



Episode 14 – Emotion at Work in Stories

Phil Wilcox

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the condition. This is our first podcast of 2018 so Happy New Year or Happy New Year of listening to the podcast depending on when you are actually listening to this episode because it might not necessarily be in early January 2018. So I got to thinking about how should I set up the New Year because this is the first new episode that has been recorded for a while, the last new content that came out was a podcast with Dawn Archer and then we have done a couple of rebroadcasts since then so it feels like I have been off of the air for a couple of months really and I wanted to start the New Year as I finished the old one with my own reflections and sharing some experiences and then setting out what you can expect from the Emotion at Work podcast over 2018.

I am going to start with a story and I am going to start with the story of my 2017 really. I find this particular reflection quite interesting because emotion is something that I study in other people, that I research as part of my work, it's something that I engage with in the coaching work that I do and in the consulting and the deception research and practice that I get involved in and yet 2017 was a hugely emotional year for me and I talk about how emotion affects individuals but it also affects relationships and then it goes on to impact teams, organisations and cultures as well. For me, this year has been really really interesting from a personal perspective in the interaction between emotion and identity. So we as humans build identities for ourselves and those identities are made up of lots of different aspects or facets and one of the things that I really struggled with last year was that the version of me that I was having to be didn't feel like me. Now I have had that in the past but that was more kind of forced upon me in the context that I was in - I was told I had to behave in a particular way so I did that and if you want to know more about that there is a video that I have done and I will put the link to that experience in the show notes. 2017 was almost like this new identity was forced upon me, that I couldn't be the me that I wanted to be and that was for a couple of different things, it was through physical illness and through some chronic pain so I had a debilitating health issue over the course of last year, the reason the podcast was off of the air for a couple of months was because I had some surgery to get that issue fixed. One of the biggest challenges I faced before the operation and then post-op, but in slightly different ways and I will come back to that in a minute, was the emotional challenges that that then brought for me and how I felt like I lost aspects or parts of who I was and there were two bits in particular that really stick out in my memory and one of those is walking through the city of London, because lots of offices in the city have got glass in them. When I was walking along the street I was able to see my reflection and I physically stopped at one point to look at who was walking in that glass because it just did not look like me, not the me that I knew anyway. So I have seen myself walking in reflections in the city for years, I have worked in and around the city for the last decade if not longer but there was a point this year where I was walking along and I just didn't know who I saw - the way that they were walking, their gait, their posture, how they were holding themselves just didn't look like me and it caught me really physically and viscerally and it really drove home to me how much what was happening to me physically was affecting me because in my head I was able to kind of push it, not able because that's a lie. In my head I was working really hard to push the pain away and to push the impact it was having on me away and yet when I saw that reflection in the glass of the building it almost, I don't know whether the metaphor could be drove home or woke me up or pulled me out, it demonstrated for me just how different I was to the me that I thought I knew and that was the same thing that was happening to me from an emotion. I guess in a way psychological point of view in that because I was not able to do the activities that I normally do, so I love running, running is my third space as Sukh Pabial would call it, running is the place I go where I am just away from everything and it is just me and my running and if appropriate for that particular run it's me and my



