



**Episode 22 – Emotion at Work Stories – Anxiety, difference and minority groups
Chatting with Tony Jackson (@JacksonT0ny)**

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition. Today's podcast is the next one in the Emotion at Work in Stories miniseries. These podcasts are a much more personal account of individual's experiences with emotion or emotions and/or mental health in the workplace. Today's topic we're going to look at equality, and equality is a huge issue in the workplace. It's a topic that often brings quite intense emotions to the fore because people's views or opinions on the topic are often linked to deep values or beliefs that they may hold and/or parts of their identity. So my quest today is open both about his sexuality as a gay man but also the challenges he faces with anxiety. In our chat before we agreed to record this podcast he talked about how his experiences as a young gay man have informed the anxiety that he experiences and it's something that we're going to explore in our conversation today. We're also going to start to think about his experiences as a gay man within HR, because I think HR is often positioned as one of the ambassadors of employee welfare or employee wellbeing and they're the creators of things like equality policies and so on. So actually being part of a minority group in HR and how has that experience also featured and formed in his life so far. Anyway enough of me talking let's get him on the air. So my guest today is Tony Jackson, hello Tony.

Tony: Hi there, Phil.

Phil: Thank you very much for coming on the podcast today. Before we get into some of the themes that I've talked about proper, I like to start with an unexpected and innocuous question that we'll both answer, so is that okay?

Tony: Yeah, course.

Phil: Wonderful. So my unexpected innocuous question for this episode then is, what makes for a good walk?

Tony: That's a great question. One of the things that people notice about me for example if we visit a new city or a new country is that I really like to wander without a destination. If for someone the walk is about the destination then they might become a bit frustrated with me. So wandering around new cities, there's a wonderful word in French flaner, which is someone who wanders around Paris without necessarily knowing where they're going to end up. I'm just so excited by the sensory emotions around me sometimes in a new place, that wandering around is really noticing things and soaking it all up. On the other hand though I've got a fairly low boredom threshold, so if you ask me to do the same walk 50 times I might be more interested in the destination and getting it over and done with.

Phil: But if it's a new place, somewhere you haven't been before, the wandering and being a flaner would make a good walk for you?



Tony: I think so. Even last week I was up in Marylebone and knew that I needed to get down to somewhere near Victoria and as you do on a nice sunny day in London decided to wander along. I had plenty of time. I was really exploring and seeing what I could see and looking up and noticing the buildings and as always in London there are always things you've never seen before. I really noticed how content I felt when I was doing that, really very quite happy, really wandering aimlessly even though ultimately there's a destination, if you plotted the route I went all over the place without having intended to really.

Phil: I do like a wander in London. Similarly I was in Marylebone recently but my wander took me back to one of my favourite places in London which is the Inner Circle at Regents Park. That became my office for the afternoon. I had a meeting at around lunchtime and then I had a few hours to spare in the afternoon so I went for a wander to Regents Park. Took the long way to get to the Inner Circle so it wasn't like a direct to get there but, yeah, I do enjoy a good wander. For me a good walk is, even though I say my questions are unexpected obviously I know what the question is, so it's not that unexpected for me. My initial answer that I thought through was that I like walks to have pace. I like to walk at a pace to make it a dual benefit of yes I get to see things and experience what's around me, but also I get to do some physical exercise and to a certain degree rehab type stuff as well. But as you talked about wandering I've realised that I think it depends. There are walks with a purpose and I like those to be outside, I like them to be in spaces that are green and I like to be physically active with it, it's walking with a purpose. But I think there's other types of walk which are meanderful, if that's even a word, where it is just, yeah, wandering around and seeing where I get to and seeing what happens.

Tony: I was going to say an example of a walk that didn't go very well happened at the weekend. We got the dog last year and he's wonderful but slightly has a mind of his own, as most creatures do. I allowed him to go for a paddle in the Thames near Richmond and before I knew he was halfway across. It's not quite as dramatic as him being halfway across say at Westminster but still he realised he was a bit out of his comfort zone as well, so that was an interesting moment. That wasn't a good walk.

Phil: You mentioned that when you were doing wandering around from Marylebone down to Victoria that you felt quite happy, you felt quite content. Is walking a strategy you use to help you work with some of the anxiety that you experience?

Tony: I think walking with my camera, as you may know I'm a really keen amateur photographer, and seeing for example London through the lens and seeing what you can see. I'm very into street photography, it's not necessarily set piece photography, it's more what's going on in the world around me and how can I see it and how can I see it differently. I absolutely love that and I can walk huge distances when I've got my camera without even really noticing it.

Phil: What is it about through the lens bit that appeals for you?

Tony: I think it provides a little bit more of a purpose. I forget what's going on in life, I forget what's going on around me too much when I'm out there. So in the wonderful world of positive psychology some people talk about a third place, that place that isn't work, isn't home and is for you, that's my



way of explaining it anyway. Photography is very much my third place. So in the context of the question about the walk, my mind immediately went to that and I suppose it's walk with a little bit of reason which addresses the boredom threshold point that I mentioned earlier. But I do lose myself in photography and I lose myself in postproduction, I could spend hours fiddling around on light room to tweak the exposure and so on. Just really takes me to a different place.

