CharityComms Podcast – Relaunch with Karen Hobbs Transcript

Lauren: Hi everyone and welcome to the relaunch of the CharityComms podcast. I’m Lauren and I’m going to be your new host and I hope you enjoy this new sound. So thank you for tuning in to the CharityComms podcast. I’m super excited. I have my first guest for the relaunch, Karen Hobbs from The Eve Appeal.

Karen: Woo woo! We’re going to have a great time and I’m not going to swear; I’m going to be a good girl!

Lauren: That’s why you had to be my first guest. I needed someone to make me laugh.

Karen: Back with a bang!

Lauren: Yes! So you can have a bit of a laugh everyone. So I first met my first guest at our ICAs in 2019. She approached me, got her name ticked off the list and I think she said something funny or rude, I think it was two-in-one, but I just started laughing. And she made me laugh throughout the night, particularly when she got her award on stage. I was very much amused and I think everybody else in the room was. So I was like I need to do something with her and this opportunity came about and I was like yes.

Karen: This has got to be the interview of a lifetime.

Lauren: No pressure!

Karen: No pressure but like everything is on the line here, Lauren!

Lauren: So, I would like you to please tell everyone a little bit about yourself and also where you’re based. I can see on your Zoom screen it says Oxbridge.

Karen: Oh my gosh! No, that’s my name from another – I’m not, no, I’m not Oxbridge! I couldn’t get in there. That is so funny! So I did sort of a comedy Zoom thing the other night and the character that I was representing was nicknamed Oxbridge, but now it looks like I’ve gone to Oxbridge or I’m in Oxford or Cambridge.

Lauren: Yeah!

Karen: But no, no, no. No, I’m South East London. Stop it! I’ll introduce myself properly. Hi everyone. Thank you for listening. My name is Karen Hobbs. I work for The Eve Appeal which is the UK’s leading gynaecological cancer research charity. And my role is running the information service called Ask Eve, which is also staffed by a gynae cancer nurse, Tracey.

Lauren: Fabulous. I’m going to ask you a bit more about your role later on. I wanted to come back to you being an inspiring communicator and, like I said, that’s the first place that I met you at these awards. So let’s look back and think what inspired you to become a charity communicator and what does that actually mean to you?

Karen: So what inspired me was that I was offered the job and I needed to pay the rent! You know, the bills were my inspiration. No, so I – yeah, so as I said, The Eve Appeal is a gynae cancer charity and so that means we fund research into the early detection, risk prediction and prevention of the five gynaecological cancers: womb, ovarian, cervical, vaginal and vulvar cancer, and we raise awareness of their signs and symptoms etc. And I was diagnosed with cervical cancer a few years ago and started to talk about it online and be as open and vocal as possible. And then the CEO of The Eve Appeal, Athena, approached me and I became an ambassador first, kind of doing work with them, giving talks and, you know, in media, news stories etc when they needed a volunteer or case study of someone that has gone through a cancer diagnosis. And then the job to manage the Ask Eve information service came up and they said, “Would you like it?” and I said, “I love not having to interview, yes please!” So yeah, it was my own personal experience that led directly to the job really. And to me, being a charity communicator means that whatever the charity you work for is about, so cancer research, you know, health awareness, whatever it is, it means to tell the general public – because you need to remember, when you work for whatever charity, whatever cause, you quickly become an expert in that subject because it’s your 9-5 Monday to Friday, and often I find people that work for charities are so passionate about the cause that it often bleeds into their evenings and weekends as well. I say bleeds – that’s a key sign of three of the five gynae cancers so watch this space. What a red flag. I can’t help myself. I can’t help myself. I’m thirsty for it. So I think, yeah, we quickly become experts in our field, so we need to remember that the general public doesn’t know what we know and we know important stuff because charities are important and they’ll be doing important things, whatever that may be. So we need to remember that it’s our job to tell the general public about what’s going on and to do that in an accessible way. Because we need to remember that not everybody spends all day everyday looking and learning and working for the particular cause, but it doesn’t mean that the person on the bus needs to know about it any less. So it’s up to us to tell whoever we need to tell in a way that people understand and find interesting, and either want to donate to the charity if it’s purely fundraising, they care about the cause, or if it’s kind of, say for example, health awareness, therefore more personal to them because they have a body, therefore they have health, therefore they need to learn about it, even if it’s, you know, gynae stuff and people without a vagina they’ll still know someone with a vagina, so everybody needs to know the information. Yes, so it’s about telling and sharing the information in an interesting way that sparks something in someone to either learn, donate, share the information.

