

Paul Cook Interview Transcript

00:00 Welcome

Hello everyone and welcome to the My Local Marketing Podcast. I'm Maria and today I'm speaking with Paul Cook, founder of the Transformation Guide. Paul, hello and welcome to the podcast. How are you?

Hello Maria, thank you. I'm very well, thanks.

I've met you for the first time, think a week ago now, but I've learned so much from you since then. And you've given me the kickstart needed to get my video started. So thank you.

That's always good to hear, the pleasure.

00:31 Paul's background

Well, today we're not talking about videos though, although that will come later. So could you please introduce yourself first and what you do?

Well, my name is Paul Cook and I founded a business called the Transformation Guide, where we teach people how to deliver business change and transformation. I've worked in that space for 30 years. I love everything about change and change management, and it just seemed a natural progression. So we've been going for probably just over a year.

00:52 How Paul came to start The Transformation Guide

How did you come to start the Transformation Guide? That was a really interesting story with how you started and then how you shift.

As I say, I've always liked working in change and probably right at the start of my career, I got into sort of changing and systems change, how do we implement systems change with people? And it's the people side that's always interested me. And I've always worked in that space. And then I felt I needed some more skill. I fast forwarded about 25

years there and I qualified as a coach. And then around that same sort of time, a business approached me and said, you're just what we need, which is always quite interesting.

They said, you've done this, you've worked in change, you've delivered big transformation programs, and you're a qualified coach. We want you to teach our team how to do this in your way. And so I worked with them for six months. And then I thought, actually, this is really good. I'd originally said to them, what you really need is training. And they said, no, we don't need training. What we need is on the job support for our team from an expert. And so that's how I thought, it feels like there's a business in here. Let's give it a go. What you call it. And I feel like.

a guide for people through that transformation. And so that's how it came about. And then since then, just over a year ago, I've been promoting it as I don't work in your business full time. I come in, I like to work with groups of people, and I like to support them while we're trying to navigate change. I might give them some tips and pointers, I might nudge them a little bit, and I'll make sure they don't make mistakes. And that's how it was born really.

02:18 The difference between change and transformation

I thought I knew what the definition of the words change and transformation meant, but speaking with you, you had a really nice take on it and I never really thought about the difference between the two words. So could you please explain?

People use them synonymously. They are different things. We all know what change is. Transformation became a bit of a buzzword. I always think, well, transformation for me is I have to think about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It's transformed. It's something completely different physically. I talk about houses quite a lot. And for me, change is all about the soft furnishings. It's for cushions. It's for decor. might be a new kitchen. But fundamentally, it's still the same house. You just smarten things up and change things around a little bit.

Transformation would be if I took the structure of building, if I took it back down to perhaps the foundations and rebuilt something completely different. And when I took my hands away and left it, it wouldn't go back to the old house. It's a new house. It's a

modern house or whatever it is. And for me, that's transformation. It's become something completely different.

03:20 Situations when companies need to change

At least not from that. What sort of things do companies go through? Because like I said to you before, if I think of change, I think of companies being taken over, a really big thing that they need help being taken through. But you correctly said that actually it's not that at all, is it? There could be little tweaks that companies need to do in order to achieve their goals.

Yeah, you've got to keep moving forward. You've got to keep adapting. know, the world is moving around us. So a customer's changed their habits. You might need to change your products. You might need to change your services over a longer period of time. You know, if you look at something like banking, we've gone from going into a branch and transacting to doing stuff on the telephone to now everything being on the mobile. That's all to be transformation. It's shifted completely, but there's steps along the way where they've tweaked things and adapted things and implemented new systems. And I think, you know, whatever the size of a business.

You're always doing little bits like that.

04:11 Dealing with change in companies of different sizes

And you do work with different sized businesses, don't you? Because you think of change and transformation, and I think instantly of corporate. So you work with those big guys, the little guys don't have enough money or anything to do, but you've worked with businesses and people at all levels, haven't you?

