

CAROLINE 00:13

Hi and welcome to Mind Your P's, the Purposeful Leaders Guide. We believe in all the p's people, purpose, planet even pizza and prosecco. In this episode we're speaking to Lisa Thompson who is the founder and CEO of Purpose HR, a consultancy that specialises in providing HR services to start ups and high growth businesses. Lisa it's an absolute pleasure to have you with us today, how are you doing?

LISA 00:35

I'm good Caroline, thank you all those P's are right up my street too so I'm very excited today

CAROLINE 00:42

[laughs] Brilliant, listen tell us a bit about you, your career journey, what led you to set up Purpose HR?

LISA 00:48

Sure sure, I'll try and keep it short. I've been running the business for seven years now, prior to that I'd always been in-house building and growing HR functions and mainly in tech businesses, so I launched the business seven years ago on the basis of, do what you know and still took the skills I'd had in-house in HR and thought there's actually a market for this as a product and there's a lot of opportunity. So I set the business initially, I did a course I had a chance to do an amazing course and go out to the states and study and that was kind of the foundation for my ambition and I guess going bigger than I had originally planned as well, but take that forward we've been running for as I say seven years now. I've got a team of eight, we're I'm really privileged because we work with some of the most fantastic, investor-backed or founder-led early stage growth businesses. Really exciting sectors, technology, life sciences, a real lot of businesses that are themselves quite purpose-driven and focussed on the kind of impact, and we use them to provide an HR function to those businesses. So everything from hiring people and managing people, developing people, we connect their strategy and their policies and developing their management teams.

CAROLINE 02:09

Brilliant, and and you know, I I've heard that you're you like to challenge inequality in the workplace and you're passionate about supporting organisations to achieve gender balance and I think you've been shortlisted for two categories in business women's awards and Scottish rising stars, congrats on that so that tell us about that and what you're passionate about there?

LISA 02:35

Well I guess I myself am a woman in business, I've faced at times, assumptions and sometimes you know people putting you in a box, or maybe limited of what you're capable to achieve or making assumptions based on based on things that I don't think are appropriate or right. I've faced you know at times discrimination, if I'm honest. I am really passionate about working with our clients to help them build inclusive cultures and not just because it's the right thing to do, which it is but also about the fact that will also help them build the best possible teams that are diverse and inclusive and a lot of the time there's work to do just to let them see things that they maybe didn't even realise they were doing that might be impacting their attractiveness to a more diverse pool of applicants or that limiting the way they can actually bring on and engage and develop the best talent. I mean it's a massive topic isn't it! I am an ambassador myself for Women's Enterprise Scotland and I'm really proud to do that and I love doing it and one of the things I took when I joined that programme was about you 'can't be what you can't see', em so it's hard to maybe think of yourself as a role model it's not a term I would go around using, but actually learning that Women in business that might want to learn from people that are a bit further along on the journey, I've benefitted from that in lots of ways, lots of mentoring so being able to get back and do that is something that I'm really excited to get a chance to do.

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CARLINE 04:12

No, I mean it's brilliant I mean I, I've like you I've experienced discrimination in my corporate career and in fact, I I did the a session for the chambers recently where it was a bit of a warts and all when I kind of told him about my, my disappointed parents when he used to play hookey at school and I told them about one of my first jobs where I was interviewed and the male candidate said that I wasn't that bright, I wouldn't go very far but I had great legs [laughs] it's like 'oh my' I mean that was a long time ago, but you know that stuff is just unacceptable and I always think about my two daughters and how I would want them to be treated in the workplace and that's really important isn't it and then when I went on to man, to run the the Dundee International Women's Center, even more so that stuff was hiding for me so I feel like we're we're kindred spirits in that Lisa. And in terms of how you manage your teams, what values are most important to you and have you integrated them into your organisation?

