



GOVCOMMS PODCAST

**EPISODE #138 HOW TO TRAIN
YOUR POLITICAL ANIMAL**

- WITH MELINDA MADDOCK

TRANSCRIPT

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Melinda Maddock:

When you're in a meeting, and you, you know, you can sit there, you've got the opportunity to observe, take the minutes of the unspoken. So, the unspoken in where people sit, what the body language is like, who's, who's talking the most, who's chairing and why, who are they listening to? There are power dynamics in every relationship, especially where we, we come together as strangers to get things done.

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 is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me. Today, we travelled to Nipaluna Lutruwita, which in the language of Australia's first nations people is Hobart, Tasmania, where we speak with Melinda Maddock.

A political strategist, writer, and facilitator of both workshops, and professional learning. Melinda has shaped her career as a political adviser and senior government executive with a broad range of experience in campaigning, public policy systems thinking and organisational culture.

She now runs her own consulting business Madfinch, where she helps people to use their power to create change at work and in communities. And this year, Melinda published her first book, How to Train Your Political Animal, a power handbook for changing yourself and your world. Melinda Maddock, welcome to GovComms.

Melinda Maddock:

Hi, David. Thanks for having me.

David Pembroke:

So, listen, let's start at the beginning, the Melinda Matic story. Are you a native Tasmanian?

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, I'm a native Tasmanian. I'm the great, great granddaughter of convicts, and I'm also the daughter of an Irish migrant. So, I grew up on the very politically dynamic island of Tasmania.

David Pembroke:

And listen, when in your growing up did you start to take an interest in politics and think that it was a place for you, a place where you could make an impact.

Melinda Maddock:

I, I was brought up in a family that strongly values justice and fairness. So, I think it comes from parents who, who didn't go to university. I was the first person in my family to go to university. It comes from having a father who was brought up in Belfast. So, I watched the troubles on the news every night and I was fascinated by what was happening in Northern Ireland.

And we always wanted to do what was right for people. And so, I was raised in that context. And of course, Tasmania is very, as I said, politically dynamic. And I went to my first rally, actually, when I was a toddler, with my mother pushing us along in a pram, my brother and I to protest the dismissal of Gough Whitlam. So, not that I can remember it, but I was there. So, it started at a very young age.

David Pembroke:

And in terms then of the family discourse and you as you, as you grew up through your primary school and then high school years, did you, did you start to play taking an active interest and being a participant in a political discussion and social justice issues?

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, I did. Yes, I did. So, you know, around the kitchen table, we will talk about the issues and things that were going on. And the question that always was asked was, well, what, what can we do about it? So, I had that firmly in my mind.

So, in, in grade six in my last year of primary school, I organised a seating, a protest because they, they weren't gonna allow the, the... it was a small primary school, they weren't gonna allow the two grade six classes to go to camp together.

So, I organised this seating on the playground. And after the lunch fell and con, we put our school jumpers on back to front, which was really rebellious. And I guess, I just had in my mind that, you know, it's important that if you care about something... to do something about it. And then, I went on in high school to organise a national petition for, um, world peace at the time.

David Pembroke:

So, I'm sure everyone's thinking, what happened with the seating? Did the two years six classes, were they able to go to camp together?

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, yeah. No, we won. Yeah, we won. We had a victory there. I'm speechless. And so, yes, won that battle. It was a great, great lesson.

David Pembroke:

And what did you learn out of that lesson?

Melinda Maddock:

Uh, I guess I learned that I could do something. So, not really aware of power dynamics when you're young, you can't articulate it. But you know, there are very strong power dynamics in schools, very structured places. And if I didn't like how something was done or questioned. So, I guess I always was a critical thinker and always questioning, well, is this the, the right thing? So, if it's not, can I change it?

David Pembroke:

It's, it's certainly a really powerful formative action, I'm sure, that you saw the power of action. And that, you know, to make change, that you actually have to do something, and you have to be able to articulate why you believe in your particular case, as you did back there in year six, but that must have given you a lot of confidence?

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, it did. And what I also learned was, to have people alongside you was really important. If it was just my voice, then it might not have been successful. But if we can rope a few others in, then we had more chance of, of success. So, it did give me confidence. But I wasn't, I wasn't an extroverted kid. I'm an introvert. And so, what it was is a quiet confidence, I suppose, a very internal thing.