Yeah, I mean, sometimes I work with individuals, but often it's large corporates. Large corporates are hard to change. There's lots of moving parts, very clunky. But I've worked with businesses. I worked with a skincare manufacturer in West London, perhaps had about 40 people. And we looked a lot about how do they sell the product? What's the sort of sales engine? They had a very good marketing engine, but they didn't really have a sort of platform to sort of get into retailers. And we looked at manufacturing.

And we looked a bit about packaging and that was a great business because no one there was really expert in change instinctively. They knew what they needed to do. And so they were actually close to being an ideal client and working at the moment with another firm that's maybe got about 150 people who make knitwear, but a lot of them work in manufacturing. So actually if you take out a lot of the people working on manufacturing, you're perhaps left with 20 or 30 people. So these are quite small businesses. It doesn't mean they don't have to change the skincare manufacturing. We've got quite a big online presence are selling in John Lewis. said wide range of companies there, it's just fascinating.

05:26 An example of how Paul helped a team through a change

Could you give an example for how you've taken a team, because you work larger with teams, and how you've helped them through a particular change? For example, they weren't selling enough, so how do you get the team and work them through a particular change?

There's a really nice example from a business. They were based around, we're actually four businesses. They were owned by quite a big company, but individually, they probably each only had a few hundred people in. I met a lady who ran that business, who asked me for something very technical, basically a picture of what the four businesses should look like in an ideal world. So I saw what I would do. This is sort of my style. I thought I would start with the grassroots and would start with a group of people. went around and met people.

from each of the four businesses and all the different components of the business. So the salespeople, the people who made, they were more of a service business. I talked to some people in technology, some people in finance, some HR people. And what I did was I engaged a group of people, invited them into workshops. And what we did was we looked at how it works today, what's wrong with how it works today. And each of the workshops was cross all the four businesses. They were like cross-cutting teams. And we looked at what does good look like?

If you look at it from the outside world, who do you really respect? Who's really good at this stuff? And then we talked about, what do we want to be? You know, we've talked a bit about what we're not and what good looks like. What do we want to be? So we designed that out. And then we built, we pieced it all together and built a picture of what we wanted the business to look like. But the amazing thing about this, I'd never seen

anything like it actually. It was hilarious because we got to, put that out of the eight weeks of running this and we had an event at a local hotel. and I had the sort of management team of the organization and I had the hundred people who'd been in the workshop and they all presented. All I was really doing was facilitating the process and they presented what they thought the business should look like. And when I walked into this room, there was a real buzz, there was a lot of energy. I'd never seen anything like it, but a group of people from a business had redesigned what they wanted their business to look like and presented it back to the management team and it was incredible really.

07:35 The key ingredients that can help a team to change

So what do you think are the key ingredients in that that made them so excited and enthusiastic?

engaging people. it's not top down. It's not like a leader saying, well, we need to look like this. We need to be this. Yeah, it's a group be doing the analysis and saying from a bottom, okay, we're in the detail of this business. This is what the problems are. This is how we address them. This is what it needs to look like. So it's driven bottom up and that creates an energy and an engagement that sort of, you know, drives people and people want to be part of it it creates this energy.

08:20 When people resist change

That's so true. And as we said before, when we had our catch up, people need to feel like they are part of something, like they are invested in it. If you're just told to do something, they don't really care about it. They are doing it because they've been told to do it, but they've got no vested interest in it.

It's worse, I'd probably resist it. You know, and we talked a bit about people resisting change, but everyone says that people resist change. But if it's a change you've designed and it's a change you want, I don't think people resist that. So for me, it's all about engaging people early on and letting them come up with the ideas and then shaping it around that.

08:39 Paul's CHAOS methodology

Correct me if I'm wrong, you have, is it chaos methodology? Is that your special methodology that you've created and that you use? So could you explain what it is and why it's important and how you've come to design this?