Phil: I find that really interesting from a couple of different points of view. One is that, I'm now self censoring again, why am I sharing this, anyway we'll go with it. I was at an event last week and there was a question asked about mindfulness and for me there's a big misconception about what mindfulness is. In a lot of places it's a meditative practice but for me it's not about that, it's about attention and it's about putting all of your attention into something. That can be into your breathing rhythm or it can be into the sounds that are around you or it can be into whatever it is really, it's putting all of your attention into one thing. Whereas I think the general conception is that it's all about meditation and it's not about that in my view anyway. When you talk about your third place and getting lost in the postproduction and getting lost in the wandering around and taking photos through the lens, it really reminded me of what I used to feel when I used to run. I would just get lost in running, it was just me and my surroundings and a count of eight, that was my rhythm, I would count for eight and that was it. When people say what do you do for mindfulness I say well I run. Well you can't run mindfully. I say well you can actually because if you worked with the definition of mindfulness, being it's about putting all of your attention into something, then absolutely I am. I don't go to run to think about other stuff I go to run to think about nothing and just be in the running.

Tony: There's a link there to my coaching practice, I think as any coach should do, you're trying to create conditions of flow in a coaching session both for you and the coachee. That relaxed state of concentration is a mindful state, a state of heightened attention. The meditation could potentially be a route to it, it's one of the tools in your toolkit. One of the best things I've ever done is deciding to go on my detox retreats which I do every year, we can maybe come back to that later, but just as a headline. I've learned there that practicing meditation in different ways can be a route to a place where you have real clarity of thought, but it's the route to it, it's not the state itself. I completely agree with you about that and I completely agree and support your view that of course doing something which you really enjoy, and which is just right for you, for example running, that is mindfulness. So completely with you on that one.

Phil: I said it made me think about two things, one was my view on mindfulness and then the second thing it got me thinking about was I guess the restorative nature of it. I've asked is it something you do as a restorative thing because it helps give you that attention and you go to that third place. What other restorative practices do you tend to use? You mentioned the retreats as well.

Tony: Well you mentioned a few minutes ago the idea of being very focused on the breath and some of the techniques that you pick up by going on those sorts of retreats you can practice them even in a crowded tube carriage. So if someone is in the group with me that detests rush hour tube travel to the point of actually not really being able to do it anymore, I actually try and avoid tube travel during the rush hour. But if I am in that situation I find that some of the techniques that you pick up from



those retreats you can actually practice them there. Playing with your own energy, complete focus on the breath, to move away from any other thoughts or emotions that are going on and so on. The retreats aren't all about that but certainly I've got a few things in my toolbox as a result of going on them. I think restorative is a really good word actually and I'm not sure if I've even ever thought about it quite in those terms. Obviously there's a linked objective of going there if you're going on a retreat, even the word itself, but actually that's a really good way of framing it.

Phil: In my introduction then I talked about a number of different things, I talked about being open with your sexuality. I talked about the impact that's had on your anxiety. I also talked about being open about your sexuality within HR and then that links us back into some equality. I know they are different things but I'm going to bring three terms together in terms of equality and diversity, and inclusion-ness within that. Then there's anxiety in general. To a certain degree I want to give you an element of control about where we go. Of those different aspects or those different themes where would you like us to start?

Tony: I think in the context of what I understand you're trying to achieve with this series, which is a great series by the way, thanks for the invitation, is understanding what it's like to carry around with you a sense of difference. How your experiences in life and in the workplace can really tailor your instinctive responses to situations you find yourself in. I don't think it's necessarily the place to go off into the realms of psychosynthesis and all that sort of stuff which I'm really fascinated about and there are elements of that in my coaching practice. But what gets in the way and that classic coaching term of in a game, so how do you get your own way. I think that's the sort of place where I would start because for me I'm pretty robust about how I look after myself in terms of other people's reactions to my sexuality. It's not a sob story, I've got a story but it's not a sob story. In fact I've had a fantastic experience as an openly gay man and I was, let's say largely out in the workplace way before there was the workplace protections in place that there are now. Which is a really interesting experience, experiences that really shape. One or two of the things that happened to me early in my career which built on things that have happened to me in my teenage years and at university, of course I carry them around with me to this day. I'm 53 years old now. One of the things that happened to me when I was 19/20 years old comes back to me over and over, and over again, it was one of the most dramatic moments of my life and it was linked to this particular point. I think as you said yes there is a complexity and we need to narrow it down, but overall in the context of this series I think it's what gets in the way and how that shapes your interactions with other people.

Phil: Let's stick with that then. What does get in the way?

Tony? If we look at my current reality, so now running my own business, have been doing for five years "on my own terms" certainly my own boss, you would think that this becomes a non issue. In fact I find I think about the fact that I might be different to a lot of other people a lot more than I used to when I was in employment.

Phil: Really?

Tony: Because in employment effectively you have a level of protection whereas now if I go into a chemistry meeting with a potential coachee and they're using well who knows which criteria to decide which coach to pick, every single time I think about how open to be about who I am. And whether for example my sexuality or indeed any other way I might be different is actually relevant or irrelevant. It's something that's always on my mind and as a coach you want to be authentic. As a coach you need to be putting some flesh in the game at times. I had a situation recently where someone suddenly decided they wanted to discuss something about something that was going on in their workplace, where it would have been really bizarre for me not to declare my own sexuality in the context of what they were asking me about. The guy in a very good way nearly fell off his chair because he hadn't the slightest inclining from our work together to that point that I might have a different sexuality to him, and indeed nor was it relevant, but suddenly it become relevant. So I think that's been a surprise to me as well in terms of perhaps feeling in some way slightly more limited than I did when I was in employment.

Phil: I find that really interesting because the general narrative would suggest that as you alluded to when you set the context for that, that being your own boss would feel freer than being in employment.