David Pembroke:

But again, going through that when you are trying to organise that particular group, do you... can you remember and do you think back that, you know, I have to get my arguments right. I have to get the language right. I have to get the timing right. Or, was it just something that came? Were you, were you strategically working through it? Or were you... was it just happening around you?

Melinda Maddock:

I reckon I cooked it up at home with my parents. And then, this when did it, I think, was how it happened. You know, I am a strategic person, but possibly not at age 12, I can't remember. But uh, yes, I think it was probably something we said, "Well, we've got to change this. What can we do?" And you know, a few friends and I just did that.

David Pembroke:

And do you remember your parents' reaction?

Melinda Maddock:

They were pretty proud of me.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Yup, they were.

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah. They're pretty proud of me for standing up for something, it's a tiny thing to stand up for. But to exercise my voice and to get a change that benefit not just me but my classmates.

David Pembroke:

And in terms of your world peace survey, your world peace programme, what happened to that?

Melinda Maddock:

So, um, when I was in year nine, it was international year of peace, and I was watching the news and the US bombed Libya. I was pretty horrified at the time and anxious as kids were in the '80s. Also, you know, afraid of the cold war that was going on.

So, I was just sitting there getting upset about it. I remember my mom was ironing at the time and she said, "Well, what, what do you wanna do about it? What can you do about it?". And then, we talked about it and came up with the idea of having a petition which started off being with Tasmanian school students, a petition for nuclear disarmament.

And so, we had some help from a senator, a Tasmanian senator to draw that up, and we got that going, um, statewide. I went to a small high school but they were very supportive and helped us get that going Tasmania wide, and then it went national.

So, we ended up, having the, the petition of 75,000 signatures of Australian high school students, and we tabled it... when it was tabled in the old Parliament House, it was the largest petition tabled on a single day at that point. So, this is before electronic petitions.

And I ended up presenting it to Bob Hawke as Prime Minister on the steps of Parliament House in Canberra. Uh, and that was another big achievement, which I was very proud of.

David Pembroke:

That's amazing. That might, you know, take me through that moment where you sort of you know, in the car driving towards Old Parliament House with a, a 75,000-signature petition. And again, what, what did that teach you? What did that, what did that whole experience teach you?

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, yes. I was very nervous because, of course, it was a, a big media scrum at the time. And being a shy person, you know, that made me very nervous. But we did it, we did it with a school friend of mine. And a teacher was there as well supporting us. And um, and there are amazing photos on the steps of, of Parliament House and I was very, very, um, happy to do that.

And I think that's where I got that real lesson in, in power and your ability as a young person to, to come up with an idea, put it into action. And then, to be there with the, you know, most powerful people in the land, who are listening to you and can change the way they think or change what they do as a result of what you've managed to get going. Which was a pretty amazing thing for 14- and 15-year-old to learn.

David Pembroke:

Yeah, it's incredible, really, that you were able to have the idea, bring it together and have the confidence and the drive and the knowst to actually, you know, get it to that position where it became a national event.

And we'll make sure that we get some of those photos and put those up in the show notes, that'll be fantastic to be able to, you know, share that with the audience as well, because that's a, a wonderful achievement. So, clearly then, you're on this path to activism, uh, early, and you're having this ongoing success. So, where to from there? Was it to university? Was it to student politics? What's the Melinda Maddock story from there?

Melinda Maddock:

So, you would think from there, that I'd be a Greta Thunberg type person, but that wasn't who I became. I think because I was more introverted, I sought to use my power more quietly. So, I went to university and did, um, political science and, and loved it.

And then, then, coming out of university I had two job offers on one day. I got into the Department of Industrial Relations in Canberra, passed that exam. And I was also offered to work for the Labour Party in, opposition in Tasmania. So, at that time, all my friends were leaving for work.

Um, Tasmania was a fairly depressed place at that time. So, people were leaving for work. And so, to stay, went a bit against the flow. But I loved politics so much at the time that I decided to stay and work, for a Former Premier Michael Field at the time. And I probably learned more in a week of that work than I did in, you know, degree of political science, because being up close to politics was an extraordinary experience.