Lauren: Hmm, that’s really interesting. I wanted to go back to the point where you mentioned you have to be an expert specifically when you’re talking about a topic or being a communicator, and I guess that’s why you joined The Eve Appeal. And as an information officer, what particularly do you do to communicate the importance of gynaecological care in The Eve Appeal?

Karen: So I think when it comes to things like social media for example, so we obviously share a lot of our health information over our social media channels, I, you know, whilst I like to think I’m really creative, I’m not a designer or anything, so somebody will, you know, design an infographic and then we’ll make sure that the information going along with it is clear. So not overusing – like using fancy words, really long sentences, it might make you look like you’ve been to Oxbridge! Call back! That’s called a call back in comedy. It might make people think ooh wow, that’s really fancy, but it kind of – it’s not quick, or easy or enjoyable to read a really overly complicated sentence about a subject you probably don’t know that much about anyway. It becomes a little bit overwhelming so I think it’s really clear to be simple without being patronising and to kind of clearly lay it out and to make sure there are sort of takeaway tips within that. So if you’re not sure about something contact the Ask Eve service or if you experience this thing (bullet pointed) call your GP. That sort of thing. So that’s kind of the very sort of public facing side of it. And then when it comes to talking to people that contact the Ask Eve service, either by phone or email, obviously that’s a much more sort of private conversation because it is just one-on-one. So I think it’s really important to, first of all, be as kind of reassuring as possible that anything the person calling or emailing wants to ask isn’t, you know, it’s not a silly question. Because I think a lot of people get a bit embarrassed when they’re talking about gynae stuff, they will often say, you know, “I’ve got a problem down there and I’m not sure if I should ask you” and that sort of thing. So I think it’s really important to be reassuring. Because I think if you put someone at ease and make someone feel comfortable, in whatever way, and everyone communicates differently. Tracey is, you know, 30 years older than me and has been a gynae nurse for decades, so she’s got – she’s really lovely, really warm, really friendly, but has a different approach to me who has just turned 30. Thanks for saying I look 12. No one said that! No one said that! Silence. Silence in the room. I’ve got – you know, I’m not a nurse but I’ve been through it so I’ve perhaps got a slightly more relaxed, not fun approach because that sounds like I’m belittling the topic, but more light-hearted and kind of, “We’ll just have a chat about this stuff and talk to me about it.” You know, so yeah, I think kind of reassuring someone and letting them know that it’s a really safe space to ask whatever they want to. And then just sharing with them the right information, again in a sort of calm, approachable way, being relaxed, putting your own personality into it. Because I think when it comes to health information it can be quite sort of stark and clinical, and it’s nice to know that there is a human side to it. And then when I go out and give talks to kind of community or corporate places, I’ve got my slides behind me with the diagram, the key things that – you know, I talked about bullet pointing, like with the social media posts and things like that, but when I go out and give talks to people I just have fun with it because cancer is a really difficult subject to talk about. And then when it’s a cancer that isn’t talked about very much, like, you know, things like breast cancer, you know, it’s someone’s breast so it’s a bit more uncomfortable than, you know, a brain tumour to talk about. I think it’s partly because the body is sexualised often. But we talk about breast cancer much more, it’s much more in the public eye and in the media. So when you combine cancer with a cancer or cancers, because there are five gynae cancers, that are difficult to talk about, people naturally kind of close up and get a little bit sometimes giggly or sometimes sort of head down or not able to sort of try and engage with it. So I just try and relax people and have fun with it. Because I think when you have fun you can be a bit more open to absorbing information if you feel relaxed.

Lauren: That makes a lot of sense. I can see why you refer to yourself as the Cancer Information Sweetheart because you have a lot of knowledge.

Karen: I talk so much. I’m so sorry. Poor Lauren, she’s asked me like two questions.

Lauren: No, I’m so happy.

Karen: I care about it. This is what I mean about people that work for charities. I think a lot of the time you seek out the thing you care about and if you can – you know, if you can pay the bills by working and helping a cause that you’re passionate about, isn’t that a great way to spend your day?

Lauren: Definitely. I think that’s why most people come into this sector in particular, because they want to make a difference.

Karen: Hmm.

Lauren: And I can see that’s a driving force behind why you do what you do. Honestly, I can see how much you really are enthusiastic about getting vagina care out there.

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Lauren: But I wanted to go back to your diagnosis if you don’t mind.

