

CPA Australia Podcast - Transcript

Michelle Webb: Hello and welcome to the CPA Australia Podcast, your weekly source of business, leadership, and public practise accounting information.

Hello everyone, and welcome to the CPA Australia Podcast. Today's episode features Clare Mann, managing director of Communicate31 and Tao de Haas, registered clinical psychotherapist, social ecologist and executive coach. They will be discussing team building, mentoring and coaching in the workplace.

Clare is a renowned psychologist, bestselling author and existential coach. Her expertise in leadership, communications and psychology has led her to be one of the most sought after psychologists in Australia. Her unique style of communication enables her to make complex issues simple and immediately applicable to everyday problems. In addition to his other roles, Tao is also a published author and is the co-author of Leadership is Upside Down. For many years he has presented training programmes specifically for accountants and accountancy firms, including KPMG, Ernst & Young, and PWC. With well over 30 years' experience, Tao's great passion is to help enrich people's lives personally and professionally. He specialises in emotional intelligence, effective communication skills, conflict resolution and management, and leadership development.

Thank you both for joining us today.

Clare Mann: Good to be on the line.

Michelle Webb: All businesses need a blend of people and skills. Employers and employees, however, may have different expectations of the working relationship. Team building, mentoring and coaching are essential elements to helping businesses derive the best out of each employee and for beneficial working relationships. Teams are a powerful vehicle for enhancing productivity, creativity and empowerment. Every individual in the team needs to feel that they are doing a good job and is a valued part of the team. In practical terms, how can managers achieve an effective work team?

Tao de Haas: What a great question, and I think that it's probably the most important question that we can start with because it really sets the theme for this session. I think it's really important to start with a bigger picture. To put it really simple, great teams have great managers who have a high level of people skills, communication skills and emotional intelligence.

I often turn the question around. How can teams work effectively with a manager? That's doing the whole thing upside down. I'll give you some context. Like the Gallup Organization's poll says that only 29% of the workforce is fully

engaged. Only 29. That doesn't mean just turning up, it actually means putting their time and doing their job and are actively involved in contributing to a team.

Just imagine that 54% of employees are not engaged at all. They just turn up, but they're not engaged. Worse still, Gallup is showing us that 17% of employees are actively disengaged. Now, what does that mean? It means they actively work against the organisation. Now imagine how costly that is for morale, culture, for activity, and of course, the bottom line.

It's a fascinating thing that often we look at what can the manager do and often turn it around, which is what does a manager need to do to start with him or herself in the first place? Because, in my experience, it's fascinating. I go to an organisation, I think, "Where do they learn to disengage people so well?" I know, also, that 79% of employees quit their job because they don't feel appreciated. 75%, quit because of their manager. You can have wonderful individuals in a team that actually want to give their best, and somehow managers, a lot of managers and I've see it, I've witnessed this, I've worked with them, do their best to somehow disengage their staff. I find that really, really disconcerting.

Managers need to be doing a lot more in order to engage the employees. I think the most important thing for that is, how do they learn to do that? For example, let me give you an example, I'll give a metaphor. Just imagine an orchestra. An orchestra, we know, works best if the individuals within an orchestra really want to do their best for their manager, for their conductor. That's what creates the magic. They're not just turning up. Yes, a lot of orchestras just turn up and they do their job and they go home again, but the magic really gets created depending on the conductor.

You can hear it. You can actually hear the difference between the piece of music that is conducted by a conductor where people really want to do their best to work as a team, to work as an orchestra, because of the conductor, because ultimately of the manager.

There are three words that I want to sum this up is like we need ... The manager needs to engage, engage, engage. Engage with individuals within the team. Now, we're going to talk more about that. It's not that even so much about what a manager can do in order to make, for example, the team work better. The job starts with the manager him or herself. I often say, "Gee, gosh. Things have changed since I've changed as a manager."

That's why often the work is neglected because that's the most important part. As I've said before, a lot of managers, and I can almost say most, they almost did a course in how to disengage people, how to ignore basic and individual needs, how to disregard personality difference. People say everyone is different. I go, "Okay, tell me about the differences." "Well I don't really know." That's really important.

