time and pausing, pardon me, and not rushing?

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: Simply to go, oh, Narelle, tell me more about that.

Narelle: How simple is that?

Allan: Now, in digital design, they often give you a headline and then go, more information. When we're interacting with another human being, it would be useful for us to do that one.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: You'll notice what I've done with the chart, one word at a time.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: And describe the word, talk about the word, but just one word at a time, simple.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: You'll notice I've gone red, blue, purple.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: I changed the colour. Pardon me, if we go back to the conferences you were talking about, or the events where you go, and there's presentation after presentation, their slides will have 30 words on them.

Narelle: Well, I don't know, but I'm presuming they did, yes.

Allan: They frequently will.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Now, I'm talking about... accessibility across a large scale. I'm talking about people with a disadvantaged... processing system, in some form.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: Which at some level we all have.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: It doesn't matter whether it's in words, or in written form. We generally... use too many words... without enough pausing, in spoken word, without enough punctuation... in written word, and without enough

Designing communication for memory and access

Allan: We generally use too many words without enough pausing in speech, without enough punctuation in writing, and without enough small paragraphs. I look at a page of print, and it's got paragraphs of 10 lines, we know, through research, that the more lines there are in the paragraph, the less likely or inclined If we break long blocks into smaller chunks, more people will access the information because it is more accessible in smaller bites. The brain also remembers things in threes more easily than it remembers ten lines at once. it into three lots of three, the... number of people who will access it, because it's more accessible... in smaller bites. The fact that it's in three chunks, the brain will remember things in threes, more than it will... ten lines in one.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: And the other thing, communication becomes productive.

Allan: The moment

Why pauses matter

Allan: The moment there is a break or pause, the thalamus helps file information into memory. Pauses give the brain time to store information clearly and make it easier to recall later. called the thalamus, goes, oops, they've stopped there. Let me put that into a particular memory bank.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: And in the pause in between, the thalamus actually plays the librarian role. And then when you finish the document, and you want to think about it, the thalamus will go and find them, because it had time to put them in the places, particular to that information. And each piece, each of those paragraphs will get stored... in slightly different places. Now, the more places the thalamus stores the information, the more likely we are to remember the information.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: So important.

Narelle: But, Allan, suddenly we've now got productive communication just by changing those words.

Allan: Absolutely. Absolutely. And not necessarily changing them. Pausing and go, Narelle, tell me what you actually mean specifically... by... people-centred.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: So, we're going to be more people-centred, and that means A, B and C.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: Now, if we did more A, B and C, and remember, we remember more in threes. Yep. Now, if I... deliver point A, and I don't pause, I go straight on to point B, the thalamus won't have as much time to file it accurately.

Narelle: Yep.

Allan: But the pausing in between... the punctuating in between documents.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah.

Allan: Vitally important. Now, if you, if we're dealing with

Accessibility, sensory learning and communication

Allan: When communicating with someone who is sight impaired, diction and clarity become especially important. More broadly, in any context, we need to make consideration for the other person. much more deliberate with you than I do somebody who's fully sighted.

Narelle: Yeah. Because the diction clarity is important. Because... you're sighted... When you and I are just talking, I don't use my hands much.

Narelle: No. Well, I don't know, but yeah. [both laugh]

Allan: So can I, in some way, no matter what the circumstance, can I make consideration for the other person, the other party? See, sighted or unsighted, if we're on the telephone, if I'm speaking at this speed and I'm not pausing and interrupting, not pausing often but I'm talking continuously at that speed, you're going to at some point in time go, I wish he'd slow down. At some point in time, you're going to go, I wish he'd pause. I've got a really

Narelle: A couple of podcasts ago, I talked to Marisa Sposaro. She is blind and never had sight. As a young child, she could feel books but could not see the letters. Learning Braille opened the whole world up for her. Marisa Sposaro, Allan. I think she's Maltese or Greek heritage. Parents born overseas, she's blind, never had sight. And she made two points. One was, as a young child, she could feel the books. She couldn't even see the letters. So, she got really frustrated. She learnt Braille and it

Narelle: Later, when she was told Braille was out and she had to use audio, it was overwhelming.

Narelle: Okay.

Narelle: However, when she went to university, they said, Braille's out. You have to do audio. She couldn't do it. It was overwhelming for her.

Allan: Yeah. Now, Narelle, there's no doubt

Allan: From a brain science perspective, that makes sense. She had developed strong sensory pathways through Braille. When that system was no longer available, auditory learning required different pathways. she's been doing Braille, and she's been developing... those sensory neurons.