LISA 05:13

Sure well the values that that we kind of live by are empathy, trust and equality and I think, ways that I've embedded them in our businesses, you know, we're trying to not just talk about it in management speak but really live them every day, so you know, trust I've hired really smart people, really an amazing people some of them are much better than me at lots of skills, areas and different things so why would you do that and bring them in and squash them, you know or mould them to do only do things the way I do them. I don't know everything, and a big part of that y'now is letting go and stepping back and actually letting the clients get engaged together with more people and realising that I can trust them to do

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that and that's enabled us to grow. A services or consultancy business if you don't do that you know, your your limited by your capacity and life asked him last election in people and you want to do that right and unless you're bringing in people and you want to do that and let them thrive and benefit from it, equality and I mean you can challenge them if you're like you're not a diverse team, unfortunately! We're we we actually a team of all women! For one thing. So

CAROLINE 06:32

So are we!

LISA 06:34

[laughs] So there you go, so maybe you can challenge me but what I am excited about is that I've been able to create a team where a lot of them have actually returned from an [inaudible] period or maternity leave, took some time out and then come back to the work place they've really thrived joining my business. We have multiple different flexible working patterns and have accommodated around different childcare needs and different things but that's our business! You know, it works because we're upfront about it, we'll explain to clients what availability people have and, I don't work - well it's my business so it's different sometimes I'll work all hours of the night and things but that's because it suits me, but I also take time out the working week through the day. I mean childcare and things like that and over the pandemic I've had to, I could talk about this all day sorry but

CAROLINE 07:28

No no it's great, it's a people first approach isn't and I think that's what's critical is that everyone now. I think we're in this work life balance phrase is just out the window and it is you've got one life don't you and you fit all these amazing things in your family, your people, you know your friends, your work, so it's making it it's making it work for everyone I think that's really important. And Lisa, I noticed that you've got the personal pronouns she/her on your LinkedIn name, can you just explain about that and where this has come from and, you know I suppose just help us understand a bit about that better, why why that might involve an inclusive culture approach?

LISA 08:07

Sure sure so it's actually it's really interesting because probably about a year or so I had noticed this a lot on Twitter, I had actually educated myself and I had looked at people's profiles and they had their preferred pronouns on their Twitter handle so I thought what is this and I'd read up on it and I'd updated at the time on my Twitter but I hadn't updated it on any of my other social media channels. And it's only more recently that I've updated it on my LinkedIn network as well and I don't know what it is, it's an odd thing that some did mention

to me and I realised that I needed to be more consistent. But that ground to it is around normalising the use of your preferred gender pronouns so that people are comfortable and to share that, not only three I don't what it means you know so that is something that people can normalise and you can show you're inclusive and welcoming and you know if you can do that and be up front in it it becomes something that's not specific to people that are transgender for example and just normalises that.

CAROLINE 09:21

I didn't didn't know that at all, that's really helpful and you're right it's about actually digging a bit deeper and understanding a bit more about it you know so, no that's that's really helpful. How you how you sort of just you know I suppose thinking about that topic of equity for women in the workplace do you think the pandemic's caused a wider gap?

LISA 09:41

Yeah absolutely, I mean there's there's been lots of studies that have shown that women particularly adversely affected, by pandemic childcare being one issue. Also if you look at the sectors that are women-owned and led in particular where women are higher employed, things like the beauty industry or services, hair services into hospitality - it's had a massive impact. You know you shouldn't make generalisations and a large majority of cases childcare impact have hit women harder. Lots of them and some of the players haven't noted - they've had the option to furlough carers, men and women for childcare purposes but many employers have declined to do so as well, so you're just left with some really difficult choices so it's had a massive impact I think things like actually the gender pay gap reporting, that was caused because of the pandemic. But all these things are going to have a knock on effect for a long time to come.

CAROLINE 10:44

Yeah absolutely I think so too, and I think just I was speaking to some colleagues yesterday who were saying that actually when we all go back to the work place end of June, if that happens it will most likely be women that stay at home and and the males will go back to that what workplace, so again that gap's widening isn't it. It's an interesting topic that we should maybe have a glass of wine and discuss wider Lisa. So listen you know I know that you're passionate about a purpose led organisations the name of your business is Purpose HR and you deal with a lot of high growth startups so what's what's your thoughts about creating a purpose and people first organisation, what practical steps can those startups do?