If you want to disengage people, make sure to micromanage, be a fault finder, create stress as possible, create a toxic environment. I'm also disappointed how many organisations I see where the managers actually create quite a toxic environment. That's how I like to start answering the question and let's explore that further.

Clare Mann:

It's interesting what you've been saying there, Tao, is what it is they actually they do to disengage. I'm of the vintage you are, where I remember what used to be called personal management, for instance. It turned to human resources. Now, whilst that was actually a very wise thing to do if you've got shareholders and you're trying to measure and compare and be productive, what it did was to make people feel they're part of the machine. They're actually dispensable. They're comparable. They can be changed and bargained with in many different ways.

I think it did something to the human animal is what is to an organisation a human resource is to an individual their career. In terms of engaging people, I see so many times managers feel this is an extra job they should be doing, and something that they must make time for their staff and they put on that hat, and yet engagement happens all the time, is talking to people, real people. Of course, that requires a level of emotional intelligence which, no doubt, we're going to get a move into.

Tao de Haas:

Absolutely and I think that ... And we talk about managers, and of course, I give them a bit of a hard time because they're not very aware of that. I think also that managers are under the pump. They're also tied to generally do the best they can and that is great. Do the best you can. The things is, you can do better when you have specific skills as a manager, even if you are under the pump. I think a lot of stress is created in a way unnecessarily. The more skillful we are, the better people skills we have, the less stressful it will be.

For example, we often talk about team building. Team building exercise. I must declare a bias. I'm actually quite allergic to that term. Team building, let's build a team. Often, when there is team building, one of the first thing ... And Clare, I'm sure you noticed as well, is where people say, "Where's my manager? Where's the leader? Where are the people that are supposed to lead us?" Somehow you feel that this whole team building, "Fix my team."

Now, when I go get a phone call and get, "Okay, come and do some team building." I always think, and I might even say, I'm not a part of glue. I can't glue your team together with an exercise. What it comes really down to is where we, as individuals in the team, work together and that is very much led by the conductor or the manager.

Basically, let's debunk this whole team building myth. Now we have this management speak, "There is no 'I' in team." Well, there is an I in team. Maybe it's not in the spelling, but a great team consists of individuals starting with an I, a me, an I. I am part of a team. You are part of a team. We are individuals that

work towards a common goal. A team works well together when we achieve that goal as individuals who are committed, engaged and motivated.

This whole nonsense there is no I in team, just try to tell to people, say, "Look, the team's important, but you are not important. You are not really valued. You don't really matter. The team is what matters." Well, tell that to an orchestra. Tell that to a football team. See how you go with that. When the individual is engaged, and when the manager pays the attention to the individual. In other words, start to work with the potential of each individual, that's when you have a lot of individuals creating a team.

The manager also needs to set the right culture, the environment, have clear goals. Again, coming back and we say some about this is we have excellent communication skills and engagement skills. There's a couple of things that we can do about that, but I just wanted to even debunk this whole myth to start with a team. There's no I in team. Yes, there are lots of Is in the team.

Unless we turn our thinking around, even our team building initiatives will be very, very limited. A high performance culture will get performing teams where individuals are engaged, and I can't say it enough. Engagement, what does engagement mean? It means each individual. Not just a team feeling valued, important, recognised. Their input is appreciated. Often, people say it is, but it's not. Act it out. Words are cheap. People do not automatically engage because they have to work together with other people.

Clare Mann:

Tao, I could not agree with you more whole heartedly. We are all different I's, who for us, of course, it is our career, our identity, and we come into a social setting. I know we've had big conversations about this. People are actually hardwired for empathy and social engagement. Yet, we set up environments often that are purely based on competition and we do not get the best out of people. That's not anecdotal stuff.

Over 400 studies have shown, and by the right of [inaudible] in schools and in workplaces, often one person will win at a competition, but the actual workforce does not. Recognising and celebrating their individual contributions is really important.