Karen: Of course not. Imagine if I said, “Cut the interview there”, took off my fake mike and stormed off set.

Lauren: I’d be like this is really awkward.

Karen: I live for this. I love – like, honestly, my two favourite subjects are vaginas and myself. So I’m disappointed you didn’t ask about my diagnosis as soon as we started talking. Come on!

Lauren: Love it. So, for people that don’t know, Karen was diagnosed with cervical cancer at the age of 24. Around that time you also looked to launch your one-woman theatrical comedy. Am I correct?

Karen: Yeah, theatre show, why not?

Lauren: Yeah, I think that’s a good way to term it. Called Karen Hobbs: Tumour Has It. And I think it’s so inspiring that you use comedy as a medium to raise awareness so I wanted to touch upon that particularly, but also other ways that you have been able to portray the message outside of the sector?

Karen: So I had always wanted to do comedy. So Tumour Has It is a kind of funny, theatre’y show. It’s kind of a play because there are different scenes and different characters in it. And then I got into stand-up kind of around the same time but I haven’t done an hour long stand-up show yet. I was supposed to do that this year at the Edinburgh Fringe, my first debut comedy show called Pussy, obviously! But that got cancelled so there is always next year, blah blah blah. So I had always wanted to do stand-up but didn’t think that I had anything that funny or interesting to talk about. What’s interesting about another straight white woman from Hertfordshire talking about Tinder? It’s not that interesting. And then I got cancer and I was like yes! Yes! Come on! I was like I can do this, I’ve got five minutes in me. Not left overall – I meant like on stage! I’ve got five minutes left. So I thought okay, you know, if I can survive cancer, I can survive being on stage doing comedy. So I just went for it. I just found so many things that happened when I was diagnosed so funny and so uncomfortable, and if you don’t embrace and kind of celebrate and slightly mock the things that happen, it becomes very depressing, even more difficult to manage than it already is to cope with and that sort of thing. So it definitely was, selfishly – I don’t know, I can say selfishly but I don’t mean that badly, if that makes sense. It was a selfishly cathartic thing for me to do comedy about what went on. I was not expecting a cancer diagnosis at 24; of course nobody does. So, as well as shocking, it made me feel kind of really out of control of my own body. You know, how can this be happening to what I thought was, you know, a young, healthy body? All of a sudden everything is going wrong, it felt like. You know, when you have something going on like that you kind of have to just put your faith in the medical professionals and, you know, this is going to hopefully be okay but, you know, they’re the ones that will look after me. And you kind of have to sort of surrender your body because they need to fix it. They need to look after you, examine you. And also, when it’s a gynaecological issue, it’s quite a lot to handle when there is constantly a different medical professional like between your legs, touching you, examining you with different instruments. It’s lifesaving but it’s not easy to handle. So doing comedy about all of that stuff was a way of me owning what happened and kind of telling it the way I want to tell it. Owning my narrative, reshaping it in a fun, positive way so that that experience is being seen how I want to see it. Being on stage is taking back control of what happened to my body. The other main reason for going into talking about it in a comedy, comedic way was that I was so scared and so confused, and I say this all the time, I didn’t know anything about my gynaecological health other than a period came out and a penis went in. I want to sort of share this information so that the next 24-year old in my position, they know that they can come to Ask Eve and ask questions, look on like my old blog that I had, or stand up clips and, you know, even when I’m doing a show, which feels like a million years ago – I miss the stage. That sounds so theatrical doesn’t it? I miss the stage. Le stage. It’s really great to get people talking about this sort of thing.

Lauren: Do you feel like awareness had been raised once you’d put yourself out there?

Karen: This sounds so up myself but yes, a fair amount of times after a set at a gig or afterwards, people would come up to me or send a message and say, you know, “Thanks for doing that because I XYZ.” It will be that they’ve been worried about something, so maybe bleeding after sex or something like that, which was my main symptom, and they’re encouraged to go and get checked out. The main or most common kind of reaction, apart from laughter – I hope the main reaction is laughter.

Lauren: I’m sure.

Karen: “It’s a TED talk, not a comedy set.” Great! “She’s not funny but she’s interesting.” Ugh, that’s like saying, “Oh she’s really nice.” Unh-uh! No! No! No one wants that. No one wants that. Is that people had been delaying booking their cervical screening or smear test and then say, “Oh no, I need to go and book that in.” And, it sounds so selfish but I don’t care, it’s the best feeling ever when you know someone is going to take a really positive action because of a fun 10 minutes I just did. It’s the best reward ever, apart from the laughter. Laughter is key. Entertain first, inform second.

