

CPA Australia Podcast

Transcript - Episode 31:

Shift your mindset – A survival kit for professionals in change with Cyriel Kortleven

Introduction: Hello and welcome to the CPA Australia podcast, your source for business, leadership and public practice accounting information.

Jillian Bowen: Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the CPA Australia podcast. I'm your host, Jillian Bowen, and I head up the content and social media team here at CPA Australia.

In today's episode, I'm so excited to introduce a CPA Congress speaker and a master of interaction and creativity, Cyriel Kortleven.

Cyriel is a much sought after speaker at conferences and events. Through his playful and enthusiastic attitude to life, he creates an open and informal atmosphere. Cyriel stimulates people to break their fixed thinking patterns, and inspires them with creative skills to boost their potential.

With 15 years of experience working in the domains of creativity and change, Cyriel has delivered keynotes to thousands of people all over the world, and is the author of four books.

Cyriel, welcome to the CPA Australia podcast.

Cyriel K.: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Jillian Bowen: All the way from Belgium.

Cyriel K.: Yes. It's quite a distance, but yes, I love to come to Australia. And this is my sixth or seventh trip, so we try to come over at least once a year.

Jillian Bowen: When you lose count of the number, it says either you're having a great time, or we have too many Belgian Beer cafes here.

Cyriel K.: It could be both.

Jillian Bowen: Could be both.

Alright. Well, let's get into the topic of the day. I was fortunate enough to see you speak at CPA Congress today, and it left me with many questions that I need to actually get more answers on, because you certainly open the mind after people hear you speak, and that is a good thing.

I want to start though, you raised something that certainly I am guilty of at times, and you were talking about change and the fact that people are actually quite fearful of that. Why is that?

Cyriel K.: I think that people like to stay in the comfort zone, because then they know what will happen, they know the result, so once they've built up a kind of pattern, that's also what our brain likes. We human beings, we don't really like a lot of change.

Certainly if other people are saying, "You have to do this, or this," if it isn't our own choice, then people are going to resist this, because they are afraid that they might lose something, something could go wrong.

And there are a lot of fears popping up. Most of them are not really real, but still they are there and they try to protect the things that they've built up. That's probably one of the biggest things why change is so hard, because so many people are resisting and trying to stay, and yeah, they are a little bit stuck in the old patterns.

Jillian Bowen: I know I'm guilty of that. I have to admit. Every time we do a podcast, I sit in this seat. This is my seat in here. Every so often, they make me move, and I'm not very happy about it. I feel quite uncomfortable. And so it does make sense. We find our space.

Cyriel K.: It's true. And it's not a bad thing. It's okay to have your patterns, but if you want to do something different, for example you, with the podcast, you want to get a totally different reaction from me, okay, in that moment, when you're standing up, something is shifting in energy, then it's good to have an added value. But as long as things are going well, please stay there. So my message is not keep on changing all the time. No. Change when you're not happy anymore, or when the logical way is not working, when you don't get the reactions that you want.

Jillian Bowen: Sometimes we want to change, but then these sinister little things come along that you mentioned, called idea killers.

Cyriel K.: Yes.

Jillian Bowen: Well, you're going to have to tell me more about that.

Cyriel K.: Those are probably one of the worst things, or things that people really know quite well, and idea killer, that was our expressions like the, "Yes, but, we don't have money. We don't have time. We've already tried it. It's not working in our company." And people are very creative in coming up with new idea killers, but the problem with them is if you want change, they immediately block the whole process.

So, if you want to be a bit more open, be a bit more agile, the first thing is, you have to get aware of your idea killers. Everybody is guilty of it. Everybody. And the result, is not something wrong with it, but again, if you want change, if you want to do something different, at that moment you want to explore new things. And the idea killers, they block us from exploring the domain.

Jillian Bowen: Well, they block us, absolutely. Do idea killers come within us as well? So it's not just someone saying that the, "Yes, but." And don't we hate the word, "But?" Always means something bad's coming. But can you have idea killers in your own head?