competition against myself or against the times that I run or the speed that I can run at, and I lost that and I tried to find it in swimming and it just didn't work in the same way for me, whether that is because of the physical surroundings or the action/activity itself I am not sure but I felt like I was losing kind of core bits of who I was or core activities that made me who I was. I found that really tricky and tricky is an underestimation. I'm now wondering why I chose the word tricky because I think actually that is an underestimation of what it was, it was something that I didn't expect to happen, I didn't want to happen and actually one of my coping strategies was to avoid it really, avoid at all costs. There was a gig I was helping co-facilitate in Manchester and there was a pane of glass at the back of the room and I explained to my co-facilitator that I didn't like the look of my reflection in the glass and so she kindly placed a piece of flipchart paper over the glass so I wouldn't have to see myself when I was stood at the front of the room because I didn't like what I saw and so what I was trying to do in a number of different ways was hide away from it. I started to hide away in movies, in box sets, in listening to podcasts but my kind of strategy was to avoid it really and not want it to happen and I got to a point, and again I wrote a blog on this so I will put the link to the blog in the show notes, where I just felt like the emotion was just there, it was at what's called the suprasternal notch which is the little dip sort of at the top of your breastplate and before your throat, and I could almost just feel the emotion there waiting to pour out and it would show up sometimes. Sometimes there would be that outflow or outburst of emotion that would manifest it's way in either frustration or tears or sometimes a mix of the two and that blog, in particular, I found very cathartic, it was almost a way of letting it flood out without it taking over me and because I wrote that blog in the first person as well I found that really helpful, I found talking as if I were those feelings as a way of helping me work with those emotions and both of the things I have talked about there, both the avoiding and trying to hide it away and the reframing are two common emotion management strategies and again I will put some links in the show notes to some work by a man named James Gross into emotion regulation and he talks about five predominant emotion regulation strategies that individuals use, and for me the reframing of talking in the first person as if I was the emotion I found really helpful but also the other coping strategy that I used was to avoid it and not give it any attention. Just to deploy my attention in a different way which just ignored this set of feelings that were happening over here and as a practitioner I look back now and find it really interesting, almost doing like some meta-analysis point of view of reflecting on and then analysing my own responses to the emotion or challenges that I had last year because I found I had to work really really hard last year especially to find joy. For me there is like a distinction between, there is the momentary emotion of happiness so that moment where something makes you laugh or you see something that you really like or you see someone that you really love or to you a particular thing that makes you happy there and then in that moment. So there is like that momentary happiness but then there is a broader kind of state of contentment and I have been quite lucky I guess, in that traditionally I found that quite common for me to be able to find that state of contentment to be happy with my lot, to know that yeah life isn't perfect, life isn't great all the time, there are issues and tribulations and challenges and trials, the classic running your own business there are sometimes where the next month's money is going to come from but actually in the round I am content with my life and in 2017 I really struggled to find that, I really struggled to find that contentment and then what happened is that I got cross that I couldn't find it so it kind of added another layer of frustration. So I was already frustrated at my health, I was frustrated about the impact it was having on my life, I was frustrated about the fact that I wasn't able to see myself or be the me that I wanted to be and then there was extra layer of frustration that I was layering in on top. So looking back now on what I was doing and how I was doing it almost makes like an interesting case study for me to learn from for the future because I really didn't enjoy that, I didn't enjoy that struggling to find that level of contentment to being happy in the round because that was just something that didn't come easily for me at all last year.



So why am I sharing all of this stuff is the question that pops into my mind because I have just looked at the notes that I had for this podcast and everything that I have just been saying for the past 12 minutes or so wasn't on the list of things that I was going to talk about for today. So why am I sharing all of this stuff? I am doing it for a couple of different reasons - one because one of the things that I want to experiment with on the podcast this year is more personal stories, so what I loved about the podcast episodes throughout 2017 was that I delivered on my promise that I made to myself when I started the podcast - I had a mix of business leaders, practitioners and researchers talking about the role of emotion at work, that could be emotion at work in individuals, emotion at work between people or emotion at work in culture and I absolutely delivered on all of those three fronts last year, but for me what was missing or one of the things that maybe not missing but what I would like to add to that, there is another reframe for you, is talking with individuals about some of the emotion at work challenges that they have had. It doesn't necessarily have to be challenges it could be successes as well, so occasions where people have had to work with their emotions or work with very emotion rich situation or scenarios. So that could be about meetings that someone has had to mediate, it could be about personal experiences that they have had, I am really looking to get that individual perspective, in a way like as I am sharing now or have been sharing for the past 12 minutes or so. Talking about experiences that they have had, how it was for them at the time, how they look back on it now, what that has kind of told them or informed them about their practice because I think there is some real value in hearing how other people work with their emotions. Now I can bring some of the evidence-based decoding of what has happened whether that be about how like me, I was struggling with identity and how that works, whether it be about what it could have been that was triggering the particular emotions, whether it is the coping mechanisms in the way that people work with their emotions, that is what I can bring to the podcast and I can start to share some of the reasons or rationales or the research that sits behind what people do but I really want to add that aspect of what individuals bring.