Lauren: Love it! That’s a good thing to live by. So yeah, comedy seems like the best medium for you outside of your immediate role, that you try and spread awareness essentially, but are there any other mediums or methods you use?

Karen: So, other than doing comedy, I love using my personal social media to raise awareness as well. It’s often got a comedy approach to it but sometimes I can be serious and hopefully really open about whatever I’m feeling or whatever thing I want to talk about. And I really enjoy when, mostly through The Eve Appeal, if I have to do media interviews on the news. I really, really relish those opportunities because I think it’s, again, not a subject that is that easy for the general public and our society to discuss. So I think it hopefully is quite refreshing if, you know, on Sky News at lunchtime there is a person that is, you know, ‘normal’, hopefully quite friendly person, kind of just calmly talking and not in a sort of scary news statistics way, calmly talking about how beneficial it is for people to have a cervical screening or, you know, the benefits of the HPV vaccine, things like that. I think it helps – I think it helps to a certain extent when not everyone you see talking about medical stuff is a medical person. I say all this, maybe no one has ever thought any of the things I’ve been saying, and I’m just like I think I’m really inspirational, relatable, friendly, funny.

Lauren: If you don’t praise yourself, who will?

Karen: Yeah, exactly. You’ve got to praise yourself, yeah. If you can’t love yourself how the hell are you going to love anybody else? What is it?

Lauren: No, it’s right, exactly that!

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Lauren: I also wanted to ask what is your most memorable moment along this journey to end the stigma around gynaecological cancers?

Karen: One of my favourite things, and I think you’ve heard this story before but I’ll watch my language, is look, there are loads of really amazing things that come from having what is a bad experience, and there is lots of fun and comedy that comes from a tragedy, there are lots of great people and events that you get to experience from working for a charity that are fighting for a certain thing to do with the bad thing that happened to you, and all of that, but the thing that sticks in my mind, because it’s the first big thing where I thought, “Oh, we really need to carry on this conversation”, like it actually means something to have this job, was one of the first community talks I did. I went to a sort of church hall in very, very – I think I was on the District Line going east for like nine hours!

Lauren: It does feel like that.

Karen: It does feel like that; so long. And the group of ladies we were talking to had done some fundraising for us and wanted to talk. And everybody was – I think it’s interesting because on social media the demographic is generally not older, as in elderly. We have to remember lots of the information we put out there kind of via the internet, social media etc, video clips, whatever it is, is consumed and absorbed by people who aren’t older, who aren’t old women. But most gynaecological cancer cases affect older women, but they’re not on Instagram to see the cool infographic with the vulva cancer information. But it's much more likely to happen to a 70-year old woman than the 25-year old that is liking the colourful post. So yes, so I went to East London and the group was – yeah, the average age was kind of like 75 onwards, and I was really nervous. I didn’t know how fun I could be, how cheeky, because I was new to the job, I didn’t kind of know the lay of the land. And I was going through the different gynae cancers, the signs and symptoms, talking about how important it is to know them and to, you know, keep track of what’s going on with your own body and things like that. And the vulvar one is difficult because obviously it’s great if people can check their genitals and get to know what they look like and feel like, but I didn’t really know how to sort of phrase this. So I said, “Hands up who knows that they should check their breasts and who does check their breasts?” And everyone put their hand up because, like I was talking about earlier, kind of breast cancer is spoken about a lot more. It’s more – generally more comfortable to talk about your boobs than your genitals. It just is. That’s just life. So everyone had their hands up and I thought okay, great. And then I said, “Okay, keep your hands up if you also check your vulva.” And everyone’s hand just shot down. I was like oh my god, am I going to get the sack because I said, “Check your vulva”? I basically said, “Touch yourself.” Can I say that? And then it was really silent because everyone had just put their hands down really quickly. And then someone at the back, who was called Margaret and was not a young lady, put her hand up and went, “Oh, F it, I do.”

Lauren: Love it! Maggie!

Karen: Yeah! Yes Maggie! Go Maggie! And then as soon as she said that, like someone next to her went, “Oh yeah, it is nice isn’t it?” Great! But that is so healthy and important. So that was one of my most memorable things because it was the sort of starting block where I thought okay, this really needs to continue because there is a whole run of people that aren’t acknowledging or comfortable with talking about a piece of anatomy. And that’s all it is at the end of the day. It’s society that has put on the sort of mystery, the stigma. It’s just a part of the body.