Cyriel K.: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think those are probably the worst ones. And I think it has to do with how you're raised, and your education, and depending on where you're coming from. But we also make quite a lot of assumptions in our heads based on the past experience that we had. If maybe I've been bitten by a dog, okay, at that moment there was an assumption in my head, all dogs are bad. So what happens, if I see a dog, I immediately will go to some idea killers. Oh, that's bad, it shouldn't be here. Not all dogs are bad or will bite.

And that's a little bit the problem with our idea killers. In some cases they help you, but in a lot of cases they block you from learning something new, or growing in your own life, because the assumptions keep you small.

Jillian Bowen: So the challenge is to try and unblock that mindset, both in terms of your own reactions, but also in terms of your acceptance of other people and their ideas. Now, I know you have three words, three magic words. This works so much better if you can see the presentation, because it is incredibly cool, the full manifesto, which we will link to in the show notes.

Cyriel K.: That's perfect.

Jillian Bowen: But the three words. I'm going to let you do it. I wanted to steal it from you, but I'm going to let you say them.

Cyriel K.: Yes And Act. Very simple. It sounds even a little bit like, you know that time when Obama was still there, "Yes we can." I think the Yes And Act is a very simplified form to look at what I call a change mindset.

So I've been working in the domain for almost 15, 16 years of creativity and you can make it very complex, but if you have to bring it back, you know do

something very simple, I think those three words will definitely help you to be more open, where the Yes stand for suspend your judgement . So that's on the topic of, can you suspend the idea killers? And dare to dream a little big bigger, because we also have a tendency, as people, to make our dreams and our goals quite small. So that's the Yes.

The second part is the And. Okay, you have your dream, you've suspended your judgement . How do you get there? And the And stands for looking from a different perspective to the world. So then you look from a different angle. There's a brilliant ... maybe we can also put the link. There's a very short movie, it's five seconds, from an artwork, and if you look at the artwork from one perspective you see the word No, but if you then switch to the side, then the word No changes into Yes. Just, you know the artwork is still the same, but by changing your perspective, your reality has changed. You look at it from a different perspective.

And that's also in the real world, if you can use the And, you have a problem, a client that's annoying you, but if you look from a different angle, you could also say, hey. Wait a minute. This client is giving feedback. He does the effort to come at us with a compliant. Wow. We should learn something from it. We should thank that client, because it's an opportunity to do something different. So the And is looking from a different perspective.

And then, you have to get into action. And I think we have enough good ideas around us, but what are you going to do with it? And that's what I call a nano-action comes in. And a nano-action is a very small step that you take. For example, you have 10 Australian dollars, you have one hour time. What can you do to see if your idea has potential or not? So, that's what I call a nano-action.

And the last thing that I want to share on the topic of the Act, if you try something new, in a lot of cases it might not work, because it's new. If you look at a child that's learning to drive a bike, it will fall a few times, and in that moment what the parents will do, is they will support it and say, "It's not a bad thing. Try it again." But what happens when you look at companies or somebody does something wrong and we say, "It was a failure," we immediately start pointing at it and blaming, and it's not good. But that person was trying something new.

So, to get the negative connotation of failure, together with some colleagues we came up with a new word, and the word is nearling. Probably-

Jillian Bowen: Nearling.

Cyriel K.: Nearling. You haven't-

Jillian Bowen: As if it's almost -ing. Nearling.

Cyriel K.: Yeah. Nearling is between the zero and one. So we think binary, we do something and it works, we call it a success. We do something, doesn't work, we call it a failure. But the whole area in between, the 0.1, the 0.3, the 0.9, that's what I would call a nearling. And you have to be proud of it, because at least you tried something.

Otherwise, if you always do the same thing, you will never learn something new. You have to learn something from it, maybe you've moved others. And we need a lot of nearlings in our life.

And the funny thing, what we discovered I think after two years when we were already using that word, that nearling, if you mix up the letters, you get learning. If you want to learn something new, you need to have a few nearlings.

So that's the Yes And Act.

Jillian Bowen: I love it. I nearling cooked dinner last night, but I ran out of time so I bought a barbecue chicken from the supermarket instead. But I nearling did it.

Cyriel K.: Okay, brilliant.

