



GOVCOMMS PODCAST

EP#139 CLARITY OVER
CLEVERNESS

- WITH BEN ROBERTS

TRANSCRIPT

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Ben Roberts:

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Introduction:

Welcome to the GovComms Podcast, bringing you the latest insights and innovations from experts and thought leaders around the globe in government communication. Now here is your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke:

Hello everyone, and welcome once again to GovComms, the podcast that examines the practise of communication in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me. Today joining us on GovComms is Ben Roberts. Ben is currently the Director of Communication with Cushman & Wakefield, where he works with the Department of Defence in Australia, in their security and estate group as part of Cushman & Wakefield's National Programme Services Contract. Ben is a Navy veteran and has spent the last several years working in senior communication roles, not only in the defence industry but across the Australian Public Service where he worked as a senior speech writer, where he wrote for ministers, agency heads, members of the senior executive service, ambassadors and many, many more. And he's also worked in the role as political advisor.

He's currently embedded with the Service Delivery Division at the Department of Defence's Security and Estate Group, and he works there helping across the group with their strategy and engagement. Ben has post-graduate qualifications in strategic communication from the University of Canberra and in public sector management from the Queensland University of Technology. He's currently studying both the Bachelor of Ancient History and the Graduate Certificate in Digital and Social Media at Curtin University. He joins us on the line now. Ben, welcome to GovComms.

Ben Roberts:

Thanks very much, David.

David Pembroke:

How do you do that as well as keep up a very busy day working in SEG at the Department of Defence?

Ben Roberts:

Well, I mean basically I just, yeah, every evening get on the books, get on the Zoom and do my lectures and do a lot of readings. And particularly there's not necessarily a lot of relevance between digital and social media and ancient history, but I would say that any communicator worth their salt needs to know a bit of Cicero, so.

David Pembroke:

Indeed, indeed. Listen, let's take us back through your career because interestingly you are a Navy veteran. When did you start in the Navy?

Ben Roberts:

I joined when I think I was about 18. Yeah, I joined straight out of high school. I was very briefly at the University of Tasmania and I was kind of just killing time until I could get recruited. I was just sporadically attending philosophy lectures at the time. Then I joined up as a combat systems operator, was in there for a few years. Interesting role. Ultimately, I decided that it wasn't exactly what I wanted to be doing. I don't think I was actually very suited to that role. Because that role is very technical and as I've discovered throughout my life, I'm very, very right brained and not very left brained at all, which is helpful in communication and not helpful when you're monitoring radar signals.

David Pembroke:

Then how did you make the journey into storytelling and communication inside the Navy? Did you start to see the opportunity to be involved in the communication in the role that you were in? Or tell us that story.

Ben Roberts:

Yeah, I mean, not really is the answer. I mean, when I started looking to actually leave the Navy and I requested to be discharged, I was thinking long and hard about what am I going to do when I discharge? And before I'd actually got in the Navy, I had been involved in student politics stuff, I was in Young Liberals. I'll just pause for the sound of everybody turning off the podcast now. I knew people through that. I was able to line myself up a job with Senator Payne, who I worked for when I left the Navy so that I could have that smooth transition.

But in the Navy I kind of came to realise that I wasn't really using my primary skill set. The only times I really was really using it was writing minutes and things like that, but not the real kind of meaty narrative work that we all enjoy so much in the profession. I left the Navy and went to work for Senator Payne for a few years and that is where I really cut my teeth on government communication and in this case kind of political and constituent communication as well.

David Pembroke:

What did you learn in those early days working for Senator Payne?