Lauren: Oh that was really – that’s such a nice story!

Karen: It is a nice story isn’t it?

Lauren: Yeah like –

Karen: I love it.

Lauren: I do.

Karen: Yeah, so that was the sort of okay, let’s do this.

Lauren: So I do have to touch upon, unfortunately, Miss Rona, Miss Coronavirus.

Karen: Yeah, go on.

Lauren: We can’t have a conversation –

Karen: No, we can’t.

Lauren: It is the day and age we’re living in and it’s changed the landscape of everything. So, talking of Miss Rona, I know The Eve Appeal launched their Get Lippy campaign. I wanted you to tell me about the campaign but also how you’ve had to navigate through Corona and make the decision to (1) continue to carry on, and what you’ve put in place to make sure it was still possible.

Karen: So Get Lippy has been running – this is the third May in a row that it’s been running and it’s kind of what it says on the tin. Get Lippy. So we’re encouraging people to, fundraising wise, to purchase one of the products that various lip care/lipstick brands are getting involved in. So kind of, you know, buy the product, a percentage goes to us. That sort of simple fundraising aspect. And then also to, you know, hold their own events or do whatever they want. You know, people can fundraise however they like. And then obviously to share awareness information on their own social media channels and all that sort of thing. And the Get Lippy run, that was on Sunday 17th May, so we encourage people to sign up and then they can see where other people are running and, you know, build a community that way. Yeah, so to sign up to run 5K for the five gynaecological cancers and then, you know, ask people to, you know, donate to their own fundraising page if they want to. We just wanted people to get involved and obviously fundraising is important but I’m way more on the information and awareness side so I get really flustered when I talk about fundraising. Because I think oh no, I can’t ask people for money but then I think no, I give money to charities, people do give money to good causes, but I’ve got that natural sort of, “Oh I can’t ask.” So yeah, I always get flustered when I say, “Oh buy a lip product – or not, or not! Or just share an Instagram post. But yeah, buy a lip product.”

Lauren: You’re not doing your job, Karen!

Karen: Yeah, I know, I know. “Buy a lip product. Next time you need a lip product, buy one that gives money to us.” Yeah.

Lauren: Why not?!

Karen: So I didn’t do the 5K run because I didn’t want to. And I don’t mind saying that because I also don’t want people to feel like they should be pressured into stuff. You know, it raised money, it raised awareness, it was great fun for everybody, but not for me Lauren and I’ll say that. And keep that in the edit. I’m not a runner. I didn’t run before and I’m not running now. And, you know, just because I’ve had cancer, just because I work for a charity, it doesn’t mean I’m going to do a run for a cancer charity. I’m not going to do it.

Lauren: I’m not going to lie. I saw it and I thought that is such a good cause, I should do that but –

Karen: No Babe! It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter. You do enough. It’s all about doing your bit and whatever you can do as an individual. So no pressure to anybody. The thing is, the last two years the Get Lippy campaign was running, obviously shopping in the shops where they sell the lipsticks etc existed. That doesn’t exist at the moment. You know, we held lots of events, we went to speak at a lot of the brand partners offices and with the staff and engaged them in, you know, like setting up the shop for a day of information, and kind of building a real in-person buzz, which is literally not possible at the moment. So doing everything online is harder but the power of the internet is amazing. You can buy things online. People can still do the run. They won’t be doing it all together but they can join an online community where they can see who has registered and who is running where. I think it’s about being as good as possible but there is no such thing as perfection I think in anything, let alone in trying to recreate something that was very kind of vibrant and in-person and about lots of events. So in regards to kind of carrying on because of the pandemic, it was never an option to cease activity at all with The Eve Appeal. Because we keep saying this in every opportunity we get, cancer doesn’t stop. So, you know, if someone is going to get diagnosed with a womb cancer, the pandemic isn’t going to make a difference to that. It’s still going to happen or not regardless. It’s our body, we can’t do anything about it. The need for funding the research and the need for running our information service isn’t going to go away. And Tracey and I with the Ask Eve service have definitely found a huge increase in the amount of people that are coming to us with questions since lockdown began for sure.

Lauren: Yeah, I can imagine. I mean there has been a lot of focus on COVID related illnesses and people being taken into hospital, and I guess people suffering from cancer haven’t had as much access to their treatments. And I guess people thinking they have symptoms haven’t thought they’d be able to go in with fear that they might catch COVID, or that they won’t be seen because it’s not a priority in the eyes of the healthcare professionals. So I’m sure that’s something you’ve had to deal with, and also encouraging people to continue to get seen and to continue focus on healthcare in that area.

