

Disability Done Different: Episode 7

Sally Coddington on... life, death and disability

Podcast transcript

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Hosts: Roland & Evie Naufal
Guest: Sally Coddington

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Intro

Maia Thomas 0:00

This is Maia Thomas, I am the DSC Podcast Producer. And I just wanted to give you a quick rundown of DSC as an organisation before we get started. DSC is a team of 33 people across Australia all working together to bring specialized training and consulting expertise to providers in the disability sector. Our focus is on helping providers to survive and thrive in the NDIS and our purpose is to create better outcomes for people with disability.

Roland Naufal 0:30

Welcome to 2019 Disability Done Different, our second series of podcasts. We're really excited to be back because we weren't sure we were going to make it past the first one and we did! We're really pleased with the response to those first six episodes and encourage you to go back because they're timeless.

Sally Coddington 0:55

You're legends!

Roland Naufal 1:00

So my sidekick this year is Evie again with Maia as our producer and we're off to a flying start in January 2019.

Evie Naufal 1:11

And today the call is coming from inside the house....

Roland Naufal 1:15

And it's Sally Coddington, one of our consultants who more than earns her space on a podcast, because she's not only a parent, she's a marketing guru. She got her MBA from Harvard, graduated from Harvard, 20 years experience in the financial services industry and was the CEO of a disability support provider. So Sally wears many hats, but doesn't always wear them comfortably, as we'll find out today.

Sally Coddington 1:39

Well, very comfortably, but just all at once, which gets a bit confusing.

Roland Naufal 1:44

So Sally's been talking a bit about the workshops she runs and it's very interesting to sit in in one of Sally's workshops because sometimes she's talking as a parent of a child with disability. Sometimes she's talking as an expert marketer. Sometimes she's talking as an ex-CEO in the disability sector. That's partly, you know, looking at what you do, but do you find it difficult sometimes flipping from those roles and remembering who you are? Is it important or it's just one big blur for you?

Sally Coddington 2:12

It's a little bit of all those things but now part of my introduction is just warning everybody that that's what's going to happen and letting them know that I'm never really sure who I'm channeling at any

point in time and then I just leave it at that. And then sometimes I'll say, "All right, now I just have my mom hat on" or "Right now I have my CEO hat" on but other times it's just.... who knows? Who knows who I am? One of those characters, one of those personas....

Roland Naufal 2:46

Do you mind telling us a bit about your family?

Sally Coddington 2:48

All right. So there are currently four of us. There were five of us, including Nicky. So it's Mike and me, mum and dad. Mike is American and we have three daughters. Ellie, who's 16, Nicky, who died last September and she was 13 and Lil who is nine. And dog! The dog, of course, is Baggers. And we live in Newcastle in New South Wales.

Roland Naufal 3:25

Okay, so we're talking about luck and agency and privilege and all kinds of things. Sally, would you say you're a lucky person? Because I think a number of people would say you've been a bit unlucky in your life.

Sally Coddington 3:36

Oh, no, I'm exceptionally lucky. Yeah, yeah, definitely exceptionally lucky. Some people would look at me and say that I have been unlucky. Yeah, I guess some people would. But being a good Catholic girl with 12 years - actually a bad Catholic girl but Catholic all the same - So, um, 12 years of Catholic school, I think that the one thing that I have taken away from that is the Serenity Prayer, which is understanding the things you can control, understanding the things that you can't control, and then understanding the difference. Or accepting the things you can't control, change the things you can control. And the prayer is to understand the difference. And for me, that has been really really pivotal during the bad luck that we have had because I just didn't sweat the stuff I couldn't control.

Roland Naufal 4:40

Sal, were you lucky to have a kid with a disability?

Sally Coddington 4:46

Now I see myself as being very lucky to have had Nicky in my life. But it didn't start that way. I felt very unlucky. So it was a journey from feeling really frickin ripped off to feeling extraordinarily blessed.

Roland Naufal 5:06

Last night over dinner one of the people we were with was talking about one of the older guys in her family- one of the uncles or grandfathers. And one of the younger females in the family acquired a brain injury and she talked about how it taught him how to love differently. And you understand that, don't you, Sal?

