

Laura 00:01

Welcome to the Mission-Driven Marketing Podcast where we turn marketing into a powerful force for good. I'm your host, Laura Meyer ready to journey with you as we explore strategies that go beyond selling products and services and towards sparking real change. So, whether you are a marketer and entrepreneur, a nonprofit or higher education leader, or simply somebody who wants to make a positive impact, this podcast is for you. Let's drive forward your mission together.

Laura 00:42

Hi, everybody, welcome back to that Mission-Driven Marketing podcast. I'm here with Carrie Fox, and she is the founder and CEO of mission partners. And I'm so grateful for the opportunity to share her wisdom with you today. So welcome, Carrie.

Carrie 00:55

Thanks, Laura, for having me. It's great to see you.

Laura 00:57

Yeah. So you have this just incredible organization called mission partners who work with some of the country's top brands on communication. Just before we even get started into my questions, share a little bit with the listeners about what brought you to today.

Carrie 01:12

You got it. Well, it's a long and winding road, Laura. But I have known since I was a kid, quite honestly, that words carry a lot of power. And I thought for a long time, I was going to be a journalist until I realized that there might actually be even more or perhaps I would say a different kind of power, when you think about how you are guiding and shaping stories, sometimes from behind the scenes. And so I set out to start a traditional public relations firm, I started my first firm when I was 25. I built that firm into a national award winning agency called C Fox communications, and then 13 years and I decided to close it down and start all over again, and happy to share a little more about that. But the story is in my new book, because I realized that communications holds even more power sometimes than we realize. And so now as I run a benefit corporation called mission partners, we think about the impact of words and even more than words, but the role that leaders play in advancing a healthy, inclusive society, we help them do that. So good and so helpful, and really a perspective that I don't hear that much out in the marketplace in the world, because people really don't talk about communication, as much as I think it would benefit them to hear about it. So before, you know, you mentioned that you thought it was important for businesses to not only make money but make an impact. Why is that so important to you know, business carries so much influence in any given community and society, obviously, in the economy, right? And so, when we are limiting ourselves to think about business purely through an economic lens, what's our profit

and loss? And what are we doing? And how are we thinking about the growth of that business, we're missing out on a major opportunity to think about the trickle-down effect of our work, right? That business carries great influence in how we treat our employees will be an experience that stays with those employees for the remainder of their careers, how we think about benefits will either you know, help our employees grow and scale or limit that growth and scale. And so we think about that very intentionally, every piece of business can be a force for good. But it comes back to how the leader how the board how the organization wants to think about using that power.

Laura 03:34

So that, and I know you mentioned that you share some of your background and beliefs in your book more than words, and in the book is all about communication practices of courageous leaders. Do you think that personal communication skills of a leader of an organization affects the overall impact of the company and how?

Carrie 03:53

I do and you know, there's no shortage of a shortage of examples of this? If we just think back over the last few years, and what it has been like to lead organizations through this incredible time of change and uncertainty and unknown, right, that so much comes back to how leaders navigated through that. And if we think back to all of those resources, you know, you you've got a listenership of leaders here, right? All those resources that any one of us listening or in part of this conversation could say, I found this from, you know, one source and this from another source. But the reality is, we were still navigating so much of that unknown, right? We had never been through an experience like a global pandemic, the way that our country finally started to deal with and reckon with racial injustice in our country, being a leader is hard. How we communicate is essential, right? How we communicate through those moments of uncertainty. There's no guidebook there's no playbook. And so the best thing we can do is think about who's going to be our friend and our coach along the journey and that's really what this book is about is making sure that you've got a trusted partner through those difficult moments of leadership.

Laura 05:05

So helpful. And I think for many of our listeners, they came up through leadership in the streets in a lot of ways. Like they have a street MBA. They're entrepreneurs that wasn't necessarily modeled for them. A lot of people like myself have been entrepreneur, almost our entire career, do you think are some of the biggest opportunities for some of our listeners to just improve their communication, whether it's with their team, or with their external audience?

Carrie 05:29

Yeah. So first, stop thinking about communications as a soft skill. Right? I think there's already a movement underway. And I would reinforce it that communications is in fact a hard skill, one of the most important skills that leaders need to know there's a new Harvard Business Review study about the importance of empathy in the workplace, and that it either starts at the top, or it doesn't really happen, right, that so much in the workplace can be grown from the bottom. And certainly if we think about new generations of employees who are coming into the workplace and how they are guiding and challenging leaders, but the reality is still sits with the leader, how the leader showing up with care, the courage to communicate the courage to lead through difficult moments, being clear in those communications. That's why communications is really a hard skill, not a soft skill, right shouldn't be written off.