I like what you said is how do we skill managers to bring out the best in people? And it does come down to communication. That's the foundation of everything. To be having the conversations that matter requires self-awareness, is, "What is my part to play in everything I create in this group of people, all with individuals?" There's active listening skills, checking out that what you intended is, "How does that come across that way?" Being curious and open-minded that maybe jumping to conclusions about what people's intentions are that work with you are not exactly what they meant or it's come across in a wrong way.

This, of course, requires a lot of emotional intelligence, which is about self-awareness, an ability to be self-conscious enough to put your hands out and say, "Look, I don't always have the answers," and be able to deal with conflict. Conflict shouldn't actually get to that stage.

I have a bit of an idea that so much of the complaining that happens to HR departments is because people are afraid to be self-conscious enough to talk about the effect of other people's behaviour or something they've said or to check it out with an open mind, and so it suddenly turns into a real problem where it becomes an official thing to sort out. We don't, within a team context, have a satisfying community if people are rushing off and just constantly relating to policy.

Tao de Haas:

Clare I so agree with you and I see this all the time. The fear of conflict. I used to work for a conflict resolution network many, many years ago. There was this great saying, "Conflict, ah! What an opportunity." If we can see conflict as an opportunity where we can actually start dealing with things that may have come underground and we can bring it to the forth, then we can actually deal with it. That fear of conflict.

Conflict can be extraordinarily constructive. Of course, it can also be very destructive. Very basic conflict resolution skills for any manager or leader, I believe are actually essentially. Ignoring it because everyone gets so scared. When you start creating part of your conflict resolution culture where when things come up there can be taken into relationship. They can be talked about. It can be resolved. Of course, not all conflict can be resolved. Otherwise, I'd be sitting in the Middle East right now. You can't. Important and also another point that you make, Clare, was about the individuals and individual differences. When we have team building exercise, "Let's build this team building exercise." We're running around on logs in the water, see the first one that falls off, then we can have competition of the person that stays on the longest. That's great if you're an extrovert. But if you're an introvert you go, "A team building exercise? Please, spare me. I'd rather start eating glass right now."

Then we think team building, but already people ... A part of your team is already disengaged by the minute you even start mentioning the word team building. There has to be different approaches. Team building is not a panacea. Outsource your team building, I don't think is the right thing either. I think what it comes down to is really what we need to talk about also is how do we engage the individual more.

Michelle Webb:

How important is coaching and mentoring compared with other forms of staff development?

Tao de Haas:

Oh, I think it is essential. Of course, I would say that as an executive coach. It's essential because coaching is about having ... Again, the whole idea of coaching is misunderstood. Mentoring is misunderstood. My earlier statement which is, team's effectiveness depends on the individual engagement. Coaching and

mentoring have a very, very essential role to play in the development of that. It plays a very important development of the individual.

When we have coaching, I know maybe some people listening now, managers go, "Oh, oh my goodness. More work and now I've got to learn end conflict resolution skills and I've got to up my emotional intelligence and my communication skills. Now I have to find ways to learn how to coach better as well?" Well, yes. As a manager, you're far more hands on than, for example, a leader. Also, we need to just have a look at the different between coaching and mentoring. I think coaching is essential. Coaching gives you great opportunity to engage, for the coachee and the coach to work out what are some of the issues, what we both can be doing better? A lot of coaching goes wrong because we're focusing on so-called weaknesses, what we still need to work on, so it's actually a lot of people see coaching as a writing session after a performance development review. That's not what coaching is about. That is berating someone. Coaching is really, really important.

Also, just a difference between - a lot of people get this mixed up - coaching and mentoring. Coaching is very much helping the person, often through a series of very powerful questions that come up with their own answers. It's not telling them what to do. That's the difference. We can have skills training and we can have development. Skills training is when we instruct. Coaching is far more based on the other person coming up with their own answers. Coaching is really helping to develop the individual.

Mentoring, for example, is slightly different. I can go to an organisation I don't know anything about what they are doing and I can still coach that individual in terms of, for example, their management and leadership skills. Coaching generally is someone generally older that actually will teach, be their mentor in a particular area. For example, if you're in the finance industry, in a particular area of the finance industry then that person has experience in that. You teach, they hold your hand, they move forward, especially in terms of skill development, not so much personal development. That answers your question in terms of coaching, how important is it? I'd say it's essential.