Ben Roberts:

It was very interesting. I mean, it was very interesting to see things from the inside, see how things that you might have speculated how things work on the inside of parliament, but actually getting to see it up close is fascinating. What I really cut my teeth on was speech writing, especially. Lots of speeches, lots of constituent correspondence and things like representations to ministers. That's where somebody will come in and say, "I need your help with this matter. Can you please write a letter to the minister on my behalf and kind of flag this issue with them?" Doing lots of that kind of work. Also, things like op-eds, media releases with the Cumberland Newspapers and all that kind of stuff. It was really great. There was something really thrilling. Even as long ago as that now, I mean, this was during the Howard government, it was a while ago, in having your words read out in parliament and being able to look up in a handsard and say, "Well, yeah, I mean I didn't say that, but I wrote that and I'll still own that."

David Pembroke:

What makes a great speech?

Ben Roberts:

Brevity, I would say primarily. People seem to think that people want to listen to speeches that go for 40 minutes and they really don't. Probably about 10 minutes is about a good speech, but ultimately I think you just need to tell a story. I think that I was a senior speech writer at the Home Affairs Department for a number of years, and then I went and performed the same role at the ACCC as well. And one thing I used always say to people was a good speech doesn't need to say everything, it just needs to say a few things well. And that was really the key is that you don't need to put in everything in here. You don't need to have massive amounts of PowerPoint slides.

In fact, I would quite recommend against doing that, but you just need to say whatever it is you're trying to articulate well, and like that famous Churchill quote that you might see me talking about on LinkedIn from time to time, if you've got a good point, come back and hammer it, hammer it three times, as much as you can. Don't try and be clever. Don't try and be really highfalutin language. Just be plain English and just nail it.

David Pembroke:

And how then do you decide what's important and what's not important? What's in and what's out?

Ben Roberts:

I mean, that's a process of negotiation essentially. It depends a lot on who you're writing for. If you are in at Home Affairs, the kind of service standard was anybody above band two I would fully write a speech for. Below that, it would be, I would just help them out. I'd do some copy editing at the end, but I wouldn't fully write it. It'd be a case of going and meeting with the person who's going to be speaking and saying, "What is it you want to say?" Then kind of winnowing that down to a few key messages, maybe between three to five, depending on the length of the speech. Some of these ones were regrettably quite lengthy speeches and then getting the evidence to support that. Sometimes you just have to sit down and write a 50 minute speech and you're going to need a lot to fill that air.

And I guess the other thing that was helpful was learning things like the ordinary rate of speech. An ordinary person speaks about 110 words per minute. A fast speaker speaks about 120. That means you can kind of figure out from the word limit, from the time limit, how much air you're going to need to fill, how many pages are you going to need to write? Then you can really just negotiate with them. "I think we need to have this here. I don't think that this really fits." And maybe they might argue for it. I mean, ultimately you kind of have to respect their wishes because at the end of the day, they're the ones that are speaking the words. History's going to remember their name, it's not going to remember my name. That's kind of how it is, you negotiate it.

David Pembroke:

Listen, in terms of speeches in the digital age, where do they fit in terms of part of your storytelling armoury and how should we be thinking about speeches?

Ben Roberts:

To a degree, some of this has evolved, hasn't it? If you consider what you're doing right now, delivering a podcast is essentially a long form narrative where you've got certain things that you want to say and you've got an audience that you are addressing that to. To a degree that is also kind of like a speech. I would say that in the digital age, the difference between say a speech and a script for video is blurry. And I think that will continue to blur. But then on the other hand, there are still lots of occasions that are still very straightforward formal speeches, but that are going to be delivered digitally. I think for example, of when the American President gets up there and addresses the people, whether that's State of the Union or if that's there's been some kind of an emergency, that is very much a speech.

There's still a place for them, but they're still happening. But they're certainly blurring a lot. Also, I would say just kind of generally, the thing that's really interesting about speeches, and this doesn't change in the digital

age, is how they bring together lots of different aspects of comms into one thing. They bring together the live kind of theatre of a media conference. They bring together the long form narratives of say an opinion editorial or another long form piece. And it's going to be recorded, it's going to exist in perpetuity. The evidence needs to be correct, your points need to be right. And that really brings a lot of things together. It being digital doesn't really change any of that fundamentally.