Tony: Yeah, and in many ways it does. Of course there are two things at play here, there's the do I feel it's an issue and do I need to feel it's an issue? Because actually in most people's minds it isn't, but you never quite know and you have to earn a living, and I want my company to be successful. So that thought process that many people might go through with some type of difference or if they feel they belong to a minority group is at play and it's at play very regularly. Even with my most important repeat clients one or two of the key players I don't think would be aware of my sexuality and that's not because I've necessarily hidden it, but we haven't talked about it as openly as someone who's heterosexual might do.

Phil: As a heterosexual white man then, what you said has got me thinking is that something I consider? Talking about wife, children, does that play on my mind at all when I'm working with existing clients or talking to prospective new clients? I don't think it does. The only aspect of me that does worry about things is, I say only because there might be two actually. The main one that most often comes to mind is how open I am about some of the work that I do in the behavioural analysis and deception detection world. I do quite a bit. I work with different law enforcement agencies, I work with another organisation to run programmes in behavioural analysis and evaluation of truthfulness. I provide services, investigative services to clients as well but it's not something I talk about very often, because when I do it changes the interaction. Because when somebody finds out that I pay particular attention to small changes in language, small changes in posture, small changes in facial expression and I can then use that to get a read of how somebody might be feeling or what somebody might be thinking about something, it dramatically changes the interaction that I have. I'm always cautious about how open, again I don't hide it, if people ask me then I'll tell them, so it's not about deliberately withholding, but it's how open do I be? It's a really interesting dilemma I have with my coaching clients. What I've landed on is I'm really open from the start so I tell them this is what I do, this is part of my work, this is a key set of skills that I have. But what that means is that I will often see or hear things that you don't necessarily want me to know because you're not telling me. What do you want me to do with that when I see it? Do you want me to just see it and put it to

one side and ignore it? Do you want me to ask you about it? Do you want me to hold it to one side and then bring it in if I think it's relevant? How do you want me to play that? because there are times when I'll see and hear stuff that you're not intending me to see or hear.

Tony: I completely emphasise with that point and agree with it. When I'm talking about my coaching practice with many people I'll talk about the in the mix despite the fact that I've been in the boardroom, been the HR director, develop the coaching practice fifteen years, all that great stuff. I also talk about the extent to which I use my personal intuition and my firm belief is that if you looked at the most impactful coaching sessions I've ever run, it's where I've used that, harnessed it, found a way of making it relevant to the coaching assignment, and then actually taken the personal risk of going to that place, the personal risk as a coach. I completely understand that point. I think just to put a little bit of a different angle onto this, I think the risk is that if you're coming from a place of difference i.e. possibly coming from a place where people have treated you differently because of the way you are, the risk is that you put up your own barriers when there don't need to be any. People can see the world quite simplistically. A really good example which I think we've touched on in the conversation before is, I wrote a blog for a website called, Are You Coming Out, which is getting older gay guys and lesbians to tell their coming out stories, to help people who might be going through that process right now. As in organisational life, if there's a lot of people telling great stories there's a lot of learning in there and there's a lot of potential support and indeed inclusion in there. One of the key points I made in that was that I have learnt that you never stop coming out. It's exhausting, you do it over and over again, every time you meet a new person you are effectively making a conscious decision to come out, certainly in the workplace. I put that into there and a woman who I believed to be a straight woman, challenged me publically on social media about this point saying, what absolute rubbish you just come out and that's it isn't it. Which fascinated me as a response, instead of being interested in the experience of someone else, she was trying to deny the experience of someone else which is really intriguing. Probably a bit irritating as well but it's certainly intriguing. I unpacked that and explained to her and then she said I see what you mean. Well thanks for listening. The key thing is I know myself well enough to know I think that I can put up those barriers particularly if I'm feeling anxious or stressed about something. But if you looked at some of the things that happened particularly in my earlier years of my career, I think you can be forgiven for doing that as well.

Phil: Would you be happy, willing to share one of those? I guess the reason I'm asking that is because I think it will be a useful context to how you are now. You said that those experiences have formed part or at least been a part of forming where you are now. It would be useful to explore one.

Tony: Very happy to. My first ever job which wasn't in HR I was sitting in a team meeting and the boss, the team leader just suddenly turned to me and said, "I've been hearing rumours about you Tony." I said, "Oh yes." He said, "I'm not going to tell you what I've been told about you but just understand one thing, if I find out that they're true you're out of this organisation."

Phil: Wow.

Tony: He was referring to my sexuality. Of course, I say of course, younger people might not quite realise how recently it was that the protections all came in. The first half of my career broadly, I can



probably challenge that, I'd need to check the dates, but let's say roughly the first half of my career was without Employment Law Protection, so you could be sacked on the spot with no recourse. Now that does put a different flavour onto your work experience and when someone's that blatant it's almost easier to deal with I suppose. But there's more subtle stuff as well. In another job someone decided that before I told anyone about my sexuality they'd worked it out and kept dropping these huge big hints, thinking they were coming from a really positive place about I think I know what's going on for you and all that sort of stuff. They were on their agenda doing what they think was right for another human being rather than asking questions and seeking to understand. Because there can be a million reasons why anyone, we're not just talking about sexuality here, just in basic relationships in the workplace, are you on your agenda and then is that the right agenda or are you on the agenda of the person in front of you? Are you dealing with the person in front of you or are you assigning to a group about which you make huge assumptions and therefore you get it completely wrong with the person in front of you? But then there have been others, my dream job the one that really changed my career was arriving at what was Price Waterhouse Management Consultants in 1995.