I needed a model. needed to both say people, we doing this? Almost like a checklist. And so it's a mnemonic C-H-A-O-S, but chaos, there's a saying, all great change is preceded by chaos. It can get a bit messy. It was a clever play on words. So I always start with the C is for compelling vision. You've got to start with that vision of what you want to be. And it's got to be compelling because people have got to look at it and think, I want to do that. It's got to have that sort of resonance, that energy. And you might not get that first time. You might have to talk to people about it and then you listen and you evolve and you develop something that people actually start to say, I think with with the company I talked about before, I want to be that I want to be part of that. And so you do that. For me, that's all about the heart, bringing it to life. It's about going out and talking to people and explaining what you want to do and how it's going to work. And that brings it to life. And then you get to the A, which is the action. So you create this compelling vision that has a life of its own and drives people to action to actually want to do something about it. We always are really around open communication, going and talking to people, what do you think? Listening to what they say. And you might not like what you hear. So you might have to adapt your vision. So there's a bit of a sort of circle here, but eventually you're going to get to a point where you've got energy, you've got momentum, and you've got a vision of what you want to do. So often I go into places who are midway through some sort of change or transformation and you sort of say, let's just stop a second. What is it you're trying to do here?

Can you just sketch it out for me on the whiteboard? And they usually can't do it. They don't have a design or they do have one. And then people start to say, that's the one I thought we were doing. A lot of people, go and look at what they're doing in change and transformation. And they've already got the sort of moving parts. They've got the ceremonies. They've got the people, they've got the team, but they haven't got any of other stuff. That's the S, the service, the service delivery. So quite often what I see is you've got the S, but you haven't got any of the vision, the energy, the communication that comes before that.

So it's just a nice way to sort of remind yourself that there's four big things before you actually get to sort of mobilizing and setting up any sort of change program.

11:10 How Paul has developed his business over time

I really like that methodology. So it's like have that vision, but then you're getting people involved in like the how, the action, the open discussion. So they feel part of it, which means that you can end up delivering that service at the end. What have you learned since starting your business? Because knowing about the industry is one thing, but having a business, getting the processes in place for you, being able to reach out and convey what you do. That's a whole different ball game. So how have you managed to develop that over the last 12 years? Because it looks really slick now to me. You've got your videos that you do, you've got a newsletter that you do, you've got your own methodology. It seems like this has been built up over an extensive period of time.

Well, it's accelerated quite quickly in probably the last 12 or 18 months where it sort of started to get more organized and formal. I have a secret operations bestie who works with me like part time and she's very good at creating a lot of these things. But also there's a theme here. You've got to keep moving forward. You've got to keep looking at what's going on and what other people are doing. And if you look at small businesses around us, they're all doing very similar things. They have that customer journey. You need to communicate with your audience. So you want to build that mailing list. You need to embrace social media. So as you say, I had to swallow my pride and try and learn how to make short videos, which I use on LinkedIn. You've got to keep learning. I mean, that's one of my core values as well. It's just, you know, you've got to keep learning and developing. So you look at what other people are doing the same, you know, what good looks like, and you sort of think, well, that seems to work. So then you piece it together and you try and map out a good solid customer journey so people can follow you through that sales funnel where they become aware of what you do. I spend a lot of time talking.

One of my KPIs, Key Performance Indicator, is to go out and have more coffees with people. So that's a measure of, I talking to enough people and tell them what I do? Being on a podcast, talking in front of groups of people. You've got to go and tell people what you do, what you believe in, what you represent. I'm not selling, I'm just talking to people about what I do.

12:59 Why Paul decided to hire an ops manager

We're going to come back to your plans for this year because I find them really interesting. But I'm just intrigued. What made you, once you get an operations person in

place? I think it's a very clever idea, but you don't normally think as an ops person as the first one you want to get on your team.

Ops might not be the best phrase for Lydia. We've talked about it a little bit. I looked at what she was doing. So she'd set herself up as a woman man. And I saw the communication she was doing online and the stuff she was doing on social media was really good to human business. So there's pictures of herself, graphics using things like camera, all these tools that we sort of hear about. And she was using them really well. I thought, well, why don't I do that? Well, I could learn to do it or I could get someone to help me to do it. And that's what Lydia's done.