David Pembroke:

No, and I certainly agree with you that it's a wonderful way of organising your thoughts around a particular topic. Then once you've organised your thoughts around a particular topic and done the work in putting together a speech, there then is the opportunity to either cut pieces of that up to then be distributed, be it video, or be it audio, or to expand on different parts of that, but they are a great way of putting something together, aren't they? To respond to a particular context and a particular point in time.

Ben Roberts:

That's right. I mean, one of the things that we used to do at Home Affairs, for example, when I would work with the social media team there would be to give them a copy of the speech that was going to be delivered and then work with them to identify which ones of these little points might be pulled out for a social post. You want to do a picture of the speaker, and you have a little pull quote on there, what's the most relevant part for that? Then also just often I would actually be there while the speeches are being delivered and kind of texting them and saying, "Oh, this wording changed slightly. This is what was actually delivered" so we could kind of update things on the fly whilst also having that kind of responsiveness that you need in the digital realm. You can't be waiting around for hours.

David Pembroke:

Listen, speech writing is obviously just a small part of your career and what it is that you've done. What's your advice to people who are looking to communicate effectively with ministers' offices? Be they working as part of the bureaucracy, trying to get a message in to a minister's office or from a constituent trying to engage effectively with a minister's office? As someone who's been sitting on the inside as a receiver of effective communication, what does that best practise look like in terms of reaching in to engage with a minister's office?

Ben Roberts:

Yeah, I mean, reaching into a minister's office can really vary quite a lot. It depends a lot on the nature of the portfolio, the personality of the minister, the personality of staff for that matter. But fundamentally, it still comes down to the two kind of main points. Firstly, you need to be clear, and that's a point in really all communication and something that I'll return to time and time again when discussing this with people, which is don't ever try and sound clever. Go for clarity instead. Clarity over cleverness every day, all the time. The big point is really understanding what the other person wants. For example, if you are working in a department or something like that and you get a request from a minister's office, it's not always apparent what exactly it is that they're after. But the more that you can firm that up, and whether that's going back and asking or if you are tasking out from a minister's office or from a member's office, again, being clear about what you want because otherwise you get products that aren't fit for purpose.

You'll get a situation where maybe a set of TPs or something like that, talking points, is bouncing back and forth between minister's office and it's not really clear why. And it can be particularly difficult sometimes when you are remote from that interaction. If you are really far down the chain, you're working in a directorate or something of that nature, you're not in direct contact with the minister's office, that's when it's a good idea to do something like give your DLO, your departmental liaison officer, call or drop them an email and say, "Can you just help me clarify what it is that we're looking for?"

David Pembroke:

Yeah, "I'm confused I'm out of guesses, I don't know where to turn next."

Ben Roberts:

That's right. "I think I've given you what I want for the last five generations, and I still don't have it, so can you make it a little clearer please?"

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Listen, your current role, just explain what it is that you do as part of the Security and Estate Group in terms of that comms for that particular group inside the Australian Department of Defence?

Ben Roberts:

Sure. I'll touch on that lightly because I don't want to go too much into it for reasons of confidentiality and all that kind of thing. But broadly speaking, I'm assisting them in my ... I've got a small team. We're assisting them to engage with industry, primarily to engage with industry, including small to medium enterprises, indigenous, veteran owned companies to try and get them into the supply chain. That's what fundamentally a lot of the work is about. It's about saying these are things that are happening in this space that may be of interest to you, work or what have you, and this is what's going on currently. And just trying to bring those two things together to keep industry informed. And it's not defence industry, it's not missiles and tanks and rockets, it's civil engineering, construction, tradies, people like that to come get work on the estate. I just assist them with that about articulating the message properly and targeting it and things of that nature.

David Pembroke:

How has your current role been influenced by your past experiences?