David Pembroke:

So, you had the opportunity to work in the office of the opposition leader, is that right?

Melinda Maddock:

Yes. Yes. So, I did electorate work, administration work to start off with. I started doing policy research. Oppositions aren't very well resourced, so there's only a few of us doing the work, so I got to, to do all that, um, exploring and just observing and, and listening and paying attention.

David Pembroke:

And how long did you spend in the opposition leader's office?

Melinda Maddock:

Uh, so, it was a couple of years. I went overseas, did my big, um, backpacker trip as... in that time as well and came back. And then, uh, labour got into government so I ended up in the Premier's office, in the late '90s, doing a job as a political adviser, which really did suit me.

David Pembroke:

Now, we'll come to your book in a minute because I imagine a lot of the lessons that you've, learned, not only from your childhood but also from your time in politics, is in the book of *How to Train Your Political Animal, A power Handbook for Changing Yourself and Your World*. But it just a personal reflection then on that time, as it... as a young woman coming into politics, what was that like?

Melinda Maddock:

It was really quite extraordinary. Um, in Tasmania, because of our small population, you have a real opportunity to influence change in a role like that. And I was really quite grateful for it. And I didn't... I wasn't one of those people who just sat still and, and put up with the status quo.

So, I, I was always finding out what the latest thinking was, and trying to get people to be more strategic, it's a very reactive environment. And I was really wanting to see how the psychology of politics worked, how we could, you know, put something into play that might have benefits down the track, all of those things.

So, it, it really shaped my skills and my strategic thinking to be able to, to think about things on lots of levels, you know. Does it... is it the right thing to do? You know, does it make a difference to people's lives? But does it, you know, negate our vote? Or does it bring us votes? Or does it forge alliances? You know, there's so many things to think of when you're making decisions in roles like that.

David Pembroke:

So, I'm sure there's a lot of wisdom in *How to Train Your Political Animal, A Power Handbook for Changing Yourself and Your World*. I just like to pick up on something you just said in that previous answer, because I think it's, it's, it's so critically important for effective communication, that communication be lined up behind strategy.

But as you quite rightly identify, uh, it's a, it's a difficult environment often to be strategic because of, you know, because of the context, because of the way things change, the way things information moves the way, you know, oppositions and governments and you know, interest groups and the media.

And everyone's seeking to influence what the narrative is and where it needs to be. So, through that experience, how, how were you able to encourage, the people that you worked with and the teams that you work with? And indeed, even training yourself to be strategic in that maelstrom, which is often, you know, the reality of politics?

Melinda Maddock:

Well, I think it's a having a plan, you know, to get this advice later in my career that, you know, the only reason to have a plan is to be able to change it. And I think that's probably right, but to, to know where you're going, so what outcome are you trying to create.

And then, to put the steps in place knowing that, as you say, there's a maelstrom, you're being buffeted, there's so much going on. But to be able to know this is, this is where we wanna get to, how we get there is gonna change, but this is where we're gonna get to.

And also, this is who we are. And I think this is what's not overt, um, in, in workplaces or in, in a polit-... certainly a political environment, which is what your values are, you know. What do you stand for? And what do you believe in? And what are you prepared to compromise on because it's an art of compromise.

I always called myself a pragmatic idealist, because we can have the ideal, but we have to be able to trade something away, because we're not always gonna get it and we have to take what we can get along the path. So, having that sense of who you are and where you're going is absolutely key.

David Pembroke:

And did you find that that was the case also working inside government, not just in political offices, but there was always a tradeoff? That there was always something that you needed to be able to give.

You needed to hold your values and your ideals and your principles close, but you needed to be thoughtful in the way you manage yourself in order to achieve the ultimate objective. It might be a, a zigzag path, very rarely a straight line.

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, Yes, absolutely. In government roles that I had, as well, always brought that strategic thinking to those roles. And you, you know, you, you'd get idealists in, in government. And uh, but it's much more about the compromise and letting things go and being really pragmatic about that.

But I also, I suppose in those roles, it's more about, well, what are your values, you know? Can you work with this? Or is it an incomplete contradiction to your values, and that's where some of that work is really challenging.