Sally Coddington 5:28

Oh yeah... yeah. Well, motherhood teaches you how to love differently. And then, I guess we all go into motherhood - if we have the fortune of motherhood - we all go into that with some sort of vision and expectation and dream about what that will look like. And when you have a child with a disability, you have to reassess that dream in cases. And for me actually, even that was a blessing because I felt completely let off the hook. All of a sudden things didn't have to be perfect. Things could just be the way that they were. Roland, you and I both interested in the book, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck* (laughs). Are we allowed to say fuck? (laughs) And what what he says in *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck* is when you give less of a fuck actually good things happen and I definitely attribute the joy and success that I've had in my life to the fact that I was able to let go of that ridiculous vision for a life of success, which actually quite frankly was going to be me at the age of 55 still in financial services after you know, 35 years. And miserable with a very serious alcohol problem. (laughs)

Roland Naufal 7:14

Sal, we always talk with you about love for one reason or another hilarious thing - I'm going to go somewhere else for a moment - about two months ago Evie was finishing up a workshop with Sally

and the next time she was talking to me, she told me that when she said goodbye to Sally she whispered in your ear, "I love you".

Evie Naufal 7:38

Let the record show I definitely did not whisper in her ear!

Roland Naufal 7:45

But you were inquiring the next day, was that inappropriate? Evie, why do we tell Sal we love her when we say goodbye?

Sally Coddington 7:56

She's exceedingly lovable.

Evie Naufal 7:57

(embarrassed) Yeah... I don't know. Did you tell him I whispered in your ear?

Sally Coddington 8:06

I think, frankly, you were looking me in the eyes when you told me that you love me.

Roland Naufal 8:13

And now it's become de rigeur! So why did you tell Sally you loved her?

Evie Naufal 8:25

Yeah.... I.... um... I feel a little bit put on the spot now! (pause) Do you love me?

Sally Coddington 8:26

You know I love you! I told you the other day!

Evie Naufal 8:31

(laughs) OK, I think that maybe I was having a similar experience to, you know, we sometimes joke about the time that somebody to come up to you at a workshop gave you a kiss on the cheek and you were like, Who are you?

Sally Coddington 8:41

I'm like, what is going on here? Do I even know this person?

Evie Naufal 8:47

Because you totally forget about how much you are personally sharing in those two days. There is so much of it.

Sally Coddington 8:52

I know. And it's like therapy.

Roland Naufal 8:54

Well there's something you do at the start of a session or during a session, which is really disarming. You create a really trusting, warm, non politically correct environment really quickly. Do either of you know what the trick for that is?

Sally Coddington 9:10

Well I can tell you it that it's just intensified since Nicky died because now I'm talking about the fact that Nicky's gone and I include photos of Nicky in my workshop. And wow. And they're awesome photos.

Evie Naufal 9:28

They're beautiful.

Sally Coddington 9:29

And we all have an opportunity to have a bit of a laugh at about how beautiful and gorgeous she was.

Roland Naufal 9:34

But it's not about your vulnerability, it's just not as simple as that. It's not.

Sally Coddington 9:40

Hmm... I didn't know what it is either.

Roland Naufal 9:41

I think it's opening a door to something.

Evie Naufal 9:44

This workshop in question as well (where I told you I loved you) was the first one that we'd run together since Nicky died. It was about six weeks later.

Sally Coddington 9:51

And we did it!

Evie Naufal 9:52

Yeah, we did. But she felt very present during the workshop. I think that's what I was responding to. I think I made you comfort me quite a bit over the two days.

Sally Coddington 10:01

Yeah. But that's what happens when someone dies is that you end up comforting a lot of other people. Yeah.

Roland Naufal 10:06

Doesn't that shit you sometimes? When people were expecting more of you? So I've seen it a number of times where people's grief is just so overwhelming that the person who's in your situation is spending time comforting them. Has that been an issue?

Sally Coddington 10:22

Um, no, not really. It just feels like the way it is. Again, I just I haven't really agonized over it but I do know that there are people I still need to tell and I have avoided it because I I'm a little bit exhausted by having a conversation. But going back to love and Nicky... I, you know, apology to my other beautiful two daughters and Mike, but I think Nicky is the person I most loved - love - still. And it's... it's because of everything that she gave me... the way that she, (crying) she let me off the hook about having to live the perfect life the way that she gave me.... um.... love.