Ben Roberts:

I'd say quite a lot. I think that it sounds a bit pretentious, and that is perhaps because it is pretentious, but I've always tried to take roles that really kind of align with my values and part of that is doing something that I think is of benefit to the nation. I'm not terribly to go and work for doing comms for say a clothing store because I don't really think it's that important. Although obviously of course we need clothes. But doing communication work in things like Department of Home Affairs or the competition consumer regulator or with Defence or in the defence industry, all of it comes down to me looking at it saying, "Is there an actual benefit to this?"

Well, I believe there is, I believe the defence industry is very important for Australia, so I'm really happy to work in it. This role that I'm in currently obviously draws a lot on my experience from being in the service, gives you really good insight and helps you working with other service people. It also helps understand things like the language and obviously the acronyms because we both know the acronyms of Defence are a lot. Love their three letter acronyms, but it all comes together for me. Having had that experience of being in the military, and I was also in the cadets when I was a kid, I was in the Air Force Cadets in Tasmania when I was younger, I was an Air Cadets Sergeant. I actually got way further in the Cadets than I ever did in the Navy.

It all comes together because it brings together those bits of different elements. The speech writing stuff that I learned in Senator Payne's office and in Home Affairs and so on. And also, I mean it wasn't just speech writing in Home Affairs, it was a lot of things like estimate statements, annual report forms, exec comms, writing the exec comms from the secretarial or people like that. Really taught me a lot about how to firstly articulate a narrative, which I think is my key skill, is crafting a narrative. And second, how to get into somebody's mind to know what's important to them, to try and draw that out, because there's kind of two schools of thoughts

when it comes to doing corporate comms, particularly when you're writing for other people as opposed to just writing for an inbox or something like that. It's you're either giving them a voice or you're emulating their voice and you really need to pick which one it is. All of those skills come together in what I'm doing at the moment and hopefully what I'll be doing in future with any roles that I work in.

David Pembroke:

Listen, what is your best advice to help government communicators to engage effectively with citizens, to help build community, to help restore trust in government?

Ben Roberts:

I think that there's kind of three kind of main things that I would look at for that. Firstly, your communication needs to be frequent and sincere. We don't need to only hear when there's a problem. We like to know about the journey as well. There was a quote, I can never quite remember it properly, but it was something like JFK speech writer or someone like that saying if you want me to be there giving you comms support when the plane's crashed, then I ought to be there when it's taking off too. The kind of idea is that you should be there for that whole of journey. Particularly when you're communicating with people, and particularly in a time now where we've seen so much degradation in public trust and civic institutions, the trust thereof, it's important to be sincere, to make it clear that what you're saying is true. You can back it up with the evidence.

The second point I would make again is plain English. This is something that you see a lot across the public service, obviously, particularly in the senior levels, you get some very, very intelligent people. And sometimes when people are very intelligent and very engaged in a particular area or subject matter, it can be a little bit difficult for them to communicate because you've got to communicate to the person who's least familiar with your material in the room, not always the person who's the most familiar. Having that discussion in plain English and trying to simplify things and make them relatable and understandable, I think is really important. The final point that I think is important, it's something that I kind of think it's kind of like a signature of my work is context. Any work that I do generally I put lots of context in there wherever possible.

I think that that's something that's really important in government, particularly because some of the government work can be kind of abstract or it can be about complex programmes or processes. And sometimes that can be highly emotive. I mean, when I was working at Home Affairs was during ... I worked there throughout the entire boat people, however you want to term it, boat people era in various roles, not just in comms, in other roles as well. And that was a really highly emotive, highly contentious area of public policy. We always kind of keep it in the back of your mind that you need to explain why these things are happening. If you are putting out doing an op-ed or you're doing a social media post or a committee statement, especially actually, most importantly with committee statements like in the Senate, is to explain why things are happening, not simply that they have happened.