David Pembroke:

It's interesting that this is your experience. And we've spoken about it on this podcast before the OECD has, for the first time, taken a thorough look at public sector communication globally. And they, uh, examined 46 countries and governments, national governments around the world.

And interestingly, one of the big takeaways is exactly that there is a complete, not a complete, but a, a very large lack of strategic planning and strategic thinking in public sector communication. Would that tally with your view of the world that, that there is that lack of strategic thinking? And it's, uh, the exception rather than the rule?

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, I think so. I think, um, I think what's valued in that work is that ability to be really nimble and be able to move quickly and that they're really important skills, but we need that anchor. And you know, there needs to be a voice in those conversations about where are we going here, and not just this week or this next 24 hours, but what's the long-term objective here?

What are we trying to change? And how is this getting us towards that? And then, it's about, you know, the language that we use, that's, that's accessible for a whole range of people. But I definitely would agree that there is a lack of strategic thinking very much, um, reactive rather than proactive.

David Pembroke:

So, let's get to the book. And I'm fascinated to, to understand what is in, *How to Train Your Political Animal, A Power Handbook for Changing Yourself and Your World*. But again, perhaps before we talk precisely about the book, take me through the, the point where you thought, "I'm gonna write a book." What was the motivation?

Melinda Maddock:

I grew up, one, actually studying, wanting to be a journalist and always loving writing. I've always, um, uh, been a writer. I love speech writing, in particular. So, writing is a no brainer for me, I just love words and the whole process of... and the whole craft.

Um, so, that's something that's, uh, from a young age. Then, what happened was I went from... so, I went from university into a political office and was a political advisor for 10, 12 years. And then, I took a job in, in government, um, in the bureaucracy, where I helped set up the climate change office for Tasmania.

And in that experience, what I learned was that there are these amazing passionate people who want to make change. And they had no idea about the politics. So, I realised that I, I knew something that other people don't. And I was... it was quite a, a revelation at the time.

So, I would work with these very professional, diligent public servants and help them craft arguments, uh, build relationships, that would make them more powerful to, to make... to help push the climate change agenda to have more influence over decision makers in that, in that field.

And so, I did that for a while. And then, I, I was asked to, to, um, go back into the Premier's office for the last couple of years of, of Labor's term. And on my way out, I wrote *Mills Guide to Political Persuasion 101*. It was a, um, one page list of tips for my colleagues in the climate change office, that's all it was. It was just about how, how to, how to use their influence to get the change they wanted to see. And I, I had that and they, they really appreciated it. And I, I just thought, "Oh, there's something in this." There's something here that, uh, that I know that others don't and I wanted to... I didn't want it to be a mystery. I wanted people to know this stuff, so that they can use their power to make change.

David Pembroke:

So, it is a really a handbook for public servants to understand-

Melinda Maddock:

Well-

David Pembroke:

... better their, their world so they can be more effective?

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, public servants but beyond that. So, workers in any organisation who want to make change, um, and not for profits, community sector organisation, businesses, and also activists, so people who wanna make change in their communities. So, it might be on school associations or on boards or, you know, wanting to, to get a bike path up in a, a local community. So, it's for a, for a very broad range of people.

David Pembroke:

Okay. So, let's distil it. What's the magic? What's the advice? What are you gonna tell people?

Melinda Maddock:

So-

David Pembroke:

If you've got a few minutes to sit down with someone, what's the framework that you can help them with?

Melinda Maddock:

So, politics is not a dirty word. Some people are afraid of it. They think other people are better at it than they are. They think they don't wanna be involved in it. So, the message is when you don't participate, you're leaving the decisions to people who may be more self-interested than you. So, it's up to you if you want to see change in your world, if... is to... it's up to you to step into your own power and participate and learn how to do that.

David Pembroke:

Okay, that's the first bit. So, once you, once you're participating, what do you do next.

Melinda Maddock:

So, then, uh, I've talked about listening skills as being incredibly important. So, the best way to influence change is to listen. So, to, um, quietly observe what's going on and understand what's going on and listen to the people you're communicating with.

The other lesson is don't sleep walk. So, stay awake, pay attention, especially to the power dynamics that are going on around you, really be curious about that. And then, the other key bit of advice is create allies, make friends, build your relationships.