Roland Naufal 11:22

So Nicky was a non verbal communicator...

Sally Coddington 11:27

As I am right now (laughs).

Roland Naufal 11:31

So I think this is going to get even more difficult. Do you not want to...?

Sally Coddington 11:33

No, no, no, it's okay. (crying, laughing) Hey, people listening - we just have to ride through the tears. There will be an end to them. I promise you, it won't be sad the whole way through.

Roland Naufal 11:43

So I'm not quite sure, but I'm going to ask this. Anyway, so Nicky's a non verbal communicator, and you had a very intense relationship with Nicky, which means you had some sort of symbiosis, some sort of non verbal means of engaging with Nicky which means you're engaged in ways that a lot of us can't even understand. So some people talk about people who use sign language as being an even richer language than verbal language because sign language offers them opportunities to communicate that we can't communicate with words. But you've gone to a whole different level with Nicky, which... is this is impossible to talk about?

Sally Coddington 12:22

No, no but I can't even define it for you. It was communicating at an intuitive level and actually... I'm woo-woo enough to be happy and comfortable talking about it. But I used to, as you will know about me, I was very very conscious about how we curated Nicky's support team. And I would observe that same intuitive communication between Nicky and the support workers that we chose to be in our lives. And they probably wouldn't have articulated it that way. But that's how I knew they were the right people, for Nicky and for us. And I was telling the story last night at dinner, I think it was last Saturday. I would be able to overhear what was going on between Nicky and the support worker in the next room. And I would know from what I could hear that there was a connection happening. Now keeping in mind that Nicky really a nonverbal communicator, and really didn't even use noise a lot in the way that she communicated. So there wasn't a lot of noise coming from Nicky. It would be something along the lines of, I'd hear, this (soft murmurs) and then there'd be silence and then the support worker would respond (soft murmurs) and then there'd be silence. And really, there was a conversation that was going on and it's likely the support worker wasn't even aware that they were participating in a really rich conversation. But Nicky's contribution was entirely non verbal. And it was

actually at an intuitive level. So I, I was conscious about my communicating with Nicky like that. But it was about Nicky it was Nicky was the one that was able to reach out and be loved and communicate and make connections. So it wasn't just between Nicky and me.

Evie Naufal 14:30

I've loved hearing some of the stories you've told recently about in the time since Nicky died... the people who've come to you and talked to you about the connection that they had with Nicky outside of you.

Sally Coddington 14:40

Yeah, yeah. So, I mean, Nicky had a profound impact on lots of people's lives. And we got, as a family, lots of messages and cards, thanking Nicky. And the obvious ones are from her school, where she was well loved. The ones that surprised me were the ones that came from specialists at the hospital and ICU - doctors and nurses who actually were really grateful for having had Nicky in their lives. But I think also really grateful for having us as a family in their lives because I think that people do need to see examples of families and people with disability living really rich lives full of love and I hope that that's what what we portrayed - I hope that that's the message because I've always said that my approach to advocacy was to live an awesome life and to be an example that loving someone with a disability doesn't mean that you can't have an awesome, successful life.

You know, we talk a lot about people with disability living really, really hard lives and families of people with disability really living really, really hard lives. And that's true. I mean the majority, many do but it's not inevitable. Having a child with a disability doesn't stop you from attaining a really awesome, amazing life. And I wish someone had shown me that when Nicky was born because when I was referring before to the journey that we went on, where at first I felt really ripped off and I came to a place of feeling extremely blessed, what I really needed at that very first moment was role models that would say to me, "You know what? Yes, this sucks. But it's not the end of the world. You'll get used to it, you'll adjust and you'll still have an awesome life." And so then I wouldn't have wasted all those years feeling miserable for myself. Yeah.... but maybe I needed to waste those years to to take that journey. Who knows...

Evie Naufal 17:31

Before I worked in the disability sector, I think the experience that I'd had of disability and particularly of parents with a disability, parents of kids with a disability was seeing the challenge and the struggle.

And I probably would have said that the worst thing that could have happened to me would have been to have a child with a disability. And it's only been in the last few months probably, especially since Nicky died (starts crying) that I've been thinking about.... (crying)

Sally Coddington 17:56

I love you, Evie Naufal.