Jillian Bowen: I love this whole philosophy, because sometimes I do think that when we're looking at our current generation coming into the workforce in particular, they feel a little bit more protected, as though when you gave that example of a child learning to ride a bike. When I was a kid, I don't even think my parents watched. I think they just gave me the bike and pointed to the street and off I went. I do remember at about the age of three getting into a lot of trouble for riding my little tricycle around the block and not telling them I was gone. But that's what we did. We took risk.

And the world has changed, it's got more complicated. And now, when a child goes to ride a bike, generally there's about 20 people standing there and going, "Are they going to fall? Are they going to fall? Are they going to fall?"

And do you think this has contributed to this change in our mindsets?

Cyriel K.: Yeah. What we see, because the world also got a lot more interconnected, so you know say 10, 15, 20 years ago you got the local news, and you knew a little bit what was happening in world, but the world is changing so fast that you know we think that we have to be aware of everything.

And there is so much in terms of content, you don't know what to believe anymore. And I think that's one of the reasons why parents, but also in companies, people are trying to protect the things that they know. So we've built a lot of control mechanisms, and we think that we have them in control, but that's not true. Things are changing so fast.

You better get an attitude of being more open and agile and learn your children, but also your employees, to be opening in and there to experiment again, and try some nano-steps like a child. A child just does things, it suspends its judgement . It's trying new things. Yeah, that's the way how it's learning.

Jillian Bowen:

Well, you talk about people having a giga-dream. Explain that to me.

Cyriel K.:

Yes. That's the opposite of what I would call the nano-actions, where the nano-action is very small thing that you can try out. At the other side is the giga-dream. What's the giga-dream? You have all the money, you have all the time, you have all the support, what would your dream be?

And I studied economics, so I know that we need to have business plans, and it has to be smart, and realistic, and we need those kind of elements a bit. I think next to all those plans, can we also have the dream alive? If you look at the companies that are doing really well, they have a dream that motivates people, that really gives you energy. If you look at mission statements from a lot of companies, a lot of them are "We want to deliver high value to our customers," and all kind of words that don't say a lot. But if you can make it more concrete and make it big, "This is what really want to achieve," yeah, it might help people to go a step further and apply some nano-steps to get there. So in your minds, make the dream a little bit bigger, because implementation will be smaller anyway.

Maybe I can give a short personal example that might help. A few years ago I decided I wanted to become a professional speaker. And one of my giga-dreams was, okay, Belgium is quite small, I can do some work in the Netherlands, but they're still quite small. So I was thinking, I want to become an international speaker. And I thought, what's my giga-dream?

And at that moment, the giga-dream in that moment was, wait, if I can give a presentation at the other side of the world, that would be cool. And Australia is already quite far, but there is a small country a little bit further, New Zealand. And I was thinking, if I can give a presentation in Belgium, and I can give a presentation in New Zealand, wow, then my international dream is a lot easier, because all the other countries are in between. That was my reasoning.

But that was my yes, my giga-dream. But I didn't know anybody there. I didn't know one person in New Zealand. So then, I was looking for alternatives. How can I get in touch with the Kiwi? And then, wait a minute, we have LinkedIn. And with LinkedIn you can do an advanced search, and I typed in New Zealand, creative and innovation, as keywords. And then you get a list of thousands of people who have that in their profile.

I took the first 10, probably the most relevant ones. And I've sent a personal email to those 10 people. "Hello. I'm Cyriel from Belgium, creativity expert. I'm coming to New Zealand. Can we have a coffee or a beer?" What happened is

from the 10 people, five replied. With a few of them we had a few Skype calls. And then after a while, I got two assignments out of it. So from scratch, I don't know anybody, suddenly, three months later, I was working in New Zealand.

And since then, I've built up my network, and that's the reason why I'm coming to this region, now for the sixth or seventh time. And that's for me the Yes And Act in action. I had a big dream, I looked for alternatives and I acted. I took a lot of nano-steps, sending an email, and building up like that.

Jillian Bowen: Well, I do have to clarify this for some of our overseas listeners who think that there's only a handful of people in Australia or in New Zealand and that that wasn't actually that complicated. There are still four million people in New Zealand.