LISA 11:27

Well I think, I would always go back and start with the 'why' as well, and just realising that for an employer as an employer it's a massive differentiator in terms of attracting people,

retaining people it's not just about doing the right things although the reasons are right, they're are a whole range of other benefits too. There's probably still an education piece around that that more employers can look at, but as you say the practical steps for how to do that in this communication first, always is. You know if your people can really understand the impact that you're trying to achieve if everyone's behind that and on board then that's going to be a massive differentiator in terms of achieving the goals that you have and then building that into your structures right through to where you recruit against people with these values, so look at your values and not just your purpose but your values get get those articulated, you know don't just write them on a wall but actively talk about them and then look at things like your recruitment strategy and your culture aspects of the hiring process, not just looking at the skills that we want people to bring or the experience that you actually want them thinking first 'are they aligned with our values? Are we clear about articulating those, sharing those?' And checking with people, is this an environment where they will thrive? It's really really important, embedding that into things like your reward structures, right through things, I could get really technical going into things even like your policies, and if you write those things with your purpose and values approach first you know. You asked me earlier about my values in our business and one of the last one that I didn't get the chance to go onto was empathy but if you think about that in terms of like, some some businesses an HR support function it's seen as maybe like the rulebook are the HR policies compliance focussed. Actually if you're dealing with people empathy is absolutely because it's treating people as people and understanding where they're coming from.

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13:35

[crosstalk]

CAROLINE 13:40

Listen, you were awarded a place you touched on it earlier the entrepreneurship program at Babson College in Boston, I actually did a conscious leadership course and still on it actually from Entrepreneurial Scotland through Babson which I'm loving I didn't get to go to Boston because of the pandemic unfortunately, but what were some of the takeaways that you had from the time and you know the other business leaders can can learn from and I suppose just thinking about about people and purpose approach?

LISA 14:15

Yeah, well I guess I mean going back to that time and why wanted to do that program I had always been you know in HR and businesses and I had my my planes of you know my discipline and skills that I knew but I really felt from two aspects, from an empathy perspective to really understand founders, I really wanted to get to grips with the much wider aspects of business and be a really good commercial partner and understand so functions like marketing, sales and finance and product and really embed my learning there so going to the states and doing that program it got me a chance to get out of the function I'd been in

and go out and work with businesses we did placements, we went out and saw businesses we met all these leaders and really got to understand from them the inside out, how these businesses are built and grow. The teaching team out there are incredible because they're all entrepreneurs that have built multiple businesses so they really know their stuff it was fantastic.

CAROLINE 15:20

What so you know if there's you know, if someone is running an organisation maybe they're not a startups the been going for a long time when they come to you and it's clear that they don't have that why sorted out yet and and it's not ingrained within the business what what sorts of things can they do to start that process?

LISA 15:36

One of them might be go and talk to your customers, talk to your market and understanding not just what do you do or why do you build or why is it great - what impact do you make? How do you help people? Most businesses solve a problem, so what problem do you solve? So you know if you can take that and then you can articulate that into your vision, you can talk to people you can talk to your team about that and actually I think in any sector of business is to have a purpose. You don't need to be a charity or social enterprise, actually where businesses should do more in that space and you know corporate CSR is really important to me. But you can blend profit and purpose, you really can. But it's just understanding that why, and then as we talked about before it's talking to your team about that, talking to your people and embedding it through everything you do.

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CAROLINE 16:33

Absolutely and who does this really well? Have you got some examples of some businesses or organisations that do this stuff really well and and what did they do and why you know why is that important?

LISA 16:45

One that I would start with and somebody that I've had the chance to get to know is Hey Girls.

CAROLINE 16:56

We've interviewed Celia actually.

LISA 16:57

She's just wonderful, and you can tell, anytime that you engage with somebody from her business and their team the passion that they have and you know, and it's not just her it's that whole team and and and they share that energy they've built so much so so quickly and I think that can be attributed to the approach and they values set from the outset.

CAROLINE 17:24

Yeah, Celia's amazing isn't she and you're right there's there's something going on with that culture isn't there where they all have shared values and they all have shared energy and and the yeah they're they're doing some great stuff.