Evie Naufal 17:58

(laughs) I love you too, Sal Pal. That I've been thinking about, you know, it's not a cliché to say that the best things in life come from the hardest parts and that you know, when I've been talking to you about some the most beautiful parts of you and your family and the journey that your life is now going on, it's been as a result of Nicky and I just think that... (crying)... yeah.

Roland Naufal 18:18

So we've been talking - and I'm taking this somewhere - so we've been talking for three decades about Socially Valued Roles for people with disabilities. And for me, it seems everybody's really wrapped up that a socially valued role should look like getting a job. But what you're saying is, Nicky had an intensely socially valued role with everybody from the specialists, right through to your family and all the way in between. Why don't people recognize the social value that people with disabilities bring to our lives? A long time ago an organisation I worked for ran a kindergarten and there were eight kids with disabilities and 12 kids without and by the time those 12 kids without disabilities had gone to school, the teachers always remarked these kids are much less prone to bullying, much less prone to be bullies, much more able to look after themselves... they were much better human beings in themselves because they'd spent two years with kids with disabilities. That's not about getting a job.

Sally Coddington 19:19

No, and it also... I mean, I can only speak about Nicky specifically but she's irreplaceable. How many of us can say that? I mean Mike could go off and marry any gorgeous young chick at any point in time.

Evie Naufal 19:40

(sarcastic) Yeah, right.

Roland Naufal 20:00

We often talk about what we learned from you, Sally and we're constantly learning from you, which is interesting - after all these years, that we can learn so much so quickly. But I had a big realization a couple of years ago in a workshop. We kept talking about teams and at that stage we were on a big kick with autonomous teams and you were actually in the audience - speaking a lot from the audience, as you do- and you made it very clear that. "You're talking, Roland, about the organisation about the team belonging to the organisation. But the team belongs to me, to my family and to Nicky". And you're starting to use the word 'curate', which has some complexity, that word. You curate a team for Nicky. So can you tell me why the team is yours and why organisations should view the team as yours?

Sally Coddington 20:49

Well the centre of the team is Nicky and us as a family so it clearly I just visually see it as a team. And I do very very consciously curate, I did very consciously curate Nicky's team.

Roland Naufal 21:15

Why "curate"? Why that word?

Sally Coddington 21:18

Well, I like that word because I want to be really clear about the level of intention that I put into deciding who was in the team and also the fact that I don't have a cookie cutter idea of what the perfect support worker looks like. I want different support workers that bring different things to Nicky's life and as a general rule there are things that I won't tolerate in support workers, unless this something extremely or exceptionally special that support worker brings.

Roland Naufal 22:03

So you really are curating. You're putting together a set of very different qualities.

Sally Coddington 22:10

Very different qualities. So I would have Wendy, who is a retired nurse, and Wendy was probably the most reliable member of Nicky's team. She would be someone that I would leave Nicky with overnight, and she'd be someone who I wouldn't be nervous if Nicky got sick, leaving Nicky with Wendy. And Wendy is very active in her church and so she used to take Nicky to church and that's something that I would never have done. So I was quite excited that that gave Nicky an opportunity to be part of a community independently for me and us as a family, but part of the community that she would never have been part of if it had been up to me. So that's Wendy. And then Kim - Kim is Korean and Kim was just amazing. So Kim's English isn't fantastic, although it is like infinitely better than my Korean. And Kim and Nicky's communication between each other was the most beautiful thing you could ever experience. Kim would put Nicky in bed and she literally looks like a piece of origami. It was so perfect.

Evie Naufal 23:36

Will you tell the story about the 1000 paper cranes?

Sally Coddington 23:39

So there is a legend that if you fold 1000 paper cranes for someone, it brings them luck. So over the time that Kim supported Nicky, she folded her thousand tiny paper cranes and we still have a beautiful glass jar with the cranes sitting next to Nicky on her in her spot. She has a spot in our house. It's actually in the hallway so that whenever we come home, we will go, "Hi, Nicky." And when we go, we go, "We're going! We'll be back in half an hour." And her older sister, Ellie brings flowers every day and puts a little fresh bunch of flowers with Nicky. So that was Kim. And then we had Byron Bay Abby and Byron Bay Abby was a little irresponsible, but just the right amount of Byron Bay. And Byron Bay Abby usually spent time with Nicky during the school holidays. And I just loved that Byron Bay Abby brought that little bit of fun and youth to Nicky and sometimes she was late, and you know what, I am very intolerant, intolerant of lateness. But that was just part and parcel of having Byron Bay Abby on the team.