So emotion at work in stories - I put a call out in October on Twitter and LinkedIn to say if you feel you have a personal story that you can share around emotion at work then I want to hear from you and I want to repeat that call now, if you are listening to this podcast, either what I have said in the introduction to this podcast or if it has triggered something and you think I've got a story I want to tell then I really want to hear from you. Now I have got the technology to be able to disguise your voice if you want it to be anonymous or I can use the voice of an actor type thing if you want it to be anonymous we can work with that but also if you are happy to just tell your story then I'm good with that too. Now I know that some people have put their hand up already and said I want to be involved in that and if I haven't been in touch with you already then I will be in touch with you soon so that we can get those podcasts recorded but this is something that I am looking to add.

So my reasons for sharing my story for 2017 then, partly it's as a way to say that I am willing to get involved in this too, so that's a small part of it, for me the main driver like I said in the blog that I wrote during the course of the year is I don't think this topic is talked about enough. I don't think there are enough people in the world that are saying I struggled and this is how I struggled and this is why I struggled and this is what I did. I want to get emotion at work something that we actively talk about, engage and work with and that's never going to happen if we don't talk about how we feel, so that's what is driving me to open the podcast in the way that I have. It wasn't my plan but we have so there we go. So I mentioned that I wanted to add to the podcast format getting more personal stories involved, there are other things that I want to add to the podcast format as well. We will have podcasts with multiple guests this year so there will be podcasts that will come that will have more than two voices on, so every podcast last year apart from one, and even then it was only part of one, only had two voices on. So what I want to do in 2018 is to get more voices on the podcast so we will have podcasts with multiple guests which I think is going to be a challenge of my



hosting duties. So as a host when there is only one other person to talk with actually you are more than just a conversation partner than you are a host whereas if we have got multiple voices on then I think that is going to challenge my hosting duties so I am looking forward to that challenge. Also we are going to be doing some live podcasts, so we are going to do two live podcasts this year, I have just decided we are going to do two live podcasts, I was going to say I don't know how many we are going to do but we are going to do two. When we are going to do them I don't know or where we are going to do them I don't know but there will be two live podcasts this year so if you want to be part of the audience for a live podcast then I will put a link to somewhere, I don't know what it will be as I just made it up, we will put a link in the show notes to somewhere you can go to register your interest for being interested in coming along to a live emotion at work podcast. We are going to do multiple guests, personal stories, live podcasts but also all the guests that I have had on so far have either been talking about things that they have done, whether that be research or work and activity or talking about existing kind of theories and concepts, so the other thing that I want to do is have more exploratory discussions and conversations. So where we have got practitioners or researchers coming together to talk about ideas or concepts or notions that people are positing for the first time. So it will be more like an embryonic discussion rather than this is what I did and this is how I did it. It's going to be much more of an embryonic discussion and the first podcast that we have got lined up after this one is with Nick Shackleton-Jones and Sukh Pabial where we are talking about Nicks created a new kind of model for how we think about memory and learning called the effective context model and myself, Sukh and Nick are going to explore that as part of the first podcast. So it is much more of an exploratory discussion and that is something that we will look to do more of through the course of 2018.