Phil: So this was prior to any employment law legal protection?

Tony: Yes. Although their own policies were ahead of legislation, in fact places like PWC, of which I'm proud alumnus, but also I think you'll find the other large professional service firms, always tended to be running ahead of employment law with their internal policies. But I found out after I'd been there two months that the person who hired me had probably worked out that I was gay in the interview process, had spotted a potential problem with their boss, gone in and said I want to hire Tony, by the way he might be gay, he might not be but if he is, if you've got an issue with it let's talk about this now and then I'm hiring.

Phil: It wasn't seeking permission it was just...?

Tony: Exactly. But then someone who's in the team I joined told me a couple of months in that as a result of that conversation the overall boss who was of course the HR director, had in a team meeting said, "Oh by the way when's the bent bastard arriving?" Forgive the language to anyone listening, that's the language that was used. That's the HR director. Yeah, these things shape you. And little subtle things like having a let's say a pretty robust discussion with a fellow director as a HR director, and expressing strong disagreement with something, maybe displaying a slight bit of emotion about the thing that was the topic of conversation. Their response is, "I haven't got time to deal with one of your queenie fits." I'm not sure I've ever had a queenie fit whatever that is in the workplace. But just so dismissive of a different opinion and attaching it to the fact that you're different to them again. Those are the sorts of things and as I said earlier these aren't sob stories but this is life experience of many people, and there are people who have had much worse experiences than that. I think the first one probably is quite dramatic but I'm not carrying around a sense of grievance around them. I am carrying around a sense of difference.

Phil: How have those experiences and that sense of difference then, how do they play into the anxiety that you experience?

Tony: It's a huge question and I think my anxiety is just part of who I am. However, as I said earlier, the risk is that if you come from a place where you've in any way felt different and even at school it's really interesting, one of the things that a lot of gay men, bisexual men or women, lesbians trans people will talk about is other people picking up on a sense that you're different, before you even know that you are yourself. I've had dinner party conversations about this with friends who've said it's really quite subtle and quite profound. Of course it's something which you can't necessarily seek recourse within your family about, when you're growing up. So, and I'll choose my words carefully here but I'm just trying to make a certain point, discrimination and being different will work in different ways for different people, which takes us all into the realms of intersectionality. People of different sexuality can be discriminated against by their own family, someone who's of a different race, so for example a black person is unlikely to be discriminated against by their own family for being black, assuming they're in an all black family. But may well face much more overt discrimination walking down the street everyday or feeling that they're the only black person in a restaurant full of white people or whatever it might be. It takes you into the space and I hope I chose my words carefully there, because it's not a competition, trying to make the point of, do enough people in life and in the workplace really try and work out where someone else is coming from given the different life experiences they had? It doesn't have to be because you're part of a particular group, everyone's had different life experiences, everyone brings that with them to every interaction, to every meeting, to every conversation, to every discussion, to every disagreement. So why would people see things the same way? Surely that would be more unusual. Oh, gosh we all see this the same way, well isn't that interesting, how can that possibly be?

Phil: Yeah.

Tony: Sorry, I've taken on a slight tangent there but I think in my mind I was answering the question. I think it linked to anxiety, I'm slightly struggling to put this into words so apologies. As an example, feedback from a partner at PWC who I've been doing a lot of work for, I had this great job at PWC, I was asked to set up an internal HR consultancy for the firm itself with a charge out rate. It was just brilliant, it was in 2001, as long ago as that. I stayed in that job six years and it took me into all sorts of different parts of the organisation and really broadened my experience it was great. One partner was giving me feedback and I mentioned the context of what my job was, because as with any consultant what had happened was I had gone into a part of the business that I didn't know to help them deliver a people strategy. His feedback was in that context and he said to me, "I rate what you've done very, very highly but if I can say one thing I find you quite hard to know." I think that was me clearly choosing not to bring my whole self into that work relationship, because it was an unknown part of the organisation to me. Underpinning that might well be how they'll react if they do know the whole me. Probably not consciously because I thought I had a really good working relationship with them and I think I probably did at one level. As I said he rated me really highly in that feedback session, but he made this point. And at that point because I valued the relationship I completely opened up to him and said, "You know what you've hit the nail on the head, I think sometimes I am a bit like that even though a lot of people see me as this fairly outgoing externalised thought processes, happy to talk to anyone extraverted in many senses, not all senses by the way, person, but actually there was something missing." He'd really picked up on it which is quite astute of him, and when I told him he just said, "Gosh I'm really sorry you feel you have to be that way and I hope you didn't feel you had to be that way with me?" I said, "No it's just clearly I've chosen not to



go to a certain place and you've spotted a difference there. Well done and thanks for mentioning it and it's led to a really high quality conversation now." I was at quite a senior level at this point, he said, "You realise you don't need to worry about those sorts of things?" I said, "Well I probably don't walk around worrying about them but it does tailor maybe how I behave."

Phil: If I could just stick with that for a moment, was he talking about you in general, was he talking about your sexuality in particular or was he just saying I know the work Tony really well but I don't know anything about the personal Tony?

Tony: I think probably the latter but I think in his terms he was also thinking we often end up in the pub on a Friday and Tony's not there or there's some laughing and joking about stuff that might not be work related and Tony's got a "professional face on," in other words putting a barrier up, so not joining in, not participating at that point. He really noticed that. I suppose there's a calculated element there isn't there to how am I going to be here and therefore that's a lack of authenticity.