Roland Naufal 25:11

Before we get through all the team members, I want to go back to service reliability for a second if that's ok.

Sally Coddington 25:18

That was Roland's equivalent of pushing my mute button. (laughs) I know where you're going! I didn't need you! I can just answer that question (laughs). Roland was about to ask me about service reliability and the fact that I would say, "Don't talk to me about goals and dreams and helping me reach my aspirations unless you get here when you say you're going to get here." Because the number one thing that keeps us up at night - and I've got my mum hat on now (just in case you didn't know) - the number one thing that kept us up at night was what will happen to Nicky when we die? And every time a support worker doesn't turn up when they say they're going to turn up, we spiral into existential crisis about what's going to happen to Nicky when we die. So service reliability is without question, the most important KPI for an organisation from my perspective and it's funny because we don't even talk about that anymore. But I remember one of the first things I did when I was a CEO was modelled off something that I remember seeing in hospitals. They would have up on the board, '375 days since the last fall'. So I had up on the board, you know, six days since the last service cancellation. And then we would all get really pissed off when somebody didn't turn up because it meant we had to go back to zero - to be honest with you, we never got a lot further than 10 days. And that's a real problem because if you can't turn up when you say you're going to turn up then you can't even start talking about goals and dreams and aspirations.

Evie Naufal 27:10

So I want to loop back to the conversation we were just having about the love that you experienced in the team that you created with Nicky, because we know it's a big area of passion for you (and one that you're exploring a little bit at the moment maybe in a podcast of your own). I wonder if you can tell our listeners anything about that?

Sally Coddington 27:29

So, I'm really interested in the role that love plays in disability supports. Recognizing of course that what love means can be really really variable. An example of this is when Wendy, one of our support workers, would fold the sheets in the linen draw or she would sort my Tupperware. I would come home from a weekend away, she would have been supporting Nicky over the weekend, and I open

that Tupperware drawer and it would be pristinely organized. I felt immensely loved by Wendy when she did that. So I'm really interested in the role of love at front line because for me there was no question that Nicky's support workers would love her. And on reflection I realized that that was partly because, not only did I feel that Nicky was really deserving of love, but that it was Nicky's right to be loved by every single person who she met. Frankly I feel the same way about myself (laughs). This was also because it kept Nicky safe. What I'm talking about is a selfless kind of love, that people would put Nicky's needs, preferences, joy, happiness and comfort first. If they loved her then I didn't have to worry about her being supported.

Roland Naufal 29:12

So the podcast idea is...?

Sally Coddington 29:14

So the podcast is an exploration of love at the front line with Vanessa Toy, my fabulous partner in crime (laughs). She's actually, to be honest, the brains behind it and I'm just the mouth at the front of it. Because my superpower is talking and her superpower is getting to understand things and bringing us together.

Evie Naufal 29:43

I know when we were originally talking about podcast concept, we were having this very difficult conversation about "what is love?". Trying to explore how we were going to define it. In the end we decided maybe the whole idea should be about exploring it. It started with quite a challenging example of somebody else that we'd heard of. They found your idea, or your concept, of love at the frontline, frankly, quite repulsive. For them love at the front line was something that was very professional, that didn't ask any kind of personal engagement. People got in and got out. And that's how you could show that person the sort of respect that they wanted.

Sally Coddington 30:19

Yeah, so the objective is to talk with a really wide variety of people about what love at the front line means, and looks like. And I want to talk with people from other human services because I think that it's equally as relevant in aged care and childcare. I also want to talk with participants about what love

at the frontline looks like to them. I want to talk with support workers about why love at the front line is important to them. Because I think it's really important. I think what we're missing is a discussion around the role of love at the front line. And it's not about the role of support workers loving participants any more than it's about the role of participants in loving support workers. It's really about exploring human connection at the front line and the role that it plays.