Finally then in terms of how else we will be experimenting with podcast format is we are going to get some old guests back on. Sarah-Jane Lennie is already lined up, so SJ was our first ever official guest and on episode two SJ and I talked about her research in Greater Manchester Police Force and she is now a year on from her research that we talked about then so I am really interested in hearing from SJ especially about how her research has moved on over the course of that year. So we are going to revisit some old guests to find out what they are up to now and how things have progressed for them since we spoke last. With all of that my request is going to be for you to let me know how these experiments go. If you think the additions to the podcast format are working brilliantly then tell me, if you think the additions or changes to the podcast format actually are making it worse then please can you tell me. Throughout these experiments one of the ways I can know if they are working or not is for you, the audience, to tell me. I can look at things like download numbers and interactions on Twitter and shares and likes and comments and those sort of things but what I'd really like is to get some feedback from you as to what you think as to how the podcast format evolves and changes over the course of the year.

What else am I up to, what else am I looking forward to this year? I am looking forward to doing more with Emotion at Work. Emotion at Work is something that came in to being formally last year in 2017 and I am looking forward to doing more with emotion at work both within the podcast but also as a business as a whole. Already we have got work happening where I'm doing some consultancy work on some talent programmes and getting involved in additional research into the way that people negotiate credibility and negotiate their identity in the workplace. I have got some really interesting work where I am coding some videos to do some behavioural analysis work to see what are people saying and how does that relate to what they might actually be thinking and feeling. So I have got a real variety of work coming up over the course of the year as well. I am excited for 2018 both from a personal health and wellbeing point of view but also from what the future of the podcast is going to look like and also what the future of my work will look like to.



Before I close off this episode of the podcast then, I just want to say some thank-yous. First of all I want to start with a huge thank you to Simon Leverton, Simon edits this podcast for me - one of the things I said about the podcast from the early days is that what you get to hear is unedited so we don't chop bits in and out or move bits around or splice between guests, one of the things we hold on to is what you get to hear is the natural conversation that occurred but in terms of helping fix my audio quality issues in terms of making sure that the levels are set appropriately, in terms of topping and tailing the podcast for me and just making sure that it is the best audio quality it can be. So a huge thank you to Simon for the work he does in editing the podcast. Also, a huge thank you to Ross Garner who is @Rossgarnergp on Twitter. Ross has been instrumental in helping me put Emotion at Work together, the learnings that he shared with me from his experiences both with his own podcast and with the Good Practice podcast has been just exceptionally helpful. I wouldn't be where I am without all of your help so thank you very much, I am exceptionally grateful. I also want to say thank you to Simon Heath because there was one podcast in particular where I made some huge errors with my audio recording and Simon had a friend who works in a music studio that managed to work some magic to get the audio quality up so thank you Mr Heath for your support over the course of the year as well. Also a huge thank you to all of our guests, I never thought I would enjoy interviewing all of you as much as I have, it has been a thoroughly thoroughly enjoyable, educational and informative experience, so thank you so much to all of the guests that we have had on the podcast. Then most of all thank you very much to you fair listener as I have called you a number of times over the course of the year. To have a podcast that is being downloaded, accessed and listened to as regularly as this one is, it blows my mind really and I am just really pleased and really proud that you like what I am doing, that you like the content, that you are finding useful and engaging and the message that I get from you that tell me how helpful and useful certain episodes of the podcast, as a whole, have been all mean an awful lot, so thank you very much. I wasn't sure whether this podcast would be any good or if it would be a bag of shit but it seems as though it is going well so I am incredibly pleased that that is the case. So thank you very much fair listener both for listening to the podcast so far over the course of 2017. I am really excited about what the podcast is going to bring for 2018, we have got some really great guests lined up already. I mentioned Nick and Sukh, we have also got Professor Cary Cooper who is the President of CIPD, we have got a recording with him lined up, we have got Sarah Taylor who is doing some really really interesting research into work and social care. So there are some really exciting podcast episodes that are coming your way. Without further ado I will say thank you very much for listening, the next podcast will be out on the 18th January so you can hear from Nick Shackleton-Jones and Sukh Pabial and then episodes will follow fortnightly after that. Once again thanks very much, thanks for listening and here is to an amazing 2018.