Because if we want to change what we do, our, our workplace, our organisation, our communities, our society, it's really hard to do that on your own. We are much stronger together.

David Pembroke:

So, power dynamics, that's a really interesting description for any collection of people really, that in any group, there are power dynamics. So, how do you go about unpicking those power dynamics so that you can understand it in a way that is useful and relevant.

Melinda Maddock:

So, one bit of advice that's in the book, and I, I talk about in my workshops is, um, when you're in a meeting, and you, you know, you can sit there, you've got the opportunity to observe, take the minutes of the unspoken. So, the unspoken is in where people sit, what the body language is like, who's, who's talking the most, who's chairing and why, who are they listening to?

There's power dynamics in every relationship and especially where we, we come together as strangers to get things done. And when don't operate in a vacuum, we operate in a structural and cultural power dynamics as well, where certain groups of people have a higher status in our society than others, uh, and so we operate within that.

So, as a little person, you know, in a workplace, doing their job, noticing how decisions get made and who influences it, who, whose voices are listened to is really key for understanding the power dynamics. So, we talk about, your personal power, your relational power, and then your collective power.

So, your personal power is, is inside yourself and your ability to change. That's why part of the book title is changing yourself and your world. Your relational power is those allies I talked about. So, building relationships with people that make your... you, you stronger and can make the case for change.

And then, your collective power is how you work together. So, those teams that you can build, uh, to, to, to make change and also respond to change. It's such a fluid uncertain environment that we all operate in, how do we deal with that environment. So, it's, it's about, first of all, seeing that you have some power, then understanding what that looks like and then using it.

David Pembroke:

That's fascinating. That, that framework that you've just articulated, I think that's a very useful and powerful framework that people can, can apply in their daily work. And I love that phrase of, you know, don't sleep walk. Because I think so many times, we go into meetings and we're not active, we're just passive.

We just sit there and we listen, we don't think about it. So, how do you, how do you get people to activate this curiosity and activate this interest so that they can better understand the dynamics?

Melinda Maddock:

It's a great word, curiosity, and I think it's as simple as that. Take your curiosity to work. Um, there's a great phrase I also use in workshops, which is practise curiosity over judgement . Um.

David Pembroke:

What, sorry?

Melinda Maddock:

Over judgement .

David Pembroke:

Yeah. Okay. Yup.

Melinda Maddock:

Practise curiosity over judgement . The political environment that I, you know, grew, grew up in is a very, um, it's a very rewarding one, but it's also can be very judgmental, very cynical, very gossipy. Um, a lot of assumptions made about people.

So, when I left all of that behind, I wanted to open myself up to people who are different to me, people have different points of view to me, and just to be really curious about that, and not judge it not be defensive about my views. And so, that's what I'm trying to show through the book, And my workshop is take that curiosity with you and be really open and let go some of these old things you might have hung on to or let go of assumptions you might make about certain groups of people or, or people that you interact with and just really listen. Because that's where we can find the connections and find better ways to communicate when we really understand the people that we're talking to.

David Pembroke:

And I love that phrase also, taking the minutes of the unspoken, that's a really, that's very powerful as well, isn't it? And that's, again, uh, gives you a role doesn't matter who you are. You know, you could be the most junior person or the most senior person, but it opens you up to be far more observant if you take the minutes of the unspoken.

Melinda Maddock:

And it is a... these are habits that we accumulate over our lifetime. And you know-

David Pembroke:

Or don't.

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, or don't, don't get stuck in, in old ones. Yeah. So, it takes a while to work, work through it. And so, we can create, we can train our brain, we can create new habits. And one thing I say, uh, especially to, to CEOs and leaders that I work with is, seek out that the new person.

There's nothing as valuable as a new person or organisation, it doesn't matter what level they are, because they come in and it's like being in a, a new country with all your senses alive. They come in and they notice everything. Um. And they kinda bring a naivety almost.

And, and when we've been there a little while we become part of the furniture. So, we just kinda accept things, you know. We're very adaptive creatures, human beings. So, we just accept things as they are and we don't question them anymore.

But the, the new people will question them, and then you can learn from them and you can teach yourself to keep questioning and keep turning up with fresh eyes, which is a really important for any, any organisation.