Roland Naufal 31:24

You've talked about you love the job you're currently doing...

Sally Coddington 31:28

(Interrupts) well, no, I love the people I work with, and the job that I'm currently doing. So keep going (laughs).

Roland Naufal 31:33

But you had a lot of agency in that. So do you want to talk about how you engineered getting your job?

Sally Coddington 31:39

Okay. So people going to think I'm a bit woo-woo. And I probably am a little bit woo-woo (laughs). So a disclaimer, for those of you who don't like woo-woo, I really, really strongly believe in visualization as a way of shaping my life. So what I did, about three and a half years ago, was create a Digital Photo Board of all the things that my ideal job would bring for me. So that it included a picture of me dressed in my professional gear, as I wanted an opportunity for professional persona. I also wanted an opportunity to be part of a team of people that are thinking new ideas, and creating new ways of perceiving the world. So I had a picture that represented that. I also had a picture represented a job where I got to stand in front of groups of people and talk about myself (laughs). Which, success, tick, I get to do that (laughs).

I also wanted a job where I got lots of travel. And I wanted a job where not only did I have a professional persona, but I could also be my own free spirit. So, it was less than two weeks after I

created that vision board (which I looked at every single day) that I remember seeing an article that Roland wrote. Upon reading it I went, "wow", this is someone I want to work with. And so I sent Roland an email saying, "I'd love to work with you sometime". And that afternoon, I started working with DSC (laughs). But for me, the vision board was really important because it helped me to clarify what I was looking for. I probably read 10 articles that day, but there was only one that really stood out to me as a pathway towards towards where I was going. So does that answer that question?

Roland Naufal 33:40

It certainly does. That was great.

Sally Coddington 33:43

(laughs) maybe convoluted, but not so woo-woo after all.

Roland Naufal 33:48

I want to talk a bit about marketing Sally. So you and I have been talking about marketing in the sector for about four years and I still feeling like we're not quite getting where we want to get. Most people people in the sector think a really good marketing strategy is all about branding at a simple level. Branding with the website name, a new logo, and some sort of groovy social media stuff. So, you've pretty much done our marketing strategy and I know you don't see it that way. Can you talk to us about this?

Sally Coddington 34:21

So the catchphrase is "marketing is everything, everything is marketing". I think you know when we talk about the big changes that come from the NDIS, that the number one challenge I always talk about is individualized plans and payments. This really means that NDIS participants are customers, the dreaded "C" word (laughs), of disability supports. I think it's really important to understand the implications of that. Roland, you were talking about social role valorization, and how being a customer, with a capital C, is a really valued role. So, I'm really keen on seeing organisations take that seriously and understand that it means that their participants, their clients, are actually customers. So if marketing is everything that means it's not just websites and Facebook postings and all of those kinds of things. It's things like how you design your services, how you measure quality. All

kinds of things, and it's really, really frustrating. I feel like we're at a point now where we're (our little marketing gurus in DSC) are hiding inside the Trojan horse as we come into your organisation. Hoping that we can show you how important it is to understand the implications of individualized plans and payments, and participants being customers to your business.

Roland Naufal 36:09

Very interesting. I want to come back and talk about customers with Evie in a moment and article she wrote a few years ago about the "C" word. But before that I'd like to talk about the overlap between brand and culture. Vanessa Toy, our co-director, comes from a leadership background, and is very focused on organisational culture. You, on the other hand, come from a marketing background and you like to talk about brand. Just to watch the two of you get together and see the humongous overlap between brand and culture is so interesting.

Sally Coddington 36:26

I think they are the same thing.

Roland Naufal 36:26

Most people don't say that.

Sally Coddington 36:28

No, they don't.

Roland Naufal 36:33

So, tell us why brand is culture.

Sally Coddington 36:44

The thing I dislike the most is when I see organisations doing a literal logo refresh, and calling it rebranding. Because you don't create a brand, what you do is, and especially in human services, is you reveal a brand. Branding should be about understanding who you are as an organisation. What you reveal when you go looking for your brand is your culture.