LISA 17:42

Another one I would mention minutes totally different completely different sector, there's a business out in Boston called Hubspot, they do marketing and CRM but they're really interesting because their technical founder he built and what he calls the 'culture code' and he is he's a technical person and he wanted in the way that he writes code and documents and things he wanted to that around the culture. We're going really really fast, what makes us great what makes us unique, and how can I like lay that down and use it as a formula to build on, like I love that thought I just thought it was really cool! And they did that early on and then year on year they update that and publish it, they have a deck that they share it and again you get a real sense of things like trust they talked about it. We don't have an expenses policy, we give people a budget and we trust them and then we we deal with the exceptions we don't clamp down on people because of like one exception like I think that kind of thing is really great that's just bringing it to life rather than just talking the talk.

CAROLINE 18:48

I love that a culture code - I've never heard of that we will need to look up look up and pop it in the resources. So you know, you you've given you've given talks Lisa on how businesses can better handle redundancies and and and that and am I right in saying you've been through that process yourself? What advice can you give leaders on how to support their staff? Because we're in this horrible sort of coming out of lockdown situation and we know there's going to be lots of businesses and lots of people affected by it but that there must be are a right and a wrong way to do this that's people focused what what would you suggest?

LISA 19:27

I mean I think you have to make sure that you're compliant and you have to follow a process but it's treating people as humans whilst you do that, it's explaining the stages and what you have to do. It's making sure that you don't get so anxious about following processes and not ending up at a tribunal that you talk to people like robots that you can't actually engage with them human to human. So simple steps like when you're in [unintelligible] taking the time to listen. Sometimes you know people are frustrated or angry you really really just let, sometimes just letting them vent and talk it through and you know making sure that people understand that these are not decisions that are taken through any fault of theirs. These are not things that are done because they failed. Often it's much bigger, it's out with their control it's financial, or the pandemic or other factors that have come in but you still have to take that and think 'well not just with the impact on our business. What's the impact of this person and their their job and their their livelihood?' And really just taking that empathy value that I talked about and bringing it to life in the discussion that you have. I've said that I've been involved in multiple businesses that have been downsizing redundancies and restructures and the difference that the human aspect in terms of the person that sits in the meeting and talks genuinely consults, not just the policies we have to consult, even so here's your consultation - shall we tick that box and move on? There's a world of difference, and you never know and you never know sometimes you can consult and alternatives can be identified and people can stay or thrive in a different role. So really you bring that to life and do that properly. The other parts, if you can put in place some sort of mechanism to support people in their onwards journey - if that's creating CV coaching or if it's introducing them to people in your network whatever you can do people appreciate that and the value it. And the last thing I'd say In Scotland in certain industries it's a small place, and people pop up again in different ways. I've always focused on treat people well and think how you'd want them to remember their exit from the business.

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CAROLINE 21:42

Yeah, we talk a lot about B2B and B2C and actually it's just human to human isn't it? It's just absolutely treat people the way that you would want and actually one of the conscious leadership sessions we did. One of the examples was treat every employee like your precious child and how you'd want them to be treated in the workplace and I think that just puts a real different perspective on it, doesn't it? So you talked about policies and tick boxes we've spoken to some amazing leaders who have admitted that they're going to dust off their CSR policy now that it's been left in the drawer for a few years and they feel that now is the time to really bring it to the fore. What's your thoughts on on on that and CR policies and and what businesses can be doing?

LISA 22:35

Well I think I think talk to your employees first and see what what would interest them and don't do things for the sake of it. Nobody wants to be one of those companies that look amazing from the outside and shiny, and say all the right things and sponsor events you go join join the business and get a job there and then you find out on the inside that's not the case at all and it's lip service. So speak first to your employees find what people are interested in and value and then design something around that because then people will engage in it.

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CAROLINE 23:13

Absolutely and you recently joined us at Social Good Connect which we're really excited about it, so tell us a bit about why now, why do you think it's important?

LISA 23:22

You know I wanted to do something, I've been focusing on a number of things for our team. So we were reviewing all sorts of things like our benefits package and our structure because we're a small team we're eight people, we're not it's not just me anymore it's not a startup and I'm into building more structure and more offerings and when I learned about Social Good Connect through actually, the FutureX program and I looked at it and thought this is amazing! I wonder if a company our size could get involved and I was delighted when I saw that you're flexible and can work with all different sizes and ranges of employers and I actually always had a policy, when I set the company up I'd always said I want to give people the opportunity to do things like volunteering but actually for people to go out and investigate that and find something, go through all those steps, all the admin or barriers that come up - in practice it's harder for people to do. I do various things myself but it was never really something as a business and this just seems like a brilliant way to actually enable people to do it and give them a platform in a way that they could find opportunities quickly and effortlessly and really exciting things that you might not have had on our radar.