David Pembroke:

So, what other tips, what was... what else was on that one page, you know? Because again, I can imagine what was there was don't sleep walk, you know, be the taker of the minutes of the unspoken, seek out the new person. What, what else is... was on that list?

Melinda Maddock:

Well, when we think about influencing people, um, we might... people might be surprised to realise that the, the best skill in influencing people is listening as well. So, I've been in meetings where I've, you know, been supporting, uh, the... a Minister or a Premier.

There is an advisor and highly intelligent people will come in for their half hour. They will have really well-prepared notes, they will have data. They'll have all this information, um, to try to persuade a Minister to their point of view. And I've watched those people fail.

Because what they haven't brought into the room is some political intelligence, and some understanding of where that Minister will be coming from at that point. Now, we can't know everything. I mean, Tas is small so we kinda know everyone but, but we can't know everything. We can't know everything.

David Pembroke:

I'll tell you what and that's true. But also, I think one of the things that people need to pay attention to in this day and age are the social media feeds of Health Ministers.

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, yeah.

David Pembroke:

They're full of gold. And if you really wanna know what they think, that's what they think.

Melinda Maddock:

Yes. And so, so, there's so many clues. You're right. There's so many clues out there about what's going on. So, if you're going into influence a minister, that very tiny amount of time that you have, think about where they're coming from because we all have filters. We're all listening out, listening out for things you're doing right now. In your job, David, we're all... we listen for certain things, you know?

David Pembroke:

Yeah.

Melinda Maddock:

So, that means-

David Pembroke:

And you know when, you know when someone says that it's like, "Ah, yeah, I'm onto that." You know, if you really actively engaged.

Melinda Maddock:

Yes.

David Pembroke:

That's, you know when it comes.

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, that's right and being really present in that moment to, to listen out for that, too. So, so, you know, trying to understand that that, that person isn't gonna love your idea as much as you do, but they might have been a bit. So, what, what can you what can you give them that they'll actually hear?

So, you know, I would... I'm a headspace person. I work in concepts and ideas, that's what I do. But I would have to brief Ministers who aren't like that, they might be more hard space.

So, I learned to take my information and frame it up as a story or an anecdote that might have more power, um, and uh, um, for that Minister then, then I would for someone else. So, it's, it's really tailoring to your audience not to manipulate but to be persuasive, to be able to be heard.

David Pembroke:

That's fantastic advice. That's a fantastic advice really. Again, because I think it gets to that point about persuasion of to be more effective. You've got to prepare, uh, and you do have to be alert. And you do have to be awake. And you don't have to be, you know, make sure you're not sleepwalking.

So, you do make sure that the data and the evidence and everything that you've got is prepared in a way that's going to be received, um, to its optimum point. Because otherwise, why, why make the effort?

Melinda Maddock:

Yeah, that's right. And there are lots of clues. I worked with one community group that wanted to, to get a project up, uh, in their community with police and young people. And we were workshopping this idea, they hadn't had much luck with their local council.

So, I said, "Right, who's the ultimate decision maker? Don't do the spray and pray like hit your target. Who, who's making the decision? Um, and what do you know about them?" And it was a small community so they knew a bit. And someone said, "Ah, I think he's a stats man. Yeah, he's into his numbers."

And I said, "Well, how can we... how do we know?" And so, we looked up the annual report. And sure enough, his report, um, in that for the council was, you know, full of lots of data and interesting statistics. So, I said, "Righty-o, let's work on that." So, your best shot of being heard by this individual is to present some data. Uh, and um, that's what they did. And they got past first base, which was great.

David Pembroke:

So, apart from doing that preparation around decision makers and influences of decision makers, what's your best advice to people around, um, around that? Around sorta understanding decision makers and, and their influences?

Melinda Maddock:

Um, really, it's about networks and understanding of people around them. So, certainly, the, the first step is that, uh, you know, working out who's deciding, um, with this thing that you care about. Who, who's deciding? But then, who do they listen to? So, who influences them?

Um, so... and it might not be the obvious people. So, you know, in a lot of cases, with boards, the chair is not necessarily the most powerful person, there could be someone else on that board who, who has stronger relational power, you know, on the board and outside it, so they might have relationships that influence the, the chair.