Roland Naufal 37:16

There's a huge push back in our sector against anything that looks like consumerism, advertising and, anything by way of that, which looks like marketing. So there's this strong push back which would be very strong in consumer advocacy groups, and in the advocacy groups themselves. This idea of "we don't do marketing". Can you tell me why they've got it wrong Sal?

Sally Coddington 37:36

Well, firstly, the first thing that comes to my mind is, is this a result of the fear of ambition in human services? Is there something evil about being ambitious to have more customers who love you and thus, do a better job in supporting your customers to live ordinary lives? I suspect it does. We need to get more ambitious in human services, perhaps.

Roland Naufal 38:10

I think that is taking it even a level above the idea that we just hate everything advertising, consumerism, and marketing. I think a lot of it comes back to some pretty simplistic notions that marketing is about selling shit to people (laughs).

Sally Coddington 38:24

Oh yeah gilding the turd (laughs). Which it's not, of course. But I wonder if we hate advertising because we hate the ambition to bring more customers to us...

Roland Naufal 38:39

But ultimately, is it fair to say that your vision of marketing matches up with very deeply one person at a time person centred approach? After all you're the person that talks about a segment of one.

Sally Coddington 38:52

And my response to that would be if that's what customers want, then yes. But I would go back to the customer every time to ask them what they want. To see if they want to one person at a time approach, which I personally do. That's why I'm a fan of it. (laughs) You know, my target market of one wants that approach.

Roland Naufal 39:12

A few years ago, Evie hadn't written a lot of articles for DSC. So one of her ambitions for that year was to start to write articles and have them become more popular. One of the first forays into it was...

Evie Naufal 39:26

(Interrupts) was an article called "When it's okay to use the C word" and the C word paying customer. And my answer was always because it's great. And it's an empowered valued role.... and not everybody agreed (laughs).

Sally Coddington 39:42

(Laughs) Oh, yay! tell us what they said.

Evie Naufal 39:46

Hmm... what did they say?.... I think, you know, what they said.

It's actually a conversation that hasn't disappeared. I'm having a similar conversation again this week with another group. For a lot of people. The word customer presents another way of othering. Really! Even some of the organisations we work with, don't like us to say, 'participant'. Do you know what I mean by othering?

Roland Naufal 39:55

But let's hear it.

The insiders/outside stuff. It's "you're not part of this group", and in particular with people with disabilities, it is "you're not part of normal".

Sally Coddington 40:19

Yeah. So when it comes to the use of the word participant, I actually agree. I've actually started to realise that we have misappropriating the use of the word participant, using it as another word for people in Australia with profound disability. And so I prefer the word 'people' which Leighton Jay introduced me to. (laughs). Thank you Leighton for that profound insight (laughs). But when it comes to the word customer, there is this huge power. We talk about customer power, so common that it is even a phrase. I think that there's nothing but power in being a customer.

Roland Naufal 41:16

So, what's the downside of customer Evie?

Evie Naufal 41:18

I think it's just another thing that delineates the roles. That "this is the role I play" and "that's role you play" because "we're not the same".

Sally Coddington 41:25

Yeah, but you know, customers have power over the people that sell them products and services. So is that a bad thing?

Evie Naufal 41:31

That's what I think that's why we spell participant the capital P to highlight the role and the power that that has. But you know, this is going to be an ongoing debate now sector forever. Will we ever find the right words? (laughs)

Roland Naufal 41:42

Yeah, the language changes so quickly! Speaking of long, difficult terms... Values based service differentiation....

Sally Coddington 41:50

Yes

Roland Naufal 41:51

Discuss

Evie Naufal 41:52

Please

Sally Coddington 41:54

Let's first just do a little 101 about service differentiation.

There's a variety of ways as a provider that you can differentiate yourself from other providers and show that you are special or different. Some of those ways include things like being awesome at supporting children or people who are preparing to leave school or people with acquired brain injury. But I also believe that there is an untapped opportunity to actually focus on supporting people who have particular value orientations. This was really highlighted to me when I was walking through Glebe, in Sydney. I hadn't realized until I stayed there, how greenie Glebe is. But it's really, really super greenie. All the shops are vegetarian and everyone advertises their 'greenieness'. So, lo and behold, on the corner of a street there was a dentist called the "Eco dentist". I say this because it is

exactly what I have been talking about when I talk about values based differentiation. There's a real opportunity to hone your service to meet the needs of people who have particular values that they live by. And I have often talked about how I would love there to be a green service provider, someone who, every aspect of the way that they deliver disability supports, takes in an eco approach. And that might be something like their corporate vehicles are all Prius', or they support participants who want to use reusable continence aides, or that any of the cleaning products that they use are eco. All those kinds of things. I think that that's a really interesting and exciting way of differentiating yourself as an organisation, that hasn't really been done outside of religion.