She did that for probably 12 months and now she's much more of a managerial authority keeping me in check, keeping me in line.

I think that's the balance, isn't it? It's knowing the things that you want to do and develop yourself like the videos and then knowing the parts that this is that you think, okay, I just need someone to help me with this so I can focus on another part, but that's a really personal decision.

Yeah, I think you've got to have that vision. How do I want this to work? How do I want to attract people? I don't particularly want to be a small business, but I am. So then you have to embrace that and look at how do I market myself? You don't have a marketing budget. You don't spend on adverts. You can't do things like that. So you have to look at how do I tell the story using social media? How do I draw people into a funnel? The News Doctor, I think, was a really interesting experience because I resisted it and resisted it. And I thought, I don't want to be held to doing something on a regular basis, pressure of having to do it. But what I found was when I started to do it, I started to write about what I think and what I do and how it relates to the world. Then I use that a lot in my marketing and my LinkedIn and stories I tell. It reminds me of all the stories you've got, know, over over 25 years, 30 years of working different businesses, you forget about things that you've seen and things that you've done.

But I've had this privilege of going into all these businesses and having a sort of look around and asking questions and poking around. And that generates a lot of stories. And I think people are interested in those stories and then how it relates. You've got to make it relatable to someone else, haven't you?

15:08 The problem with putting off activities

It's interesting though that you mentioned your newsletter, how you resisted. I think that's another interesting part of change because with change, we tend to blow something up in our minds or put something off and delay doing it. And it becomes such a big thing. And then you end up doing it and you think, this is so much easier. Why did I make this such a big deal and delay for months doing it? I think that's the thing with change. can often blow up our minds to be bigger than it absolutely is.

There's probably some deep-rooted psychology about it, a fear or I don't know, I'm not a psychologist, so someone will probably help us on that. But yeah, think people, put off things and then they sort of take on a life of their own. And the more you sort of resist it, the more stubborn you get. And you've got to remind yourself, haven't you? Take your own medicine. All right, and see what happens. What's the worst that can happen? I suppose I always had this fear that people wouldn't be interested, but then that means you have to tighten up the whole message and think, right, well, I need to make sure people are interested.

I need to tailor it to the audience a bit like this. What is the magic that you can give away to people here that they'll think, well, that's really useful. That's really helpful. I'm very much into giving away as much as I can because what's the point of holding onto it? So if you've got lessons or learning or models or tools and suggestions, you've to give it away.

16:22 Paul's plans for this year

And that leads nicely into your plans for this year, which is your KPI to have more coffees, or in my case hot chocolates with people. That is your goal for this year, isn't it? To get out and get in front of as many people as possible. Could you say bit more about that?

Exactly. mean, again, a little bit of feedback I got was you've got really good stories. You've got a really good model. You've got to get out and talk to more people. And so I've set myself some goals around speaking in public, which is how we sort of met and trying to speak to groups of people, to businesses, currently talking to some business students and things like that. But also the coffees, the network, going out and meeting people, going to networking events, which is where we met at Reading First Friday, which was a brilliant event. And then I met and really interesting people.

and then you go and follow up with them. I'm not a natural networker, but it's classic networking. You follow up with them and talk to them and they recommend you speak to another couple of people. And before you know it, you've been to one event and had 40 coffees.

17:17 How to approach networking

And this is the interesting thing because I really love networking and getting to meet people, but you can't say I will go out, I'll meet three people and the third one will ask me to do a podcast or if I meet five people, I'll get a really good opportunity. You don't know, you've just got to go out and meet people and opportunities will come, but you don't know what will come and when.

If you knew that life would be really dull, you've just got to go out and but you know, if you like drinking coffee and you like going to little independent cafes and try new things, what's not to like, but you've got to keep going around and asking people. I spend a lot of time talking to different people, looking for advice. No one knows everything. So people have always got advice for you. And it works both ways, doesn't it? I think that's what makes being a small business really good fun. And you choose who you want to spend time with and who you want to network.