Phil: We were talking about a previous colleague of yours who you'd done some work with who said they really rated the work that you'd done, and in that particular time in your interactions so far he'd found you harder to get to know, is that right?

Tony: Yes, that's right.

Phil: It got me to thinking to what extent does everybody hide parts of who they are or choose not to share parts of who they are in the workplace? If I think about say the conversations I've had with other guests on the podcast I suppose as well, so for example when I spoke with Amy King about burnout. So part of that was that she wasn't aware that she was feeling or that she was experiencing burnout, but also she wasn't sure if she wanted to share that she was. I guess I'm using that from a point of difference, so she perceived that she was different in a particular way to others and she was then choosing not to share that. So is there something in that? Do you think in terms of is it okay for everybody to bring all of themselves to work?

Tony: I think it's okay to a certain extent, it takes into the realms of authenticity doesn't it and puts a red flag around authenticity. I'm the first to talk to my coachees about authentic leadership. In fact I was presenting to a group of leaders the weekend before last, we went into this place and talking about authenticity. The risk is that some people might think that authenticity is around unreconstructed unfiltered me, so displaying everything, da, de, da, de, da. Which of course certainly in the context of leadership but frankly for anyone I think there is something to balance the idea of authenticity which is, what is your brand at work? There will be some people listening to this who might immediately find that difficult because should you have a separate brand work and otherwise? Certainly in the first half of my career I managed my brand very carefully and that included being open about all sorts of things, but I was careful about it. It was a different version of me. I don't think it was an inauthentic though, I think it was just careful. I think that's okay in a work environment, I think it has to be. I can think of for example my husband and I were serious party animals, so at the weekend we're going through the clubs of London and indeed other cities. I'm not sure every single detail of our expeditions into different nightclubs was necessarily for the

workplace. But do you choose to share everything and how does it impact on you? Particularly if you're already thinking you might be slightly different.

There's that balance between authentic you and which versions of you are there? Certainly you can see even out on social media when people do talk and indeed in your series, when people do talk about the challenges they're facing you get a largely positive response, you don't get a universally positive response, there's always something else going on. I got a couple of thoughts on that. So for example I'm very resistant to anything that falls into the realms of all men this, all women that. And what I notice is that you can find people of either gender falling into the trap of making stereotypes about the other gender. It seems to me, and this is based on some employee relations experience as well, that being the minority in by gender, it's not just always about what it's like for the woman surrounded by men, it can be very interesting to see what the experiences for men surrounded by women. Again I'm choosing my words carefully. One of the trickiest employee relations cases I've ever seen was the experience of a man in an otherwise all female team and the precise dynamics that you'd see elsewhere were being repeated but just the other way around. Which is fascinating on one level and it's really disappointing also. I've had personal experience of this because there was some interactions at one point on Twitter where people were resisting quite strongly the fact that there had been an article in People Management about what's it like to be a man in HR, it was just one edition. There was some really strong reactions including from some women out on Twitter which because they were quite strong views I thought well it's okay to join in with some quite views in return. Because my point was you can't necessarily say that all men have it better in the HR profession, it may be that many do but actually are you thinking about Asian men, black men, gay men, bisexual men and so on and so forth and what their experience is. Or indeed frankly just any man, you can't make sweeping generalisations about it. It caused quite a hoo-ha publically and behind the scenes that I'd challenged back on this point. The point being we're dealing with individuals here and back to where you started with this thought.

The other idea when I worked at Macmillan I lead the HR function for Macmillan Cancer Support. I did a lot of work alongside that going out effectively as a volunteer into organisations to work on the work and cancer agenda. Given your question of how much does one reveal in the workplace, and is it okay to hold stuff back, and your example was an interesting one. If we talk about carers, carers don't necessarily self identify as a carer, they might just think I'm looking after someone. But actually they have huge needs in the workplace, they need a lot of support and I would be very surprised if any organisation could accurately put a number on the number of people in their workforce who were currently carers. Therefore people must therefore be hiding an element of their life. I don't particularly want to talk about the fact that I'm going home and my other half is having a real struggle with a long term illness or I'm going away and looking after a parent struggling with being widowed or living with dementia or whatever it might be. What do we do to understand the individual in front of us, what makes them tick? To make it okay for them to be whoever they want to be. I think the risk is that we start to go off on a crusade of let's all be our full selves in the workplace. Well not everyone wants to be, some people want to come in and do a good job and go home again. Back to my experience the thoughtful feedback that we've talked about from that partner led to really...I was very grateful for him going there because he was actually being very empathetic and I think he probably knew which conversation he was about to have. Not everyone is



as subtle or as on your side as that, because he was clearly on my side. I think the big thought here is, are you on the side of the person in front of you or are you on your own agenda?

Phil: You made that point earlier on as well.

Tony: Ah, I'm repeating myself, sorry.

Phil: No, sorry, my meaning behind it was that's an important point to make. It wasn't a, you're repeating yourself, it was a that's an important point to reinforce.

Tony: We're in the realms of assumptions as well aren't we. So back to that big 'i' word I've mentioned once which is intersectionality. I've given a lot of thought to this, influenced by one or two people in the charity of which I'm a trustee. We're not talking about this anywhere near enough in the corporate world, maybe in the third sector and the public sector. But it really starts to get you to think about the entitlements that you have and that actually you may well have a more entitled and privileged life "even as a white gay man," than maybe the person next to you who's a black gay man, who's got a complete different life experience. It's back to this key point that I like to get across to a lot of people whenever I have the opportunity including here, of don't assume that you can start to understand the reality for the person, ask the questions to understand the reality of the person.