Karen: You’ve honestly just summed it up there. So, so many people are contacting us and saying, “Sorry to bother you but I’m worried about XYX,” whatever it is, an itch, a bleed, whatever, “and I don’t know if I should contact my GP or not because they’re really busy at the moment.” And honestly Babe, it breaks my heart. Because I think these are the people that are contacting us but imagine how many of those emails we’re getting there is going to be double/triple/ten times/a million times that of people that aren’t contacting us.

Lauren: I actually also want to touch upon Mental Health Awareness Week. And I think you touching upon cancer, it can be quite a scary time for people thinking that they have that illness or all those kind of things and, dipping into COVID, the theme actually is kindness. So I thought if you could share a story or some things that you and your team have done to support each other remotely, and also the people that you are serving that you’re trying to help.

Karen: This distance and everybody is under heightened pressures – everybody is, regardless of your working situation – and I keep seeing this thing on social media, you know, you’re not working from home, you are at home, trying to work during a pandemic.

Lauren: Yeah, exactly. I literally tweeted that.

Karen: Oh my baby girl, that’s lovely!

Lauren: Yeah. Because it was so true. I think sometimes people put too much pressure on themselves and it’s like be honest, you’re working with your whole family or by yourself, it’s so alien so why would you think that sometimes it’s not okay to say I’m not okay.

Karen: Yeah. And I think it’s really important to – I think it’s up to each individual how much they sort of share with their working team, if they are with a team or job or whatever that has a team, because sometimes people are, you know, self-employed or furloughed or whatever, but if your situation, your working situation at home, you are talking to a team regularly, I think it is beneficial for sure if you’re as honest as you can be about how you’re feeling. Because we are never going to, hopefully, go through anything like this again unless there is a second spike if people keep having picnics, but whatever! But it’s so hard, it’s so difficult, and I think just be really transparent and it’s okay. Like, you know, I had a colleague the other day that was – a part of her job was to do X task and she didn’t feel up to it. She was having a day where she was struggling and I had some time. You know, some days I do have spare time, some days I don’t. Some days I work, you know, on Saturdays and Sundays because Tracey is at the hospital at the weekend so can’t answer the calls. You know, you have to adapt and so I did the colleague’s task and that’s fine. And some days I’ll say to Tracey, you know, say I’ve been answering kind of really heavy questions all day from people that are really struggling with their gynae health, I so badly want to help them but also after a while, if you don’t give yourself a little break, you start to feel quite overwhelmed with it and then I think, do you know what, if I do another hour or so I’m not going to be any good to them tomorrow because I feel quite drained by the whole situation anyway. So it’s about saying, “Hi Tracey, can you actually check the emails on Saturday because I just can’t?” You know, whatever you need to say. And it doesn’t mean you’re lazy. It doesn’t mean you don’t enjoy your job. It doesn’t mean you’re not pulling your weight. It doesn’t mean, you know, you’re taking the mick out of the situation. It just means that you’re also acknowledging that you’re working in really, really weird circumstances and you’ve got to think about yourself and how to make yourself as prepared and ready to do your job as possible. And sometimes that means passing a task over to a colleague, being transparent and saying, “Actually you asked for that thing for that journalist at 11, I need to eat breakfast, it’s going to be 12 o’clock.”

Lauren: Fair enough. Got to eat!

Karen: I love eating. You know, “Actually I know we said we’d have that team call at 6pm but I need to go for a walk.” It’s still doing your job as best you can but the parameters just change because of this. I think it’s hard to be honest though isn’t it? Because it’s difficult for people to say if you need help sometimes I think.

Lauren: Oh definitely. I think no one wants to be seen as though they can’t do their job, especially when everybody else is trying to do their job. You don’t want to seem like the weak link.

Karen: Exactly.

Lauren: But it’s not that. You have to – everybody has to flex. Everybody is flexed in different ways and it doesn’t mean you’re less of a person or an employee. I think that’s good to stress.

Karen: Yeah, yeah.

Lauren: But also you’ve basically touched upon wellbeing and having to go for walks and to just like step back. Have there been like any top tips that you’ve shared between your team that you’ve been able to incorporate in your routine, or they have?

Karen: Get outside.

Lauren: Yeah.