Cyriel K.: That's true.

Jillian Bowen: I almost made a New Zealand joke and my partner is a Kiwi and I went, "If he listens to this, I'll be in trouble." So I'll just stop right there.

Cyriel K.: It could be a nice nearling, but we better stop it here.

Jillian Bowen: It was nearling a joke, and a very bad one at that.

Well, I love that story, and it says a lot about you. I think that you may have been born, possibly, with a fairly good mindset, but that doesn't mean that other people can't change their mindset as well.

And it seems that part of that is opening their mind up to having new ideas, and letting that creativity flow. I believe ... I'm going to put you on the spot ... that you have quite a simple method that people can follow to triple the number of ideas that they're having. If I promise you a beer afterwards, will you share it with us today?

Cyriel K.: Brilliant. Yes. Absolutely. One way, and that's in the Yes part, a lot of people find it quite difficult to suspend those idea killers, because we're using them so much, and certainly also in meetings they pop up all the time, so what we've done is we've created some beer coasters. So I can use the beer afterwards, very good. And we have a beer coaster with two sides. And I'll make sure I also put a link, because you can download a poster with ...

At one side, the idea killers, so all kind of expression like the, "Yes, but" and things. And on the other side are, "Hey, let's give it a try. We'll see if we can find budget." And an exercise that you could do, and I recommend that you give it a try, called The Three Minute Exercise. In your next meeting, say you have 10 agenda points, please nine of them use logical thinking. Make the decisions what you normally do, I'm not the Yes And guy. You have to watch the movie if you want to see somebody who said, "Yes and," all the time. I'm not that guy,

but maybe, there is one agenda point where you could use some creativity, or the logical way is not working.

At that moment, you take the beer coaster, or you print the poster, put it in the middle of the table and you say, "People, for three minutes, no idea killers. Everything is possible," and you go in a Yes And mode. If there is somebody during the three minutes who is saying, "Yes, Cyriel, but we've already tried a few times," you can take the beer coaster and like in the European soccer, you can give a red card to the person.

Jillian Bowen: I honestly thought then you are going to throw it at me, which I thought that it's like so much fun, and this got even more exciting. I'm going, "I'm doing this," but no.

Cyriel K.: But it helps. It helps. It's a very playful way to make it a little bit easier for people to also come up with the crazy stuff. And then after the three minutes, people will think, "Yeah, but we have a lot of crazy ideas in here." You say, "Okay. We suspended our judgement. Can we use little parts of it?" Because that's also something where creativity or brain storming sessions go wrong, is that people think that they have to apply the whole thing. No, you can take little pieces from all the ideas that you gathered. Put them together, and I'm quite sure that after the three minutes, that you're amazed how many things are possible.

And I think this is a way to double or triple the number of ideas that you normally have. And it takes three minutes. I've never met somebody who said, "I'm not going to give it a try." You know, introduce it as an experiment. And yeah, I would say don't believe me, but in your next meeting just try it, see if works.

Jillian Bowen: Cyriel. We are nearing out of time. And that's not going to get old and boring at all, is it?

I'm just going to enjoy that probably up to the point of having to do it on my own, because no one's going to let me in the room anymore because I love it. Yeah, but it is probably the best term I have ever heard.

Unfortunately we are actually out of time. We're not nearing out of time. We are out of time. It has been an incredible opportunity, both to hear you speak today at CPA Congress, and to speak to you further, now. I may actually end up wanting you online, because I still probably have a hundred questions I could ask you.

You have an amazing website as well, which we're going to include. All the details we've talked about today and that website itself in the show notes.

If you'd like to find out more about Cyriel, download the transcript for this episode and access further resources, go to www.cpaaustralia.com.au/podcast. Make sure you never miss an episode of the CPA Australia podcast by subscribing on iTunes or Stitcher.

But, for now, until we speak again, Cyriel, thank you so much for joining us on the CPA Australia podcast.

Cyriel K.: It was my pleasure. I'll be back.

Outro: Thanks for listening to the CPA Australia podcast. To download the transcript and find more information on today's episode, visit www.cpaaustralia.com.au/podcast/31.