Someone said a really nice thing which I heard this week which said, if you don't make me smile, you don't get in my diary. And I thought that's really good.

18:15 Paul's advice for people on how to view and explore change

Going back to all the advice that you have, what techniques or advice do you have for people who say, oh, I may need to do some changes, but I don't really know what change or how to get about it. What advice do you have?

Basically, you need to engage people, you need to talk to people. how do you do that? you workshops are always good. think we've all been in those workshops where lots of people have post-it notes and write things on the wall. If you think about what you're trying to do, rather structure it and have different ways of doing this. Sometimes we talk about I've gone into places where I've said, you know, what's wrong around here? Why doesn't it work? You usually get a torrent of like people love writing negative things on

post-it notes. There's an idea of stolen from another business where they have two boards and they talk about magic and baggage. So they recognize that there's magic here. And they talk about the really positive things as well as the baggage. There's a tool we use a lot voice of a customer. And it's pretty obvious, I think what it is, but you go and ask the customers what they think and they tell you for the boat with their feet usually. So that voice of a customer and what they really want is really important. You've really got to listen. I think everyone sort of does this either with customer interviews or with surveys or with feedback on Google forms.

Everyone does it, do they really pay attention to it? I was talking to a quite a big business who had used AI actually to go through all of the comments people have made on all the different forums, little chat forums, and they pulled it all together and processed it into a really good story about what customers thought about them. And it was really powerful. So voice the customers good, but any of those sorts of workshopping sessions like that, I think are brilliant. I do a series of videos, longer videos on this. The dangers that you get to a set of notes about what's wrong with the place and you don't have that view of what you need to do. You can look at other people, but then really all you're doing is copying people. we talk a bit, I don't like to use the phrase operating model. It's quite a technical pick chance, but you can start to put different bits in there. You could start to say, well, I need to have a digital channel. I need to have a new channel or I need to have a direct offering. If I'm selling stuff, maybe I should be delivering stuff. Maybe I need to branch out into recipes or a different product. And then shape out what that means. So here we're getting into sort of structured techniques to get to how do I write down what I want this business to look like and what I want it to be. The bottom line is talking to groups of people, customers, other stakeholders, people in the business. There's no substitute for that. And then asking what do think we should do to fix that?

20:48 Paul's final advice for businesses

It sounds so simple and yet most businesses are not doing this.

I've tried really hard to make it simple. I believe that anyone can do this. You need a few little tips and tricks and things like that, things to avoid pitfalls and things like that. But anyone can do that. But it goes further than that. if I go into a business and they come up with the ideas, the people in the business come up with the ideas, those ideas are much more likely to stick and much more likely to resonate with the comments. Going back what we started with, if someone starts telling you what to do, you tend not to like it. But if you're given the floor and asked what to do,

It's a hard question sometimes to answer, but those ideas resonate. That's where the transformation guide came from. Let me show you what I know. Let me show you the tools and techniques I can, let me teach them and let's build momentum in your team. Your business is full of all these clever people. They can fix all of these problems. We just need to look at what's stopping them. What's holding them back and give them those tools and give them a bit of support and then leave them to it and build that sort of cake, birthday in-house.

Yeah, you can go and employ external people to help you do this. But if it was one thing I'd want people to take away, it's the fact that you can do it yourself. You just need a little bit of help and support.

That's very important. We've come full circle. I was going to ask you what advice, but I think that is a perfect note to end on unless you have any other final thoughts you'd like to leave people with.

Well, obviously I'd say follow me and pick up the tips and advice, but yeah, I think you've got to believe that you can do it yourself and try it, give it a go in a controlled way. I think the other bit of advice actually is to put yourself in the shoes of your customer and see what they would think. And mystery customer, people used to talk about that, but what does it actually feel like to be a customer in that place? And what do they actually think? I think people forget that.

That was brilliant advice to you, Fred or Paul. Thank you so much for your time today. Much appreciated. And yes, we're going to have to have another coffee because there's so much more we need to discuss.

Absolutely look forward to it.