Karen: Like hugely. I think that is a massive one. So if you don’t have a garden or outside space, if you need a breather, if you’re getting a bit too stressed, overwhelmed, just log off for half an hour in the middle of the day if you need to. Just walk. Just go and walk. Put your music on and walk. So definitely the benefits of being without a screen in front of your face. I think getting rid of a screen. So that often means going outside for a walk, so that’s an active thing, but even just chatting to your team I think as well and not talking about work is really important. So we try and do that once a week. Team drinks on whatever platform and not talk about work. We’re actively not allowed to talk about Eve Appeal work. Because we all work for The Eve Appeal but we are not all The Eve Appeal. We’ve got our own personalities, our own problems, our own housemate situations, our own, you know, like, “Oh, I couldn’t buy any eggs.” Everyone has got their own thing going on and I think it’s also difficult – I wanted to really stress this – that earlier we were talking about how important it often is, the cause of the charity, to the person working for the charity. And often there is a personal reason, like myself, why someone has come into this job. And, even if not, you often, because you’re a certain type of person, end up caring so much that it’s hard to, for something so important to you, to be a 9 to 5 Monday to Friday, and I think it’s important to remember that you can’t be consumed by the same thing all of the time, and to try and not develop an unhealthy relationship with it. Because then I think you end up like kind of resenting it sometimes. If something consumes you 24/7 you end up actively not wanting to talk about it. So kind of remembering that you’re your own person aside from the cause that you really care about and that, you know, you won’t be able to give your best to the cause if you don’t put yourself first.

Lauren: Definitely. Look after yourself.

Karen: Look after yourself.

Lauren: Yes! We are coming to the end and I just wanted to remind the listeners that I did meet Karen at the Inspiring Communicator Awards.

Karen: They’re all thinking how on earth did she get herself there?! What have we been listening to?! They’re like, “You met her at the what?!”

Lauren: Yeah! Yeah, so I wanted to ask if you can leave our listeners with ways that they can motivate, inspire and encourage themselves, and those around them, to become better communicators?

Karen: I was so surprised.

Lauren: Honestly, I will have to say your nomination was so lovely and your colleague was so like celebratory of you and all the things that you had done, and it was just so nice to read.

Karen: It was gorgeous. It was honestly the most wonderful – I couldn’t believe it. I was so surprised. It was so wonderful.

Lauren: No, it was really good. And I’m sure you do things that you don’t even realise motivates people but in your day-to-day what would you say you try to do to help encourage those around you, even when they’re not feeling their best or feeling that they can’t do their job, what ways do you think, “Okay Karen, you can help the team, let’s go.”

Karen: This might sound like an obvious answer now, coming from what we’ve just been talking about, but crack a joke. Like take the mick out of someone, be a bit self-deprecating, make a joke, make a silly bit of word play on something a colleague has just said. And it’s not patronising or being mean or anything. It’s making light of a really stressful situation. People need to laugh. If you laugh you feel better. Like it’s science from the chemicals that are released. It literally feels good to laugh. So for the funny lot I would say people value humour. That’s one of the reasons I was nominated. And I think if you can, not necessarily entertain in a sort of, you know, performing monkey, come on let’s go, crack out a joke, but also humour is very like personal and it’s very human. Humour is very human. So if you’re all stressed about numbers or fundraising or a technical problem on the website, it’s when you can’t all be in the office together and someone goes wrong, it’s really stressful, everything is really heightened, you feel kind of helpless at home to not be able to sort out this issue. So a bit of light relief I think goes a lot further than perhaps people think. And also in terms of kind of work and kind of a tip, I would say just – you probably haven’t even asked me this and I’m just going off on it. I’m like well I’ve got a tip for you.

Lauren: I did! You’re listening, it’s good.

Karen: I am listening. I thought I’ve been talking for so long I’ve forgotten the start of the question. But when you are trying to communicate something, so whether it’s a campaign message or a piece of information or awareness or whatever, imagine you are one of your older relatives, or a stranger on the street, or the person that served you in Sainsbury’s, kind of going full circle what we were talking about at the beginning, they probably don’t know about the thing you’re wanting to tell them about, so imagine what would capture their attention, sometimes tug on the heartstrings if that’s relevant if, you know, you need to give a personal account or an example to make people sort of stop and think for whatever reason. Think about the person on the street and what they do or don’t know about the subject, and how you can excite them about that subject or about that cause. Because people will care. Not everybody will care the same amount but everybody will care for some reason and have some connection to everything, however vague that might feel at the time. So I think about clear and connect.

Lauren: I think these are all great titbits that people will really benefit from. I did say it was almost the last question but I have one more question.