So, it's that looking around and, and seeing what the networks are, and then what, what your networks are and how you're using those, So, in influencing, in some circumstances, it might be, you know, that you've got one person who's, who's proposing a change or, or lobbying on an issue, but they might not be the best person to go and talk to the decision maker, it might be someone else.

So, you know, with... in political strategy, when we've been trying to achieve law reform, we've identified people in the community who, who would go and talk to members of parliament, for example, um, about the, the change and because their voice is much more powerful, uh, than, than yours might be.

David Pembroke:

So, Melinda, we could talk all day, really. And I'm sure there is just so much more in the book, *How to Train Your Political Animal, A Power Handbook for Changing Yourself and Your Worlds*. And I'm really looking forward to diving into the book.

And I know it's available, uh, in Tasmania at Fullers Bookshop, but it's also available in Australia, Amazon, Booktopia, Dymocks. It's available as an eBook on Booktopia. It's available on the UK, uh, on Amazon, and it's available in the US at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

So, people are, um, able to get their hands on this. And it seems to me that you might have identified a bit of a niche. Because maybe another part of your motivation was that you might have been looking for something like this and couldn't find it. Would that be fair to say?

Melinda Maddock:

Yes, it is. And also, what I, what I see when I look out and I, I saw this most, I must say, in the public service was people who are really passionate, but they're really worn down. And I think COVID has unlocked this energy, people are reflecting on their lives and they're wanting to change things and they want meaningful work and they wanna make a difference and didn't quite have the toolkit, you know. They see other people sorta playing

those political games. I don't know, don't understand it, don't know how to do it. And I just wanted to hand over everything I knew, you know, in one place, all the tips that would help people who are in that position, to open their world up to make that change.

Because all of that energy and all that potential is there. I just see that it's locked up, we just need to tap away at it and let it out and we can do extraordinary things.

David Pembroke:

Wonderful. What a great way to finish a, a fascinating conversation. Now, if people wanna reach out to you, what's the, you know, as you say, you mentioned, you, you're a facilitator of workshops and professional learning. Um, you're available for people who have got stories to tell that you would like to... that may like to, uh, work with you. What's the best way for people to, to connect with you?

Melinda Maddock:

Through my website, so melinamaddock.com. You can send me a message through my website and I will get in touch.

David Pembroke:

Fantastic. Well, Melinda Maddock, thank you so much for sharing the last 40 minutes with us, that's just bang on, for this audience. This is the purpose. This is why this podcast exists. And I'm sure that a lot of people working in government communication will certainly take to heart that, that challenge around strategy.

But also, understanding that the reason they have a plan is to change it, because you're gonna ... it is going to change but you've got to have a plan in the first place. And there's just so much other wisdom there, um, that you've shared with us. You know, don't sleep work, be curious, you know. Take the minutes, Be the minute taker of the unspoken in those meetings. So, I'm sure that people were scribbling down just as I've been scribbling down through this, conversation, you know, just drinking from a fire hydrant.

So, thank you so much for, for sharing your wisdom with the audience today. And to you, the audience, thank you for coming back once again. What a great conversation with such a talented, experienced, political operative. And I love the fact that, um, Melinda said, you know, politics isn't a dirty word. It's not a dirty word.

If you wanna make change, if you wanna have impact, whether you're inside the bureaucracy or outside the bureaucracy and... you have to engage. It's not just gonna magically happen. And you know, Melinda learned this back in year six, when she wanted to go on camp with the other six... year six class.

She learned it again. It was reinforced when she wanted to... when she was sorta unhinged a little by what was happening, um, around nuclear disarmament and did something about it, but I think that's the other thing that she took action. And when she wanted to share, um, what she knows with the rest of the world, she's written a book.

So, there you go, again, taking action. It happens. The people who get things done and known for taking action. So, really, grateful for Melinda coming along today and grateful for you for coming back once again. Um, we'll, we'll be back at the same time in two weeks.

But before I say goodbye, a big thanks to Olivia Casamento for organising today's conversation and to Ben Curry, the technical producer of the GovComms Podcast. We'll be back at the same time in two weeks. But for the moment, it's bye for now.

Outro:

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