Phil: One of my personal mantras is there's always more going on, there's always more going on than you may think or see or hear. If you work on that basis you're unlikely to find yourself coming up short because you're always open to there being something else and other explanations, other possibilities, other options and so on. I agree with you in that the authenticity, the uncensored authentic self is an authenticity, that you with no filters, no sensor, no consideration of others, I don't think that's what authenticity is trying to be, I don't think that's what authenticity is about. That's brutal honesty not authenticity necessarily. Is it okay though for people to keep stuff to themselves? I think it is and there is a risk that we bring whole self to work too literally or too far...

Tony: Or it becomes a mantra and serving which agenda. Because my experiences in life for example I think made me a much more inclusive person than might otherwise have been, doesn't mean I get everything right. Far from it. I think it's very easy particularly if you're in leadership position to get this sort of thing wrong, if you have the value we are open, well what if somebody doesn't want to be that open? Does that mean they're not living the values? These are quite big questions I think.

Phil: Yeah, I agree. When I then think about one of the original themes that I positioned at the start of the podcast that we were going to explore today which was around anxiety as a theme. So I would, and maybe unfairly, but I'll go with it anyway, I would link anxiety to fear as an emotion. What some of the research suggests is that when you look at reasons why people are scared invariably it comes back to they perceive there to be a threat of harm of some description. That could be a harm to their physical self, but it can also be a harm to their psychological self, so it can be a harm to their identity or their reputation or their potential future earnings or their potential future clients or their potential future prospects in their organisation. Those threats don't always have to be real in the physical realm if that makes sense. So those threats can be real like something's happening in the world around you at that particular moment in time, but you can also

feel threatened by something that might happen if I do this then what, in the if then, or if then kind of conundrum. I think what sits behind some of those things that you might want to keep to yourself is the insecurity or the unsure or the anxiety about what could that mean for me or what harm could that do for me or what harm could that bring for me or to me?

Tony: Indeed if someone is prone to anxiety, as I've realised at the age of 47/48, so five years ago, I put that label onto it which is actually quite a breakthrough to identify something. So rather than why am I feeling the way I am feeling, it's more ah my anxiety is at play. Which is quite helpful to have that label certainly for me. To build on what you've just said the way I experience anxiety is that those things which might be a threat feel very real. It's the flipside of the intuition that I use in my coaching, and we've touched on that already. If one has the ability to spot and notice things and draw inferences and pull it altogether into a concept that might actually be real, that can be a real positive. The same applies if it's anxiety, so you pull together all these thoughts and ideas and create a concept which is a really negative thought and it feels very real to you. If you add to that that sometimes often the things about which you are anxious or scared actually then come true, just as an aside it's probably not the right focus for this podcast but just as some context, my biggest fear as a child was losing my mum and then my mum died and I was a young man. The things you're frightened off actually then can happen therefore you can go into a real fight or flight place. Now if that is being triggered by someone in the workplace who is treating you differently or even being hostile to you because of who you are, then the risk is that you're in the grip, you have a stress response, it impacts on your performance, it impacts on that relationship, crucially you're not at your best.

Phil: I guess if we were then going to play with some psychological constructs then, so what we're talking about is we create a trigger associated with that particular thing. When I did 'x' I got 'y' and because of either the intensity of the emotion at the time or if that's happened a number of times that can make the trigger hotter as well. Then we potentially turn it into a script, we can easily see how this plays out.

Tony: Yes, and I'll add to that, back into the realms of psychosynthesis, the future as interference. A lot of psychology is about what has happened to you up to the current date that impacts on how you are and how you experience the world and how you respond to the world. Well we're introducing the concept of future events as interference. If the future event is something you're frightened of it impacts on your performance. So if I go into that interview to be HR director the first time and this happened and they say I'd like to test how honest people are just by exploring the things you put down as your hobbies, which is not quite how I'd interview someone but that was the question they asked. I put passionate about all things Italian on my CV. They said, "Well tell me about that?" I said, "My other half's Italian." They said, "Oh where's she from?" I said, "He." Now the amount of anxiety attached to using that two letter word, but actually feedback after the event was you did that with such ease that you made it okay for everyone. I shouldn't have to make it okay for everyone it is what it is. Next time you're going for an interview you think gosh how will they react if I do it again? That worked last time will it work next time? Will it get in my way of future progression, do I even get onto the list for the future progression within the organisation? So on and so forth. Your mind, which is back to your point, just starts to become your own worst enemy. If we're talking in any way



here about impact on your performance because it's emotion at work, then off you go, are you at your best?

Phil: How does the anxiety manifest itself for you?

Tony: Quite viscerally at times. It's mind and body stuff. In fact it's something I've been working on really hard over the last few months and I seem to have moved on, touch wood, to a certain extent, by doing a variety of different things. I certainly feel like I'm in a different place having had a more challenging year or so from an anxiety perspective. I work really hard on it. I experience it as I said, it can feel like mental overload but it can also feel like someone's got my guts in their hand and they're wringing them out. That can become quite overwhelming actually, so finding ways of dealing with that. Interestingly, well I think interestingly, if you ask the people who I've worked most closely with over my career, I think there would be a theme in what I think has been a successful career of there are moments sometimes with you, Tony, it feels like we're getting a stress reaction. Well you are. It can become so overwhelming that's actually quite hard to not display it one way or another. It may come across as different, it may even come across as withdrawing or it might come across as really violently disagreeing with something, maybe one notch beyond where you'd normally be in the professional world. I think if I look back I can think of, we're probably not even talking once a year, I can think of a finite number of incidences where I have thought my gosh I really was not at my best there. And if you plotted my anxiety levels on a graph those incidences are probably where my anxiety levels were at their highest.