Carrie 06:20

Yeah. So, I'll just even say for myself, like, clarity has been a struggle for me, because I want I'm feeling the room and I want everyone to feel happy and comfortable. And then a lot of times the communication can get muddled for somebody who like, and I think a lot of entrepreneurs are like that. They tend to be very much feelers, and they're intuitive for somebody like that. What are what are some of the ways in which we can improve our clarity? That's a huge opportunity for business owners such a great question. So first, don't assume that people get it. Be explicit in what you're trying to communicate, follow up, follow through on that communication. Brine Brown said it really well clear is kind, right, say it and then say it again, because folks might not actually be hearing what you need them to hear. I often ask, have you ever been in a room and communicated a message and or you feel the eyes glazing over? It is a really common feeling to think you're communicating, but you're actually not getting that point across. So communicate your message, and then actually ask for feedback. What did you hear? What are you taking away? What will you carry forward? Make sure people are hearing what you need them to hear?

Laura 07:27

That's such good advice. And yes, I think we've all had those staff meetings where all the eyes glaze over. And you think to yourself, I know I'm doing something wrong, but I don't know exactly what here. And I hear this all the time, I hear this from leaders, again, especially people who maybe started a business the business took off, and then all of a sudden, they're finding themselves leading an organization. And they're like, Wait, like, I didn't really sign up for this?

Carrie 07:50

Well, and that's the other side of it, Laura, is that many times organizations and organizational leaders are growing, they're growing their businesses as fast as they possibly can. And then at some point, they look at it and they say, where did it go? Right? Where did the heart of this go? Where did the Where did the core of our work go grew so fast that we lost it? Hold on to the core, right, there's a there's a great book called scaling of excellence that I just absolutely

love. And in that book, they talk about, find your core and scale around it, find what you are at your most excellent and scale around it. So that's another reminder to make sure that we're not losing the moment to communicate who we are at our core.

Laura 08:27

Yeah, that's such good advice, especially for mission driven entrepreneurs or organizations. Because that's I think, when we experience burnout is when we become detached from what it is that is our deeper why in the company. Right?

Carrie 08:40

Right, right. And what I worry about is any organization who says I'm not mission driven, what does it mean to not be mission driven? Right, we all have a mission, we all have a reason we started our companies find that mission, that mission, and then challenge yourself and ask What's that mission intended to achieve? And are you achieving?

Laura 08:58

Yeah, so it's interesting, because I think you work with so many organizations where that is such the core, right? And they're built on it. And also, I've interacted with so many entrepreneurs that like don't have a mission statement, or what happens is, is that in the marketing space, people are rewarded for the amount of money that they make, and that's all that people see celebrating. So, I think this is such a great reminder and message that if you feel like there's been something missing in your organization, it's probably that right? Is that probably that connection to a deeper mission. That's right. And you've heard the phrase so many times people say I'm just not very good with words, I'm not very good at explaining things or, you know, what I'm going to do is I'm going to hire an operator, and they're just going to handle that. So, what's your what's your response to when people say exactly that I'm just not good with words. Well, what do you expect to happen if you're not the one communicating then you've also got to put whatever happens is also outside of your control. So, if you are trying to guide and grow something that's got meaningful impact and you're going to be able to the effect of your work, you need to have a role in that. You're exactly right. There are many times we'll work with organizational leaders, and they'll say, oh, no, we leave this in the hands of our communications department. But what, what if right? What if you actually were to take a more meaningful role in it? Could you be even more impactful? Because you would be closing the gap between organizational leadership, organizational strategy and organizational communications? I think what often happens is the organizational leader believes that the communications department will have it all under control. But if there is space between the leader and the communicator, you can't expect it to go the way that you want it to go.

Laura 10:39

That's good advice. Is there anything specific that comes to mind that you've seen working with organizations where they just start communicating better, whether it's with their internal teams, whether it's with their external audience, and they have an impact that maybe they weren't expecting? Or something happens that they were like, whoa, I didn't know that communicating better could result in this outcome? I would love to share that.

Carrie 11:02

Yes. So as leaders, we know, it can feel very lonely at the top, it can feel like we have to know the answer to everything, we have to be ready for anything that comes our way. And I was working with a leader not too long ago, she wanted so badly to guide her team through a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative. And she started through that work. And she realized, oh, gosh, I don't have the answers to this. I feel like I'm in over my head. I feel like I'm saying the wrong things. I feel like I'm losing the trust of my team. I'm going to just shut this down. And then we had this what if conversation? What if you entered into these conversations, not having the answers? What if you actually didn't talk, but instead listened? And said, what's the experience of working here? What are you learning? What can we improve? What can we challenge? What can we do better? And when she changed that frame, to have moved from the solutions provider to the listener, everything became unlocked. The team deepened their trust in her, the team had a role to play in the work. And collectively, they made a bigger impact and a better workplace. Right? So sometimes it just comes back to saying it's okay to not know the answer. It's okay as a leader to collaborate in the process.