Clare Mann:

I think neuroscience is catching up with common sense and actually showing us the importance of coaching in the workplace. I'd like to share I think to the discussion now is something that I found enormously valuable, a book called 'The Success Zone'. I remember, Tao, we've talked about this ourselves is, and they actually use an example to understand the difference between a good coaching and lack of coaching.

As you are listening to this podcast ask the question, "Did I have a favourite teacher?" Some people will say, "Yes, I did." Then if we look at those qualities and when I've asked people that people tend to say, "Oh, it's with someone that highly regarded me, that listened to me, didn't have favourites, and really encouraged me, didn't make me feel like the kid and they were the teacher." If you ask people and ask yourself this now, "Did you have a teacher you didn't

like?" And people say, "Oh, yes. They made me feel foolish." They'd say, "I'd never amount to anything."

What we find is when we wire people's brains up, when someone is anxious and upset, their blood flows to the back of the brain. They say it's relevant for school teaching, but also to organisations. Their blood flows to the back of their brain which is the flight or fight area. Correspondingly, with cortisol and adrenaline. When they feel encouraged and relaxed, their blood comes to the front of the brain. In the context of school, there's been experiments done where you can train teachers to teach in exactly the same way to be calm, effective, and ask questions. But you can have two groups. One teacher puts their hands up and says, "Look. I really don't want to be here, but I'm going to be professional and see the job through." The other teachers in the other part of the experiment really love their work and even though they get tired, they just love it.

What we find is even though those teachers can teach exactly the same, the children in the group, where the teacher doesn't really want to be there, and is just being professional, they start to play around. These are children between about eight and 11. In the other group where the teacher loves it, they're all calm, relaxed and focused. And what we find, there's a contagion effect. Where the blood flows in the brain of the teacher affects those children. They're like little sponges. When they get a bit older, maybe they're able to self manage themselves a little bit more. Therefore, a teacher that we didn't like, is aggressive, is bossy, is not encouraging, their blood is at the back of the brain regardless of their external appearance and the children correspond to that, and likewise the other way around.

If a teacher is supportive and actually using a more coaching style, their blood comes to the front of the brain. Let's have a look at this in the work context because my colleagues, who wrote *The Success Songbook*, did studies in organisations and they found that more collaborative forms of coaching resulted in the coach's blood being at the front of the brain and it affected the others by contagion. So when they sat with people, both of them were in the front of their brain, so to speak, and they were able to take a level of critiquing of their work. They were open to new ideas, they felt supported, and so coaching is something that the individual person coaching cannot just take on a few skills. They've got to do it from within.

And I like what you said, Tao. It's about doing your work on yourself and so we can't just adopt a few skills, go to a communications training and just listen a bit. It's got to come from the inside because we can no longer pretend we highly regard that person and encourage them if our blood is in a different part of the brain.

Tao de Haas:

That's spot on, Clare. Again, in the conflict resolution network, we had a saying, it's not what you do that matters, is who you are that has the most powerful effect. And it's the same what you say about teachers. It's the same with a conductor and executive neuroscience principle is going there. Football teams,

any team where you have an inspirational teacher is exactly what you said before, Clare. You know, someone who gives you the same content, but what is it? Let's call it that third dimension. What is it? How do you inspire? And I love the word inspiring. It comes from inspirited, has nothing to do with religion, but there's something that's going on, and neuroscience is exactly what you said, Claire, is now showing what's happening when the blood flows to the frontal cortex. What you really want is a contagion. We want to do something to get ... It's very infectious. That's why people like inspirational leaders, and boy, there's a lot of vacancies for those at the moment.

Michelle Webb: Bearing in mind the distinction that you're explained, Tao, anecdotally, it is said that generation X employees prosper with frequent guidance and coaching, and that generation Y employees appreciate being mentored by veterans. Would you agree?