Phil: That's looking back on it reflectively. So it manifests itself you said both physically and mentally, so physically in you feeling like someone's grabbing your guts and wringing them out. You described it as mental overload. So looking back on it now you can see the pattern between, when those one step beyond what a normal professional interaction would have been, plot that with my anxiety levels and they were really high. With the work that you've done recently, when did your awareness of the anxiety kick in?

Tony: Well the work has been about actually removing the causes of it rather than managing it.

Phil: Tell me more about that then?

Tony: Well I just think we're in a world where it's constantly bombarded with negativity these days. So as a specific example, we know Twitter and that would be a shiny example of how it can be a positive thing. I first went onto Twitter when I was leading HR for Macmillan Cancer Support and I was very much encouraged by the social media team to go onto Twitter as a campaigning mechanism, i.e. go out there with a point of view on things and they were obviously thinking in terms of campaigning on behalf of people affected by cancer. I had that as my Twitter brand, having something to say let's put it that way, along with a lot of other people who got things they want to say and some of them not very pleasant people who sit behind their anonymous accounts and so on and so forth. I had some really unfortunate interactions out there. I suddenly realised that I need to manage Twitter better and social media better. I'm now doing it completely on my terms which I'm not sure is going down too well with some people because I've halved the number of people I follow. Including some people who I love to bits in the real world but somehow it doesn't feel right on

Twitter. So there's the relationship with the real world and let's build on that. But also not listening to the news so much, not looking at the news websites so much. Not having news alerts pumping stuff out all day when I'm working at my home office, not having Radio 4 on in the background, having music on instead. Thinking consciously about where I spend time, thinking consciously about the type of literature that I'm reading and so on and so forth. All of them are quite small steps but actually they've had a huge impact. The other thing is back to the retreats, I work with an amazing guy there who is, it's quite hard to put a label on him, but something like a healer or an energy guy. I had some real breakthroughs with him recently as well after some really concerted work by both of us. So a combination of different things and everything just feels a little bit more level than it was a few months ago, a little bit more I suppose in control. Just not worrying about stuff that isn't worth worrying about, making that choice.

Phil: Was that the stuff that was out of your control, say for example the news that you would be consuming or the interactions that you would be having online?

Tony: Yeah, there is other stuff as well, it's just context. My father died two years ago, that brought back everything about mother dying. Then we had to deal with the estates, step mum living in the advanced stages of dementia, so on and so forth. There is all that going on plus father-in-law is not well etc, etc, etc. If you add into that a world and back to our topic, so we're linking together the anxiety and the feeling different or being different in the world, a less tolerant world than maybe it was a few years ago, well certainly it feels that way. That absolutely is a trigger for anxiety. Did we think we'd won a lot of battles in terms of it being a more inclusive society? I would see it actually swinging back away from that. I think you could argue that it is at least partially happened and the experiences of people from different countries, the experiences of people of different race and the experiences of people of different sexuality in the current world and in the current United Kingdom, are not, I don't think overall are as positive as they were five to ten years ago. It all starts to link together doesn't it?

Phil: Yeah.

Tony: This all sounds very dark. One of the things I really wanted to emphasise is that actually if you can harness this difference, if you can really think it through, I think it leads to, certainly led for me being a more empathetic person at least some of the time. As I said a more inclusive person, certainly I think a better coach because you bring these experiences into the coaching relationship, much more I think empathetic. So there is a real positive part to this.

Phil: You mentioned that the experiences help you be more empathetic, be more inclusive, how do you harness the anxiety to help you?

Tony: I notice things, what's going on, we're heading into the realms of Gestalt coaching here. Controversial. So for example I was coaching someone who by any measure was a success already and it's the sort of person that is the dream client for a coach. Chief exec, hugely successful, wants to get to the next level of performance, wants a coach. Well what's not to like? I found him very impressive indeed which of course you have to watch out for, because does that take you to a certain place in your coaching? So where are you coming from in your coaching practice? In one

session I noticed I was feeling anxious. As he was talking about something else I was just trying to work through well what is this telling me, what's going on here? I really tuned into that visceral stuff again and later in the session, he was talking about his new strategy and launching it, so a pretty significant decision for him. I just gently said, "Am I picking up any fear here?" He looked at me and I thought have I just blown it? There's my anxiety at play. And he said, "Actually you know what I haven't told anyone but actually I am very scared about this decision. I find myself chief exec, I am about to make one of those decisions which would sit on a company's timeline, looking back these were some of the big decisions that we took. It feels pretty lonely and yes I think you're right, there is some fear here." We then worked on that because of course that's potentially his interference and so how do we help him overcome that and help him be at his best and so on? He wasn't petrified and unable to act but it was there, it was an element. That would be I think an example of actually harnessing it and using it in the service of a client's objectives and it was a breakthrough for him in that coaching assignment. Quite a big moment for him I think.

Phil: Is there a risk in that, that you project that anxiety where it isn't and if there is how do you temper that?