Laura 12:18

That is so powerful. And I love how you started that out. Because I think for so many entrepreneurs, as we become more successful, if there's a huge amount of loneliness at the top right. And you feel like you need to be able to answer all of the things, whether it's operations, or its marketing, or sales, or it's HR or whatever is ending up in your inbox, people are expecting you to be able to solve the problem. And that can feel so overwhelming sometimes I think in leaders, I hear that from other entrepreneurs that I know that I'm friends with and I have felt it so many times myself. And I love how you flipped it become much more collaborative with the communication? Do you think there's a way in which we could potentially lose our authority if we don't do that the right way? Or do you think there's not necessarily a risk of that?

Carrie 13:04

You know, great leaders, I think this is really, really where it comes into great leadership. They don't need to have all the authority, they may ultimately be accountable for the work and for the organization. But the best kind of leader actually, those lifts up their team to share in that power, right to share in the process.

Laura 13:23

Yeah, yeah. That's something that I think that is, is something we have to learn versus our nature, especially as business owners, is that what you meant by communication is the hard skills that are hard. Did I think that's how you put it, that it's something we get to learn, it's not necessarily something that we should feel bad about? Not necessarily like, intuitively knowing?

Carrie 13:45

That's right. That's right. They don't teach these skills necessarily, in this way, in your MBA or in your undergrad, right? We are learning this, you say it best, right? You're street skills. You're learning it by doing it. And if every day we show up, ready to learn, ready to challenge ourselves, what we know and how we operate. We are growing every day, we are improving our craft and honing our craft. And at the end, it really comes back to the same things. How are you showing and practicing care in the workplace? That's how you communicate and how you listen? How are you being clear in what you stand for and what you don't? Again, that's how you're communicating your issues your mind and it's also communicating through the decisions you make, right? Whether you're saying anything or not, but how clear are you being and what you stand for? And how are you showing courage at a time in a society in a world when we need courageous leaders? Now's the time to be practicing it.

Laura 14:43

Yeah. Before we wrap up, I'm actually curious too, you shared an internal example about communication. Has there been anything that comes to mind particularly in an entrepreneurship type of space, where external communication with customers audience had an unexpected or surprising or exciting result in your work?

Carrie 15:05

So think for a moment about Rei. And if you recall, Rei is decision to close on Thanksgiving. I, it was Black Friday, it was Black Friday. Yeah. So it is a moment when the industry said, Are you out of your mind? Why would you close your doors when that could be one of your greatest sales days. And they said, You know what, what's more important to us is our people and giving our people a break. And the reality is they still felt a greater increase, it didn't need to come in on that day. And so showing what you stand for being willing to take a risk in a way that other people might think you're out of your mind for a moment. Ultimately, that turned back around to their benefit, right and to the benefit of their workforce who is deeply loyal to working there.

Laura 15:56

I don't know if you've ever worked retail I have. But when you wake up on Friday morning, and you have to go to work it is. Nobody wants to do it. But you just feel like you get caught up in

this culture, right of having to rush out the door or having to go and get the deal. And I love that they made that paradigm shift, and then benefited from it. So thanks so much for sharing that.

Carrie 16:17

And that's a great question, actually, to pose back to your community. Right? What do you do on autopilot? What are you doing just because you think you have to be doing it in your workplace in your environment? And what if you actually challenged it? Right? What might you unlock as a result?

Laura 16:33

Yes, I've had to ask myself that so many times, even with like, how the staff meeting is structured as our company grows, like, is this really still working? Or why are we exciting people with this structure? Do we need to change it up? And I think continually asking that question is so smart and thankful that you have an amazing resource. So if people are listening to you, and they're like, Okay, I need more curated boxes, wisdom in my life, what is the best way for them to access your genius? And yes, I'm leading up to your new book, oh, you really kind?

Carrie 17:04

Well, missionforward.us is a place where you can engage in a weekly say right on the intersection of communications and life. Or you can access the book plus a ton of free resources. And you can tune into our podcast, the mission forward podcast, so and I think you'll find some good things over there Missionforward.us.

Laura 17:23

Awesome. We'll put it in the show notes as well. So thank you so much for coming here. Really appreciate you sharing with our audience. And I really encourage everybody to go out and check out Carrie's podcast, and you book. It is phenomenal. And I know it will benefit you in so many ways. And thank you so much, for being here.

Carrie 17:40

Well, Laura, you model all of these things well care, courage and clarity. You're a perfect example of what that looks like in practice. So thank you.

Laura 17:47

Thank you. It is definitely not nature, it is nurture. So I appreciate that. And encourage anyone who's listening to tune in again. Thanks so much, and I'll talk to you soon.

Laura 18:04

That's a wrap on another episode of the Mission-Driven marketing podcast. We hope our discussion today sparked fresh insights and inspired you to continue using marketing as a force for good. Remember, every strategy and story shared here is another step towards making a positive impact. And if you found value in this episode, be sure to subscribe, share it with your network and visit us at Joybrandcreative.com For more resources. I'm your host, Laura Meyer signing off until next time, remember the change we wish to see begins with us keep making your mission matter and let's ignite change together.