Tao de Haas: Yes, and I think there are generational differences. I prefer to look more at individual differences. We can talk about a zoo. We can also talk about all the different animals within the zoo. What might work for one animal might not work for another one, regardless how old or how young they are. Of course, yes. Generally there are some differences. I think even more with younger generations. They work best when they are engaged. They work best when they're supported. They feel best when ... They're not for nothing called the iGeneration, you know? From the iPhone. It's a me generation very much.

If they're just being ignored and not valued, and their inputs not valued and appreciate it, that's when we disconnect. You'll find that certainly with the difference, a far more ... For example, a generation Y and oldies and whatever you want to call them, definitely. So the I is really important, again, in any individual engagement. For example, you might ask, and I think one of the greatest questions is, as a manager or as a leader, what do you need? How can we best support you?

Now we're back to individual and individual differences. Some people might say, "Well, just leave me alone and because ..." They wouldn't say it but, "I'm an introvert and I think best on my own." And somebody else, "No. No. I'd like to sort of talk in the group or I'd like to be ..." Be guided by the employee, be guided by the people that work with you. Be guided by them rather than there's another box. Now we have introversion, extroversion. We have this and now we have this generation. Let's see what the individual ... And one of the most effective thing is when the individual actually feels. When you ask them question what's important to them, they can open up and they actually feel engaged by just asking that question. In other words, "Hey, I met her." And that's to me one of the most important things.

Clare Mann: We've got so many layers that affect behaviour and performance, haven't we? Generational difference. That context in which people were born, therefore they're influencing their behaviour and expectations, but also things like personality of course. Learning, life experienced, culture. But I think the

generation thing is an interesting one because if we look at why do we have these different names and different heroes? I guess it's because we're affected by the social and political spirit of the time.

Obviously, generations now are being born into the use of technology that older generations shake their head thinking, "Are they ever going to come off the phone and have a meal with us?" We say that about our children, of course. So those three different eras we can pinpoint that were influential in how people's behaviour occurs in organisations and in schools is the baby boomers and the older people. They came in an era of obedience. Now, even if listeners here weren't born in that sort of era, they were influenced by parents and grandparents who said, "If you don't do as you're told, you get in trouble. If you come home late tonight, you're grounded for the week."

The next group, the generation X started to be influenced by what's called the era of reward. Work hard and you will be rewarded. You will get gold stars. You'll get a better result. In a workplace situation, if we invested more, we'd have our superannuation at the end. If people invested time and energy and learned they were able to be promoted. Therefore, generation X is often very influenced by coaching is, "How can I get on? How can I do better?". Generation Y and the millennials, and now centennials of course, were born in the era of respect. If you respect me, I'll respect you. And so they were questioning of authority and it's hardly surprising that the younger people today are wanting more mentoring because they believe they have something to bring to the table. Older generations say, "Can I suck up all that information and then apply it and will I get on to be rewarded?"

Tao de Haas:

It's so true, Clare. Coming from having moved from group thinking from the military model, you've got a sergeant, major, being in charge of a certain amount of men, of course, in those days. We went from the group and then we went group, "We have to obey." They we went from a obedience to individuality. Interestingly, now we have generation called I, where the individuality is moving more towards a group again, which is fascinating. There's some really fascinating development in the psyche of people, in the psyche of people that work for organisations, and it is hard.

I need to say this. Being a manager, being a leader, is not an easy gig. It is challenging. That's why it is so important to have some basic management leadership developments to support people in that role because you cannot, in a way, be functioning in that role with all these different transitions because we are in a period of chaos in the world, in chaos, but also within organisations. I need to say this is not easy. The thing is it will make it easier when you have the right attitude and the right skills and when you really equipped to work with people, especially knowing individual differences, exactly what you've been saying, emotional intelligence that will really serve you very well long term as well.

Clare Mann:

We talk generally, and it's important for people to have actual skills and I think we'll move on to that, but it comes down to people have got to have to work on themselves. We're not just people with a job title. We have to become more self aware. We have to ask ourselves, "What is my part in creating what happens in the workplace?" Be an active listener, be open and open-minded and encourage people. And it's also the wording, isn't it, Tao. We've talked a little bit earlier when we overheard someone speaking. One tip is to replace the word what with why.