Because that's sometimes missing. And I think you can save a lot of heartache, a lot of questions on notice by adding that context up front and saying, "This is the reason that this is happening. This has not happened in isolation. We have this information that supports this action or this policy has been developed because of it's a response to this report" or whatever it is. Giving that context is really important because that context can help people, particularly people in the public who might not be very engaged with what you're doing, understand the rationale you're applying, that you're not just acting randomly or sometimes whatever you're doing they might not be very on board with. There's a difference between explaining it to somebody and just letting them wear it. And that difference will be expressed in how they feel about it.

David Pembroke:

How hard is it to make context or to infuse a narrative with context and to still keep it brief? How do you go about that sort of stitching those things together?

Ben Roberts:

It's really hard. It's really difficult to some degree. To some degree it's about repetitive messaging. Sometimes particularly when you're dealing with people who don't necessarily really understand comms very well. There can be a tendency to look at things, say, "Oh, this sounds very similar to something you've said before." And our point of view of comms people is always, yes, that's the feature, not a bug. Making that clear, building up a narrative over time and reinforcing it continuously itself builds context. There's always other opportunities too. If you're writing a long form narrative piece, you have lots of opportunity for context. If you are doing a social media campaign, maybe you can start building that through things like your hashtags and what you're linking to and whatever else.

The challenge is always, particularly in government comms, not specifically in the role that I'm in now, but just in any role that I've had really is about being able to push the important messaging through the layers of bureaucracy that you're working with since you are sometimes, depending on who you're writing for, often quite removed from the end state. I mean, if I'm a speech writer and I'm writing for the secretary, then that's pretty simple. I've got direct access. But if I'm writing for somebody else who's submitting something to the secretary and it's like five times removed from me, then there's a lot of opportunities for that message to get diluted. That's where adding the context doesn't necessarily even have to go to the message. Sometimes the context is going to the person who's going to be approving it and saying, "This is why we are including this in the message."

David Pembroke:

Listen, you've been around for a while, throughout your career, what are the big changes that you are seeing that government communicators need to understand and perhaps take advantage of in order to be more effective, be more able to be included earlier in the conversations and to be more valued in the roles that they play?

Ben Roberts:

Yeah, it's something that's always kind of the case with comms, I think, which is that comms is a strategic enabler that works across any organisation that it's in. And it can dip into little bits and pieces here and there to help them achieve their goals. But generally speaking, comms can have a pretty broad view of what's happening in any given organisation by nature of all the people that I deal with. Building those relationships I think has become increasingly important in comms. Comms used to be very transactional, in some places it still is very transactional. And getting away from that, in my experience and observation has been partly about communicators building stronger relationships with the non-comms people in their organisations, departments, companies or whatever to demonstrate over time the kind of positive outcomes that you can get. People always think comms is going to do something stupid, essentially.

"If we give you this information, you're going to go out there and tweet it." It's like, no, literally we are never going to do that. We're going to stop you from doing something wrong. Building those relationships over time has become really important. I think that the relationship management aspect of it has certainly increased in value. Also, obviously the embrace of social media and the digital space is huge. I mean, I think when I joined Home Affairs it was like 2006 and I was there until 2018, and there was no social media I think at all at that point. When I joined, certainly I'd be surprised if there was. Really just trying to stay up to date with that has been a change.

But also I think that there are more comms people in the government now than there used to be. And that's something. I mean, I'm never quite sure who to attribute this quote to. I read once that it was Napoleon Bonaparte, another person said it was Stalin, but it was that quantity has a quality all of its own. Simply having a great quantity of comms people now, building across the public service especially is great. And that's a change. And that wasn't the case in the past. And I think that through the pandemic we have increasingly seen

the importance of good public government communication and we've also seen what happens when it's lacking. That gives a real kind of impetus towards greater empowerment of comms people to be more part of strategic conversations. Yeah, that's kind of what I think of that anyway.

David Pembroke:

And I totally agree with you. I think that getting up out of your chair and going and inviting yourself to meeting and really playing that role of where people are ... They can't see the necessary reason maybe as to why you need to be there. I think that's the point is that you've really got to go there and again, build trust over time. And another thing is that when you do have impact is to make sure that you are showing people and demonstrating back to the organisation the value that you're creating and not just quickly moving on to the next thing because there's always something else to do. There's always the next thing, but I think there is a really increasingly important function to be able to explain what it is that you're doing, why you're doing it, and the impact that you're having.