Karen: Yes?

Lauren: So the CharityComms team, specifically our CEO, has been working with other organisations and they’ve come up with this hashtag #NeverMoreNeeded. Basically to celebrate how important charities are, especially amidst times like this and crisis’s when the government can’t really help or haven’t helped enough, and so we have to step in, and so I just kind of wanted to ask you really, have you used this opportunity to collaborate with other organisations or charities?

Karen: Yeah. So Tracey, my Ask Eve partner, has a good relationship with Macmillan. So Macmillan are a huge cancer charity. Everybody knows their green colour, their font, their logo, their TV adverts, all of that sort of thing. And people will think of Macmillan when they think of cancer support or cancer information. But there are so many different types of cancer, so many different nuances when it comes to different cancer treatment, different practices, all of that sort of thing, different referrals, how different types of referrals are being delayed because of the pandemic, all of that sort of thing. So we are making sure that for bigger platforms that have more money and more visibility, that they know that they can, when there is a specialist question, come to us. It’s most often with womb cancer patients because womb cancer is the most common of the gynae cancers, so that’s just kind of how it works out numbers wise. But that they can come to us if they need to refer somebody with, you know, a question that Tracey, a gynae cancer expert, can help with. And we’re making sure that, you know, for example, lots of people with conditions like endometriosis or PCOS might have questions and kind of queries over, “Oh God, is this a symptom of my PCOS or is this something I need to be worried about more?” that, again, the classic, “I don’t want to bother my GP because everyone is so busy.” So, you know, we’re making sure that we provide websites or people’s blogs or smaller platforms, so again going from big Macmillan to smaller platforms or community pages. Yeah, we are kind of in the middle. We are bigger than the individual lot but we’re nowhere near as big as the massive lot. So it’s about giving information out, I think, to the smaller lot to know that they come to us, and also letting the bigger people know that the expert level of someone like Tracey is something they can probably benefit from when a particular question is raised with them.

Lauren: That’s really good. I like that. I like that you’ve tiered it.

Karen: I’m just the middle man.

Lauren: Yeah, but it works.

Karen: And hey – hey, what a great note to end on: don’t cut out the middle woman.

Lauren: Amazing. So what I would like to start doing is to end these podcasts with three questions. So I will start a sentence and you’ll finish them off for me.

Karen: Okay.

Lauren: Working for a charity is …

Karen: Rewarding.

Lauren: It’s alright if that’s it.

Karen: Yeah, do you know, rewarding. I sometimes still can’t believe how much I enjoy my job. Do you know what, yeah, rewarding and then full stop, new sentence. Rewarding. If you care about what the charity does you’ll be one of the few people in the world that can say, “I love my job.”

Lauren: That’s really good. The second question is: Being a part of the sector is…

Karen: Being part of the sector is – this sounds so selfish but you do get a little bit of a smug feeling. Like at the awards, the CharityComms awards, where you’re in a room of people who are just everyday people, you’re all doing something that matters. Being part of a sector really gives you the feeling of, first of all, community with other charity workers because you know that you’re all there because you care about something enough to do it for not enough money.

Lauren: Essentially. That shows money is not everything.

Karen: No, money isn’t everything. You can pay your bills. Do I have a penny of savings? No. But do I and do we help people? Yes. So sometimes helping someone means more than an expensive lipstick. Unless the lipstick is giving a portion of the proceeds to The Eve Appeal for the Get Lippy campaign.

Lauren: Well done [applause].

Karen: Thank you.

Lauren: Thank you. And lastly, being seen as an inspiring communicator feels like…

Karen: A huge surprise, an unexpected honour and something that I was obviously born to do.

Lauren: Get out.

Karen: Get out! Like is it really that much of a surprise?

Lauren: Honestly, Karen, it has been a pleasure. I’ve laughed so much my cheeks are hurting.

Karen: I have had such a good time and I was so, so chuffed when you said you wanted me to be your first guest.

Lauren: The bar is so high.

Karen: The bar is so high, that’s what I say. I’ve thrown the gauntlet down now.

Lauren: Did you hear that? Good luck!

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Lauren: I hope this episode made you think about what inspires you and also how you can inspire others through your own personal story. Also, I just wanted to shout out our Twitter page, it’s @CharityComms. So if you have any questions that you would like to ask any of the team then please reach out to us on there. Or you can shout me out on my personal twitter which is @LaurenHaizel. Capital L, Capital H.

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The CharityComms podcast is produced by Lauren Haizel and Christine Fleming.