In terms of what and why, if I say to you, "Hey, Tao, why don't you come to my party?" You come up with some sort of reason, excuse, so that I will remain to be a good friend. But if I say, "Hey, Tao, you didn't come to my party, what's the problem?" Obviously we're on equal footing. I think you might have a good story that you wanted to share with people to elucidate on that and perhaps add some other tips here.

Tao de Haas:

Yeah, and I agree. The interesting thing with even a couple of ... Seeing you talk about complexity and big picture, and I think it's always very useful to come back to okay, now, you have a feeling of, "What can I do immediately?" And this is what people that are listening can do immediately, it's exactly what Clare is saying. Just replace why with what. Why did you underperform? Now, interestingly, that the brain ... Something of the brain, when I ask why, I ask for a reason. When I ask what, I ask for information. What happens? What could you do better? What could you do different? What are some of your options? Now we're asking for information. Why did you do that? Is a very difficult question to answer. Start working with that, just start replacing that. The other thing that's my tiny, little hobby horse here. When I say to you, "Clare, that was a really good job." But the funny thing that happens in your brain, in the hippocampus where to fight, flight and surrender also occur, the word but, the brain immediately interprets it as a rejection. What do you focus on when I say, "But ..."? You focus on the but.

Now, here's the most powerful little thing that you'll ever learn in your life. If you can replace the word but with and, you'll see how that very much immediately improves your communication skills, "That was a great job and I wonder if we can explore what did not work so well in that particular situation." What happens to brain is now open. We need to help people to open their brain. In other words, they need to be prepared to not go into the defence. I want it to be solution-oriented. "That's all very well, but ..." "I agree with you, but ..."

But the brain hears is you don't agree with me. That is not all very well. I didn't do a good job, so if you can just replace one three-letter word with another three-letter word. In other words, forget about the word but and start using and. Not, "That was a very good job, but." "That was a very good job, and I wonder how we can ... Blah, blah, blah." The word and adds on, the word but is confrontational. The words, by the way, the brain hears the word but as confrontational and will go into defence. I do not want people to go into

defence when it's important, so to the word and is really important to start using that. And I'm focused ... I'll give an example.

"I hear that it's very difficult for you to come on time in the morning," and then people say, "But." They already start to dismiss. People already feel berated at that stage. "I hear it's very difficult for you to get here on time and I have a need for you to start at a certain time because ..." Now, that is a lot less threatening and not dismissing your reality, the word 'but' actually rejects the reality. To what and adds on. One little thing that's going to make a world of difference in your communication skills.

Clare Mann: I think what you've highlighted there, Tao, is it's all about trust. It's do the work on yourself and then build trust with people because we cannot work with people and inspire them if they don't believe we have their best interests at heart. Work is so much more than the pursuit of objectives and profit. It is about creating a satisfying community in which people work. As I said earlier, what to an organisation is a human resource, our career, our identity, and so let's bring all the individuals back and let's actually have better relationships by improving our own skills and engaging and trusting others.

Tao de Haas: Absolutely, and that's where we come back. We're not addressing people as a team. It's about the individuals and exactly what you're saying. It needs to be much more terms of management, leadership development, because this the individual that makes ... As we've seen before, from a neuroscience point of view, that's what makes a difference. And then because for things to change, first I must change. Then we can say, "Gosh, things have changed since I've changed." And I think that's what we need to focus on more than, "How am I going to get my team?" Well, start working and start creating that self-awareness, the consciousness, move away from judgments, become more curious, interested, intrigued, fascinated about people. And that's where we started to connect also on a human level and we'll find that when people feel connected on a human level, their productivity goes up well and truly.

Michelle Webb: Thank you. That concludes today's podcast. Clare and Tao, thank you both very much for your time and expertise today.

Tao de Haas: It's been a pleasure.

Clare Mann: Indeed.

Michelle Webb: To find out more about Clare or Tao, you can visit www.linkedin.com. If you want to download the transcript of this podcast or access further resources, go to www.cpaaustralia.com.au/podcast/96.