Tony: Yes, there is and I was taught well by a guy, he's still my coaching supervisor, a wonderful guy called Sheridan Maguire and one of the many things I picked up from him when I was formalising my coaching development, was the importance of creating the right space for your coaching and that's physically and mentally. I am always way too early for a coaching assignment, I have always ensured that we're in the right sort of room for it, we're not going to be interrupted. I have as part of always being early, always created space to have a walk round the block a few times, back to our walking point. Cleared my mind, cleared myself of my stuff so I am, not sure if blank canvas is quite the right way of putting it, but you'll take my point. I think, yes, knowing this, and frankly any coach should or does do this, but not dashing in at the last minute feeling stressed and anxious and so on, then it's going to really have an impact on the coaching session. I would say the same in terms of how I operate generally. Despite the fact that I've got, against many criteria, an extraversion preference, if you look, and we're talking Myers Briggs I suppose here, on one of the features, one of the elements, I've got a much stronger preference for intimacy than for being gregarious. So in a party environment possibly all linked into this, how people react to me if they find out about the real me, because I've had some interesting experiences in a social environment as well as a gay man. You will tend to find me finding someone who I really get on very well with, in the corner with them for two hours rather than being the life and soul of the party. I have to sometimes really think myself into the mindset of going to a social gathering, when actually I think probably many people see me as the person who can work the room. I'm not, I'm really not. I suppose there is some dissonance there between different facets of my own personality and indeed therefore difference in how I behave at times. I have to really think myself into certain social contexts as well.

Phil: The whole big circle of extroversion, big circle of friends, knows everybody and that sort of stuff. Whereas I would say that I have one best friend and then a few really good friends and then lots of associates in that kind of way. Whether you do it on the big five or other preference assessing tool it would suggest that I am more extravert than introvert. I think I want to bring it together then. We have explored difference and what that difference has meant for you in different experiences and different times in your work life. We've then talked about how that difference can



link in with some anxiety and how those two things have combined and joined together at different times to form different aspects of the experiences that you've had. How that there have been some real strengths or benefits for you that have come out from those experiences around inclusivity, around the intuition and empathetic aspects that you talked about earlier on. Is there anything else then you're thinking, feeling or want to say around everything that we've talked about to bring us together to a close?

Tony: If we think about it in the context of the inclusive leadership or inclusion development sessions that I sometimes run, if someone was listening to this and isn't the slightest bit interested in anything I have had to say, hopefully some people will be, I think the important point is that the person sitting next to you in the office could be bringing a lot of this kind of stuff to the table with them, into your interactions with them. So certainly for a leader but frankly for anyone pausing to reflect, giving people space to go where they want to go, suspending your own judgement criteria about things, again to give people the opportunity to bring their experiences to bear and to be as open about things as they want to be. So appropriately open for themselves. Is just crucial. I think it really could unlock things if more people really worked on this and that's what we're all in business to do isn't it which is to create better workplaces, to help people be at their best performance regardless of what sort of measures they are, and so on. I just think that as with other guests that you've had, if people can suspend their own life experience at times, and I have to do this as well obviously, in service of really understanding the person in front of them, I know I have repeated that point, I think that's a huge learning point certainly. I think it potentially is a real differentiator as well in organisational life. Some people do this really well by the way. I've highlighted examples of where things haven't gone well, there's some fantastic examples of how people have made me feel extremely included, so let's remember to talk about the positives as well. There are some people who are very, very gifted at this, so can we increase the number of people who are gifted at this in service of having the workplaces we want to have.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you, Tony.

Tony: You're welcome. You've really got me thinking on this so thank you and thank you for guiding me through this experience so effortlessly because it's obviously a big topic. It's intensely personal stuff as well. Thank you for the ease with which you've guided me through it.

Phil: You're welcome, thank you. I guess some standard questions that I ask for most of my guests at the end of the podcast, is there any books or resources or videos, talks or places that if people are interested in some of the things that we've talked about today and trying to find out more, where would you guide them to go?

Tony: That's a really interesting question. I instinctively respond to the which books you read by steering people away from business books. Which works of literature will open people's minds to difference, to the experience of others? So for example one that really opened my mind was The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver, which I think frankly should be on the curriculum of every school in the world. All about the different experiences of people and the cultures in which they find themselves. A wonderful work of fiction and I learned much more from that than I learned from any business book, I can confidently say that. If people are really interested in the psychological side of



things I think the books that's influenced me the most in my coaching practice is by a guy called Bruce Peltier which is called The Psychology of Executive Coaching. It's designed for therapists thinking of entering the coaching world but can be read either the other way around or frankly by anyone, because it really opens up a whole load of different models and ways of thinking for you. That's a really interesting one. But I think the answer to this one doesn't necessarily lie in a book, the answer I think lies in conversations, in making space to really understand the people around us and where they're coming from. As we've already discussed in the behaviours people display as leaders and as colleagues in trying to create the conditions well, firstly of inclusion and also the conditions for the highest possible performance. This is what it's all about isn't it and I am a great believer that the more included people feel in the workplace the more likely you are to get high performance out of them and in the team within which they sit. So it's the right thing to do but also if people need a business case then they will think there is a business case for it as well.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you. Are there any guests that you would recommend that I seek out to come on the podcast or anyone you'd like to hear from in particular?

Tony: I think I've got a bit of a blank on that one I'm afraid. I might need to reflect on that.

Phil: Yes, if anything comes to mind then let me know. I think all that leaves me then is to say a very heartfelt thank you, Tony. So thank you for a) your time and b) for sharing your experiences, sharing your stories and being so open along the way. I have really enjoyed our conversation today it's been really helpful and really insightful, so thank you very much.

Tony: Thank you and you've got a good thing going on with the series. I am going to try to listen to more and more of them as well.