Because I think if you can do that over time, you build that reputation and then you start to become the, "Oh hang on, I'm going to actually go to that person because last time when we did this, look at the impact that we were able to create." I think get up out of your chair, build those relationships, get in front of people, invite yourselves to meeting and make sure you are showing and demonstrating to the organisation the value that you're creating, so as that you're more likely to be invited to other conversations and other opportunities into the future.

Ben Roberts:

That's exactly right. And I think the other aspect of that is when you're talking about demonstrating what you're doing and demonstrating your value, sometimes the work that we do can be invisible, particularly if it's quite clear when there's been an issue and somebody's come to engage comms to help with our media kind of holding statement or something of that nature. But it's not obvious to anybody where you've proactively identified an issue before it's happened and have fixed it before it's occurred, which in comms you're doing all the time. Telling people, "Oh, maybe you shouldn't do that because there are these optics that you need to consider" or reaching out to somebody on social media and saying, "Oh, that stuff that you've just posted, it's a bit questionable. I would be careful with that because it could reflect on your employer, rah-rah." And killing those kinds of things is a function of kind of comms and PR as well that can often go completely unnoticed unless you point it out to people.

David Pembroke:

Yeah, exactly. I think that is, and there's ways and ways of doing it, you don't have to put your name up in lights and push yourself to the front of the queue, but certainly you understand where the influence is and just don't let it slide is my advice to people often is just make the point and make the effort to make the point. And again, you don't have to make a big deal about it, but certainly it does help to be recognised the impact that you're having. Listen, we're coming up against time and we could talk about many, many things, but I want you to go into the future. I want you to time travel five years into the future and tell me what does it look like? What does the communication function look like and how do people need to prepare now, so as that they're having impact in five years time?

Ben Roberts:

Oh boy, that's a real tricky one. Again, I think a lot of this is about quality and quantity. I think that five years time we're going to, in the world of government, you're going to see more comms people. That certainly is some of the recommendations that have come out of variety of reports from a variety of different areas. I'm thinking of the one about the pandemic report that was kind of privately funded.

David Pembroke:

Yeah, last week.

Ben Roberts:

That was an interesting one that was held by some venerable ex public servants, but quite interesting for that to come from the private sector. And that had some recommendations in about comms, which was quite interesting, that calling out government needs to invest more in its comms to really make sure that we get this right. And a lot of that is really just a function of trust and visibility, I think. If you've got a greater amount of comms people working within their organisations, their departments, agencies, whatever, and they're actually trusted by their senior executives and the important people there, then there's going to be a better quality of product that is produced.

And as you know, I mean five years from now, we could be looking at literally anything. I think the climate's probably not going to be great. Particularly things around disaster communication, floods, fires, things like that, that needs to be really, really, really accurate. And I think broadly speaking, it has been, I know that in Canberra, particularly during the height of the pandemic, obviously we're not out of the pandemic now, but during the height of it last year especially, I thought that the ACT Health team did a stellar job, their comms team, of getting really clear, accurate, or at least as accurate as they could be, given the information that was available, getting that out and keeping the public engaged and informed during that whole period, especially when there was the daily press conferences.

But I'm thinking also in terms of the social media updates on Facebook and LinkedIn and places like that. I think we're going to see more of that. Pointed accurate communicate that clearly are the result of a whole chain of trusted endeavour coming together to produce that outcome. And I think that recent events have really underscored the importance of that. And I don't expect that that's going to change. I also think that there could be, and this is highly speculative and I'm not at all an expert on this, but there could be a greater emphasis on professional communicators working with places like national intelligence agencies and military and stuff like that to get into some of those kind of information operations and to work with the people that are carrying out that kind of work as part of national resilience and so on to craft narratives and help them professionally to build those stories. I can see that happening. I'm not aware of it actually happening yet, but I can see that there's a pathway to that happening at some point, which could be interesting.