Narelle: Yeah. In what's called peripheral, procedural memory.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: It's physical activity.

Allan: Yup. That's a particular piece of the brain that will get developed and strengthened and grow.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: When that's switched off, and that's not available, and they go, you've got to do auditory learning, her brain then goes, oh, my goodness. I've been so used to getting it in one system, those neurons that do the auditory... have actually pruned and reduced.

Narelle: Oh, okay.

Narelle: Yup.

Allan: Yeah.

Allan: It's a little bit like, you know, go back... 40 years ago, I did some study in speaking German.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: If you said to me, put a sentence together in German, I couldn't tell you. Cause those neurons have pruned. However, I only need to be in... Austria, Germany, Switzerland, for, just days. And all of a sudden, I still can't speak it, but I can start to hear it. And that's just the neurons have been, because they haven't been activated. And this is, this is really understanding the science of how a human being... receives information and learns. Yeah. And we run into one of the difficulties. We run into, oh, I can't get it through that system, because I've got a disability. And I go, you can't get it yet or now.

Narelle: Yes.

Allan: Yeah, or now. Yeah. Now, I guarantee you, if I said to that woman, I want you to not... try and get everything out of the auditory system, but I want you to listen... to the auditory system... for 30 seconds and then hit the pause button. And then write down what you've heard. In just three words.

Narelle: I've got to tell you, our mutual friend Mark Muscat basically did that with her. What he did was he got a Braille keyboard,

Allan: Yep.

Narelle: She could feel with the Braille and she could hear it.

Allan: Yup.

Narelle: She uses audio all the time now. Because he brought, Mark, well, we know how great Mark is. And Mark was able to join the two together. Turns out she's a visual learner. And that's how he did it. So, now she is very competent using... screen readers, everything else. She writes books. She does community radio, all because he taught her how to join the two together.

Allan: We just have to, we've just got to realise when we say we can't do something, we've got to say yes.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yep.

Narelle: Yeah.

Narelle: I agree with you. We can't affirm our limitation or dysfunction. Yeah. We've got to go, yes, that is. Take my own experience. Could not read.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: For 30 years.

Allan: I got very innovative about how to get information. Yeah. I grew big ears and became a really, I never stopped writing notes. -[in unison] Yeah.

Allan: Then I learned that if I wrote in different colours, it'd improve my memory. So I now, I alternate, I have those pens that you change colours.

Narelle: Yeah. And grow the coloured neurons. There's a piece of the brain called V4. V4, if you write... in three different coloured pens, V4 will put that information in long-term memory.

Allan: Yeah.

Colour, contrast and accessible design

Allan: For people doing web design, use enough colour contrast. Difference helps the brain remember. Don't make everything look exactly the same just because of brand consistency. for people who do have sight.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Make sure you're using enough contrast colours.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Don't have... ...the same colour all the time. Now, the people with brand obsession go nuts, because they always want their slides to look exactly the same.

And I go, do them differently. The brain remembers difference more than sameness. Yeah. If we, you know, you and I are working on... the videos that we have in the Peak library. And we're now captioning them, so that the people who are... who are... auditorily... restricted in their ability to hear it, now have it to be read. Now, I know that while they're... actually reading the caption, they're actually now saying that, inside their head at the same time, so it's stimulating the auditory function.

Narelle: Yeah. It's just fascinating, Allan. And while we've been talking about all this, how many years, when did TV come in? Early 50s, late 40s?

Allan: Late... I think I was six...

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: When we got our first television.

Narelle: So--

Allan: So, that was mid-50s.

Narelle: So before that, all you had was radio, and book.

Allan: Absolutely.

Narelle: So, everyone knew how to listen.

Allan: Yeah. I mean, we, I was... the fourth of nine children. Eleven of us sat around the radio listening to... serials.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah.

Allan: Listening to information and interviews.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yeah. So, listening was a much, much more... demanded of set of neurons.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Yep.

Allan: The visuals to see the... people who want to gather... information, from a video clip. Yeah. That'll give... strong neurons to their visual recall. It'll reduce the likelihood of them reading quickly.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: And the more we go, the world has got to be designed

Designing for sensory multiplicity

Allan: The world needs to be designed with sensory multiplicity. We need a variety of ways to receive, process and interact with information, especially in web design. ways of doing things. And particularly in web design. Yeah. We've really got to step back and go, what do we know about the human brain, and what is it telling us... that we could actually get experimental with, that we could do exploration and test and trial things out? [in unison] Yeah.

Allan: If we...

