

Andrea Sampson - "Reviving Human Connection: The Future of Work and Storytelling"

Host: Maggie John

Overview:

Andrea Sampson joins us to discuss the power of storytelling for business leaders. Andrea Sampson is the founder of Talk Boutique. As an executive speaker coach, communication expert and business strategist, Sampson specializes in helping those who have a message to convey do so with engagement and clarity. Sampson shares why creativity needs a little tension, the magic of the water cooler conversation, and the kinds of stories audiences actually remember.

Highlights from our conversation include:

1. Thought leaders create the future, making it especially important that diverse leaders are able to convey their ideas and stories to the right audiences.
2. People remember stories more than facts or data.

MAGGIE:

It's Magnet Network Live and I am your host Maggie John. I'm now joined by Andrea Sampson. She is the CEO of Talk Boutique, a speaker development representation training firm she works with thought leaders scientists, and innovators to craft compelling stories and presentations helping them communicate complex ideas effectively. Her work often focuses on science communication and storytelling for business leaders. Welcome, Andrea.

ANDREA:

Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here.

MAGGIE:

Biggest takeaway from the past two days?

ANDREA:

Oh, you know what? People, people, just amazing, amazing people here. I think that's one of the things that for me, you know, as we come out of the last four years, just being able to be together, to have good conversations, to hear stories, to be able to connect on a human level. I think it is so important. And, you know, look, there's always lots of great information at these types of conferences, and I'm excited with all the learning, but it's really all about the people for me.

MAGGIE:

I think sometimes, you're so right, Andrea, I think sometimes we forget how important it is to just be amongst each other and not on the Zoom calls all the time, because there's, you know, those side conversations that you wouldn't have on Zoom or some other online portal, right? And just the vibe, the energy, all of that.

ANDREA:

You know, it's true. Like I was talking to somebody the other day and we're saying, you know, what we've lost is, you know, the water cooler conversation, right? Like, you know, we would go into our office, you know, every day and like in the mornings, what would we do? We'd go to the kitchen, we'd grab our coffee or a glass of water or whatever it was. And someone else was there and we like, did you watch or did you do or, you know, it wasn't so much that it wasn't what we were saying. It was that we were connecting. And that's what we've lost because, you know, Zoom is efficiency, right? It's like jump on, right in, you know, oh my God, I got another one, got to go. And so, you know, like one of the things that I'm starting to see happen with in the Zoom world, in the video world is people are now starting to open up their Zoom calls minutes early so that you can do that, you know? But it's still not the same.

MAGGIE:

No, but I think if anything, we have grown to appreciate this, like what we're doing right now, right? Because we can easily do it at home in our pajamas, but it wouldn't be the same connecting the way we are today.

ANDREA:

Look, I think it was, you know, there was the novelty of, hey, I'm like at work in my pajamas, you know, and we all loved it until we didn't. But now we're like, get me out of these pyjamas. I want some real clothes. Exactly. Like I want to, I want to actually look okay. You know, like I want to, I want to do the things that I used to do. Like, you know, it's like anything, you know, the pendulum swings. Yeah. And so, you know, we, we were all the way over in, you know, I, I want to hang out in my pajamas all day. Like you have my cat with me. And then it's like, you get there, be careful what you wish for.

MAGGIE:

Because you got a lot of it. A lot of it. We got a lot of it.

ANDREA:

And we're not as, it's not just that we're not as productive. We're not as creative. Because I think, you know, one of the things I know about being a creative soul is you need tension. And I don't mean stress. I mean tension. And tension is that there's something pulling you in a way that you don't want to go and suddenly you have an idea. And that's what we lost, you know? You know, like sometimes it's the tension of the pants that are too tight. Um speaking for myself... you know but sometimes it's the you know the tension of like you know being in a constant go go go and your brain is going wait a minute I need the you know the release of creativity I need I want to start to look and do things differently and so there's where we get innovation yeah because that and I think you know I think we're a real in danger with going into too far into this work from home where, you know, everybody's in silos. Innovation doesn't happen in silos. And, you know, if we look at, you know, the reason for this conference, future of work, innovation is a big part of it. And look, not to say that we're lacking because there's a lot of innovation happening out there. But I think if we keep going down this road, we're going to find ourselves becoming less and less and less innovative. Yeah.

MAGGIE:

Yeah. And just the back-to-back meetings and not that margin of space to be creative, to bounce ideas off of each other, to, you know, just to say, hey, what do you think about this? What do you think about that? Instead of the whole structured meeting back to back, right? And not being able to explore new areas. Let's talk a little bit more about what you do. My first question is, how can leaders effectively communicate complex ideas in a way that resonates with diverse audiences, especially in times of rapid change?

ANDREA:

Yeah. You know, I mean, there's a lot in that question to unpack. I mean, like, how do you...how can you communicate complex ideas? How can you do it through a lens of diversity and what's going on with change? There's a lot there. I mean, when we talk about complex ideas, one of the biggest challenges with complex ideas is that, first of all, there's the word ideas in there. Most people don't know what an idea is. Right. Like we think we do. But I go, what's your idea? And it might take you an hour to tell me what it is. An idea is one sentence in really tightly contextualized. So the first thing is just getting that idea down. You know, when I used to work in the TED world, in the TEDx world, and the thing that would happen a lot when we would get people applying to be on stage is that they would tell us stories. And look, don't get me wrong, I love a good story, but a story is not an idea. And so you've got to be able to separate out the idea from the story so that the story is the right thing to contextualize that idea. And that's how you decode a complex idea is that you have the right context for it, which is story. And then when you talk about, you know, diversity, looking at the ways in which diversity plays into this. Well, the great thing about stories is that it allows us to bring who we are and why we know the things we know into the context for our ideas. And this is something I talk about a lot. I talk about the need for more diverse thought leaders in our world. Why? Because, well, thought leaders are creating the future. And when we look out there, the problem that we have is that we tend to put these thought leaders onto pedestals. You know, they're leaders of countries, leaders of companies, leaders of industry. And I don't know about you, but when I look out there, I don't see any of them looking like me, you know. And the problem with that is if they're creating my future, where's my voice in that? Yeah. And so stories allow us to take our thought leadership and to convey it

using our own diversity in a way that starts to contribute towards the future that's being created.