David Pembroke:

And just a final question, in terms of your advice to young people working inside the government communication function, in terms of the skills and the mindsets that they are going to need to acquire in order for them to be valuable, what are the skills that are going to be important for government communicators to have a handle on?

Ben Roberts:

I think there are a lot of things. One of the primary ones is the ability to write well. I must admit, I have been surprised in some places that I've worked where I've encountered people who work in comms that aren't great writers. I'm always kind of surprised about how that would be, how you would come to be a person if you weren't a confident and clear communicator. Engaging with your content, reading a lot of material, reading lots of different books, doesn't really matter what genre they are, is really important for a writer because it exposes you to a greater vocabulary. Certainly trying to expand your vocab, but also understanding when you should be using a 10 cent word, not a \$10 word, it's pretty important.

I think that learning the levers to pull inside your organisations are super important. Focusing on those soft skills, like your relationship management skills are important. Always make friends with your EAs and your EOs, they're the gatekeepers to your senior executives and they're a very important person for you to be friendly

with because they can be influential and they can also give you more information when you need it. And you don't necessarily want to bother, you don't want to bother your DepSec, but you can talk to the EO and get the information that you need out of them. That's really important. And also I think engaging with other communicators online, especially through platforms like LinkedIn. I love LinkedIn. LinkedIn's awesome, it's a great place to get on there and speak to people that you would never otherwise get to speak to or sometimes you wouldn't even have any visibility of.

For example, I was working in a speech at Home Affairs one time that was something to do with Prime Minister's Office, I can't really remember what it was, but it was Home Affairs people and the PM's people were going to be in the same place giving speech. I wanted to reach out to the PM speech writing team to find out, make sure we could deconflict any messaging that there was not going to be anything that was going to kind of be incorrect. We were going to say one thing and the PM was going to say the other thing. I looked up the speech writing team on LinkedIn and was able to actually connect with the head departmental side speech writers through that way. And I've actually maintained that relationship with that person who now works for UNSW or something like that.

But it was important because I could get that outreach through LinkedIn. I could say, "Hey, I'm working on this end, just want to check this messaging that we're working on isn't going to conflict with what you are saying, is it?" And obviously we got the correct emails and stuff, we didn't have that discussion on LinkedIn, we just got each other's emails off there. But that let me find somebody who I would not otherwise have been able to find. And reaching out to your professional network like that I think is pretty important to develop your skills and your knowledge and just developing a huge network of comms people to deal with.

I mean, I've got Barack Obama's ex speechwriter on there, I've got corporate comms people from heads of companies that I would otherwise never have been in a position to speak to that I can message and say, "Hey, what do you think about this news story?" Or, "Do you have any tips on how to present this information?" And you can get that. So engaging further in your networking, even if it's just online, I think is an underrated skill and something that should happen more, as well.

David Pembroke:

Well, Ben Roberts value bombs galore in this podcast and thank you so much. The purpose of the podcast is really to have senior communicators such as yourself to share wisdom so as that people can be just a little bit better in their job every day. A big thanks to you for coming on today. We certainly do appreciate it. Thanks very much.

Ben Roberts:

Thank you.

David Pembroke:

And a big thanks to you, the audience for coming back. Once again, the GovComms Podcast is growing in audience and impact, and I was at a conference in Brisbane the other day and it was lovely when one of the conference attendees came up to me and said, "I love this podcast" because it really helps them. It's all about government communicators and trying to help the function and the practise of communication inside government and the public sector and to really take advantage of people like Ben who are experienced, who do know what they're talking about. And as I said, just great value there today. But audience, thank you for coming back again. We'll be back at the same time in two weeks with another episode of GovComms. But for the moment, my name's David Pembroke and it's bye for now.

Outro:

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