Allan: If we were to find a person, or a company who had a piece of software that designed a piece of software and said, here's what it is. We're giving you the capacity to make five changes or suggestions to it. Would you please redesign it and make that available... for five minutes every time somebody's interacting... to readjust something, redesign it? I contribute to redesign every time I go to a website. I can't believe how difficult websites are to work out where to go next. Yeah.

Narelle: Yeah. And it's

Narelle: It's a common issue. I couldn't even find an email yesterday on a company website. A friend helped look, but we still couldn't find the right address. I ended up ringing the company. an email yesterday. And I happened to be talking to a friend in Melbourne. She started looking for, and it's a Queensland company. So, she's actually looking for emails and texting me all these emails, and saying, try this one, try this one.

Allan: Yes.

Narelle: You know what? We didn't find the email we needed. I ended up ringing the company, and they said, oh,

Closing reflections

Allan: The calmer you are, the more clearly you see, hear, think, speak and decide. Composure and breathing increase accessibility between two human beings. be scientifically true, no matter who you are, what your abilities or disabilities are. The calmer you are, the more your eye sees, if you have sight. The calmer you are, the more your ear hears. The calmer you are, the more your brain will produce the words that you want to say. The calmer you are, the more clear you'll get about what you feel and what you think, and what you decide. The calmer you are, the less mistakes you make. The calmer you are, the fewer things you leave incomplete.

The calmer you are, the clearer... the reception... between two human beings is. And we can just make sure that no matter what situation, if we want to receive something, have access to it, receive it and understand it. The frequency with which I pause and breathe... is the one thing that I always have power of, and I could always increase my accessibility... with composure, and oxygen.

Narelle: Allan, how can

Narelle: Allan, how can people get in contact with you? every time we talk.

Allan: Narelle, in a

Allan: Search for Allan Parker OAM, or visit the Peak website at www.peakpd.com. You can also email frontdesk@peakpd.com. after it, you'll get me. If you... go to the Peak website, www.peak, P-E-A-K, PD.com And for accessibility purposes, you might notice that I said it and repeated it with punctuation.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: Two different ways.

Allan: Yep. You can... contact us by... sending an email. Do an old-fashioned email, at Frontdesk, F-R-O-N-T, D-E-S-K, at peak, P-E-A-K, P for Peter, D for Donald,.com. That's frontdesk@peakpd.com.

Narelle: Allan, thank you. You know, I think

Books and further learning

Narelle: Allan, thank you. I think we've explained how the basics of communication need to work to get the message across. the message across.

Allan: And we have just scratched the surface.

Narelle: Oh, yeah.

Allan: We just scratched the surface.

Narelle: It is. And Allan,

Narelle: As always...

Allan: A pressure. Thank you.

Narelle: And can I tell everyone, if you want to read

Narelle: Allan has a number of books, including *The Negotiator's Toolkit*. Could, Might yet. That's on my list.

Allan: Can I jump in, *Would, Could, Might* is not a book.

Narelle: Oh, no.

Allan: It looks like a book.

Narelle: Okay.

Allan: Yep.

Allan: It's got a cover

Allan: *Would, Could, Might* is not just a book. It is a six- to 12-month course about the art and science of speculative thinking. 12 month course. And I ask you to stop reading about every eight or nine pages, and then give you tasks to do. things to think about, things to go and talk to people about, things to observe out in the world, and then get you to come back, and do journal writing about what you've learned and noticed.

Narelle: Yeah.

Allan: And it's... *Would, Could, Might*, it's the art and science of speculative thinking. It's how do we move from crystal... intelligence, which is what we know, to fluid intelligence, which is what we do... with what we know. [in unison] Yeah.

Narelle: You've got two other

Allan: Other books include *Beyond Yes, Negotiating and Networking*, and *Switch on Your Brain*. brain integration. How do we get two hemispheres to talk and work together?

Allan: Yeah.

Narelle: Yeah.

Narelle: Thank you, Allan.

Show sign-off

Narelle: Thanks so much for your time. I'm always after feedback and advice on how we could make The Digital Access Show better. The Digital Access Show better. So, if you do have Please email reception@dasat.com.au. If you like what we do, please share, review, like and subscribe. You can find old podcast episodes on YouTube and on dasat.com.au. week. Thanks again. If you like what we do, please share, review, like, subscribe. You can find all our old podcast episodes on YouTube, and also on our website, dasat.com.au. And we really do, and would love to receive

any feedback that you can give us. So, we'll see you next time We'll see you next time on The Digital Access Show. Bye-bye.