MAGGIE:

Why do you think we've lost the essence of what an idea is?

ANDREA:

Because I think it's one of those words that became ubiquitous. I got a good idea. Right? And the problem with that is, yeah, okay, I had a thought. That's not an idea. And so when we look at ideas, what is an idea? Like, as an example, you're giving a business presentation. Okay. And somewhere inside of that business presentation, there's an idea in there. But it's probably got slides. It's got a whole bunch of research. It's got maybe some testimonials. Maybe there's a case study in there. Where's the idea? You're believing that somebody will be able to suss out what you actually mean, but you haven't come up and you actually don't know what you mean. You're going all around it. And we do this all the time. We start to tell somebody our idea and we talk for minutes and back our way into it. And then we go, oh, this is what I really meant. But you've lost your audience. You actually forgot all the stuff you said before it, and now there's no connection points.

MAGGIE:

But do you think that's because, Andrea, because we have been. We've been trained to back everything up with tons of research, tons of reasons why, because we don't really believe in our idea. So we think, oh, if I prove that I've read all of this, if I've proved that I've studied all of this, then Andrea will believe my idea. And in the midst of that, we lose the idea.

ANDREA:

That's it. And so, yes, I think there's that. And I think that we've lost the I think we've lost the respect for the idea, too.

MAGGIE: Oh, that's good.

ANDREA:

Because I think that, to your point, the data has become more important than the idea itself. And the idea is why we do what we do. The idea is the thing. It's like, you know, I talk a lot about thought leadership. That's my idea. Diversity of thought leadership so we can create the future we want. That's my idea. And if I start filling in, like, look, I could find tons of research. I could do my own research on it. And, you know, to some degree I have. But if I start talking to you about how one in five thought leaders is a person of color, you're tuning out. Like, I've just bored the hell out of you. If I, you know, say.

MAGGIE:

I'm starting to think one in five? I'm like, who are these people?

ANDREA:

Well, exactly. And I mean, I just made that up. That's totally a made up stat. But the point there is that if rather than saying that, if I'm saying, you know, we need a future that is inclusive, not only of people of color, but those who are neurodiverse, those who are gender diverse, those who have cultures that, you know, that are different. And now we start thinking about that. And you start thinking about all the people you know who fit all of those different places. And you go, yeah, like, wait a minute. Like, I want my future to be inclusive of those people as well. Well, who's representing them? Now, I don't need to give you any stats. We can all go, yeah, that makes sense. If I was trying to prove something, yeah, maybe I'd go and do some research, but I don't need to prove it. I think we can all feel that. When we get into the place of proof, and this is where academics and science, you know, and I work with a lot of scientists and academics. And in the industry, of course, there's lots of competitiveness. And they're all trying to, you know, sort of prove each other either right or wrong. And I think that's actually part of the losing respect for the idea, because now it's not about the idea. It's about who got there first, who got there more clearly, who got there more completely. And it's like, yes, but can we go back to what we were actually trying to prove out? Like, if what we're trying to do is to cure cancer or come up with, you know, a way to teleport between, you know, places, you know, so that we don't have to drive cars and fly planes. If that's what we're trying to prove out, does it really matter who got there first or does it matter that we got there? And so I think that's part of it for me.

MAGGIE:

So then how can businesses develop stronger communication strategies to build trust and drive action in this evolving workforce? And we come back to this, you know, the idea.

ANDREA:

Yeah. And well, first of all, the first thing and I mean, I work with, again, a lot of business leaders, too. We teach them how to be storytellers, right? Now, we don't think about business and storytelling. Those two things are like almost like, you know, they don't go together, right? Except they do. Because we all know when, you know, you're sitting in the boardroom, people, we're all sitting there. There's one presentation after another. We've all been in that boardroom, right? And then the guy gets up or the girl and they start telling a story. And right away, you're like, oh, that's interesting. Where did that come from? And suddenly in that story, they're delivering something that you didn't know. And you're like, wow, I never thought of it that way. And then they start telling us, you know, here's what we're going to do. Here's the plan. And now you're fully bought into that, right? That person is a storyteller. They're a business storyteller. And so when we have the courage and the bravery to use our own lives as the context for the ideas and the work that we want to do, what we do is we shift the conversation within the boardroom, within the context of the work that we do. And not only are we, you know, listened to, but people remember. This is like so important. There's brain science behind stories. It's not just like, oh, it's kind of cool. When you tell a story, 10% of the information you tell within that story is remembered. Think about your last corporate presentation. How much of it do you think is remembered? maybe 5%? If you can get to 10% of it remembered, think about the impact that you could make within your business. Think about the growth of your own career. If every presentation you're giving, 10% of it gets remembered and gets fed back to you. And you get credit for that. Storytelling is powerful.

MAGGIE:

Andrea, I could talk to you forever. Thank you so much for joining me today.

ANDREA:

You're welcome. This has been absolutely a pleasure. Thank you.

MAGGIE:

That was Andrea Sampson. She is the CEO of Talk Boutique.