Evie Naufal 44:06

I think I've just figured out why. We're creating a lot of online training stuff at the moment for frontline workers and there's always somebody who wants to add in something about human rights and how important human rights are. But I keep coming back to the fact that you can't tell people that they need to respect people's human rights, because nobody believes that they don't respect people's human rights. So to start the conversation, you need to show them how it works. And just as you were talking, I was thinking along those lines, maybe the problem in our sector is that the stakes are already so high that most providers are talking about how they help people to live their dreams and, you know, break down barriers and live a life of independence. That something like sustainability, which probably most people would agree is an optional value as it's not a value that everybody shares, would be a de-escalation value compared to what everybody else is saying.

Sally Coddington 45:04

I think it's a higher order value. I think that for me, if I'm visualizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, being able to choose a provider on the basis of value, like eco friendly, is operating at a higher order need. It's a place of privilege. Those providers really are focused on the lower order, safety, we'll feed you, we will be there when we say we will be there.

Roland Naufal 45:44

Sally, you do a huge amount of support coordination workshops, and they're proving to be more and more popular, we're unable to keep up with the amount that we want to get you out there doing support coordination. So I know you're pretty much only doing work that you're passionate about these days, you're pretty picky about the work you'll do with us. Why is support coordination pushing your buttons? Why are you putting so much effort in that space?

Sally Coddington 46:06

I honestly believe that support coordination is the single most important role in the NDIS. I know that we were extremely successful in using Nicky's plan to support her to live an ordinary life and us as a family live in ordinary life. And I attribute that to our confidence in using Nicky's plan super flexibly in order to connect with providers that we loved working with. So I think that support coordination plays that role for participants and families who aren't quite there yet to do it for themselves. So that's the role that I see support coordination playing, it is the role in supporting people to be as NDIS confident as we were with Nicky.

Roland Naufal 46:58

So I want to wrap up and if people have listened this far they will know a lot more about you, Sally, if they haven't known a lot more about you already. But you're clearly an early adopter. You've been an early adopter, as a parent of a child with a disability. An early adopter generally in marketing, will show you what the future will look like. So as an early adopter, can you give us your reflections on where you think the NDIS will go over the longer term?

Sally Coddington 47:31

I can tell you where I hope it goes. And where I hope it goes, is that by combining both the ILC (Information Linkages and Capacity) building grants and individualised plans, that we can actually move towards a place where people need fewer paid supports in their lives. What I love about that vision is that it's entirely the purpose of the NDIS. I think, we're at a place right now, where many participants and families are still really anxious about not having enough paid support in their lives. I think that's because as a community and society we're very not inclusive and supportive to people with disability. So we really need paid supports, but I would really love it if we just didn't.

Roland Naufal 48:41

So, as an ex-CEO provider, this is the question. How do providers get ready for the new world?

Sally Coddington 48:50

I think that providers need to focus on making themselves obsolete in the lives of the people they support. Understanding that they'll always be a steady stream of people being born with disability, it's one of the miracles of modern technology in some ways. I think they will be successful by aiming to support people to not need them, instead trusting that there'll be a new bunch of people who will need them too.

Roland Naufal 49:23

Thank you Sally. There's only one way we can end this podcast...

Everyone 49:26

WE LOVE YOU!

Evie Naufal 49:30

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Roland Naufal 49:41

The podcast has got legs but they're only baby steps. At this stage. We're only getting enough listeners to keep us fired up in the hundreds. We want to see lots more people coming so give us a five star rating so some other people will tune in and listen to some of our fabulous guests

Evie Naufal 49:54

Please feed Roland's desperately hungry ego and share this podcast with your friends and colleagues.

Roland Naufal 49:59

And if you can any negative feedback please keep it to yourself.

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