CAROLINE 24:40

Brilliant, well we're delighted to have you in the team Lisa and look forward to working with you. So just finally what's the sort of best and worst advice you think you've ever been given?

LISA 24:52

Well what the worst advice probably was quite early on when I was thinking of starting out I had an idea for the name for my business and I remember somebody said to me that and 'that's a stupid name' that's fine I didn't listen to them, 'but don't call it that it will only ever be you that people will buy so just call it Lisa Thomson HR, because that's what it is really'. And I just ignored that advice because I always had plans to grow it and if I'd called it Lisa Thomson HR how would I ever build a brand, it's not very exciting for my team so I don't know if that's the kind of thing [laughs].

CAROLINE 25:43

No I love it! Because you know it's like you know no one can tell you what your name should be yes, and of course Purpose HR is important to us because that's what it's all about it's all about purpose. I'll let you into a little secret our name is Social Good Match for a while and and we kind of what we're likened to match dot com for for volunteering and so I did some research all in the interests of business Lisa and signed up to much dot com and never got asked out on a date.

LISA 26:14

Well some people with bad taste on there!

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CAROLINE 26:16

Just to see how that connection piece worked and how the matching piece worked because obviously that's what it's all about it, so that was the worst piece of advice. What about the best?

LISA 26:25

I only wanted to say one last thing about that worst piece of advice if its ok, but that was actually indicative of the fact that that was somebody limiting my ambition for me and seeing that would only ever be - and there's nothing wrong with that for people who do choose to have a consultancy business that's just themselves, if that's their goal. But I had a goal to build something big but I was almost put in a box of ok it'll only ever be you, so sorry.

CAROLINE 26:53

No, that's great!

LISA 26:55

One of the best pieces of advice I got was around, trying to think of the best way to explain this. Sometimes people will underestimate you and actually just don't take that to heart, don't let it knock you down, to keep smiling, carry on anyway and sometimes do you know what you can go under their radar and fly way past them and it says more about them than about you, so I don't know if I've articulated that very well but I used to get really knocked down if I thought somebody had you know, underestimated me or not valued me. And actually, it's not about you it's about the limiting factors that they put round themselves.

CAROLINE 27:42

I love that, that's great Lisa. And a great way to end I think. You know there's something in that isn't there about self belief and and language that you use with others and not limiting that at all and I really love what you said at the in the beginning about your team and trusting them and that you know how great is it to admit, and in fact I did this yesterday with with some of our team and said I don't have all the answers you know! But together we're going to come up with some great great ways to achieve this and deliver this so I really like that too. Lisa it's been an absolute pleasure, just just before we finished just tell me about your LinkedIn group because it might be useful for people to know, tell us about what that is who it's for for and what your plans are for it.

LISA 28:30

Awesome. Well it's only been going maybe a couple of weeks or so, we've got now maybe a hundred and sixty-odd people in it. And it's called Purpose Driven Leaders and and initially I'd set it up with a view for being, kinda clients or people people in our network and people that are maybe building a team, are thinking about growing their teams and would benefit from that peer to peer support of like-minded people. That was really the thought behind it I have to admit, it's harder work than I thought to have a LinkedIn group and trying to get people engaged in the chat! So it's taking up quite a lot of time but I do like my social media. I think being connected on my LinkedIn you'll probably have noticed that! So it's just about sharing ideas and learning from each other.

CAROLINE 29:24

Yeah keep keep going with that because it's a, it's great just to see all these communities popping up that the of like minded people. Sometimes Lisa's I think it's just a time thing isn't that it's just you know, because sometimes I see your posts and sometimes I don't when I'm in LinkedIn and I missed some so it must be I don't know if it's the algorithm or whatever that stuff that's way too complicated for me to understand but no I think it's a great source now and I really wish every success with that and thanks in your that you're doing in that space. Lisa it's been a pleasure to speak to you.

LISA 29:56

Yeah, I've really enjoyed meeting you, thank you so much Caroline!