

# Ep 109 - Interview: Bri Williams, behavioral scientist and founder of People Patterns, on designing customer journeys that change behavior

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science For Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and practical marketing. Every week we sit down and go deep behind the science of some of America's most successful brands. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

**Richard Shotton:** And I'm Richard Shotton.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** In today's episode of Behavioral Science for Brands, we welcome Bri Williams.

One of Australia's leading voices in applied behavioral science. Bri is the author of the Williams Behavior book, host of the podcast, talking Talks, and a prolific speaker on behavioral science. She's also the founder of People Patterns, a consultancy that helps businesses implement behavioral science.

A thing very close to our hearts here at the Consumer Behavior Lab. In today's conversation, we explore Bri's, easy to remember frameworks and models that help move people from current behaviors to desired behaviors. And in our talk, Bri went deep on the, some of the most [00:01:00] common barriers to behavior change.

Things like apathy, confusion, and fear. And we also talked about practical tools any marketer can start using right away. Things like sequencing language, arming your advocates, and designing communication for real decision making moments. So Bri welcome, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands.

We're so excited to have you.

**Bri Williams:** I'm thrilled to be here. Let's get into it.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Yes. And Richard and I were saying what, how fun to have someone who shares such a mission with us to be on this show. Talk about behavioral science, talk about its practical applications, and yeah, it's gonna be a really great hour.

And so we've put together. For you, Ms. Williams, A few quick fire round questions that we thought we would start with.

**Bri Williams:** Okay.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** The pressure is extremely high right now. If you could have dinner [00:02:00] with one behavioral scientist, dead or alive. Who would it be and why?

**Bri Williams:** I think I would choose Amy Edmondson and Michael Larin.

You might know this 'cause I see that you have also endeavored in this field, but psychological safety, which Amy came up with is such a fundamental concept and one we take for granted, but it underpins everything we do and I think she's a genius.

**Richard Shotton:** What's her book? Is there one that you'd recommend if What is her book?

**Bri Williams:** It's something like The Right Kind of Wrong is Her Latest, right? Wrong One's got a couple of books, but this is very much the belief that we act. At our best when we know that we have the safety to do that, which means for our consumers, but also our colleagues. And so it's really fundamental. And I know this is quick fire and Michael Lara, you might wanna talk about it more in detail, but [00:03:00] she stumbled across this in 1999 where she did some research in a hospital setting and she found that the most high performing teams had the highest error rate.

And so that was Then why do they make so many errors? It's not that they make more errors than other teams, it's that they report them because they have the psychological safety to do that, and I think that is critical.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** My build on this, Bri, you're right. This is a big area of passion of mine that seminal work has spawns a whole area of great people management, human capital strategies.

And when you pair it with cognitive diversity, meaning we want all types of thinkers. Introverts and extroverts, people who are internal processors, people that are external processors. When you combine psychological safety with that, you get to some really great solutions. And [00:04:00] at the face of it, Richard, you and I.

We're passionately aligned, but we might come across as slightly different. And that cognitive diversity has made our team good. And when we bring people on, we're looking for people on the show that have different, not just different points of view, but different ways of thinking. It makes for more interesting conversation.

It makes for higher performing teams.

**Bri Williams:** And from what I understand, Google actually have used psychological safety as it as its number one metric or measure of a team that's going to be highly effective. So you can see her work has permeated, although she probably, she may not have the brand recognition as others, but I think she's just one of the leaders in the field.

She's at Harvard, I believe. Yeah, Harvard.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** She's at Harvard. And the project Aristotle with the work done at Google. That's right. We'll drop it in the show notes, Bri. 'cause I think you're right. People are gonna be interested in this and you and I share that passion. So cool.

**Richard Shotton:** Bri what's something that you once believe very strongly, [00:05:00] but you've now changed your mind on,

**Bri Williams:** I'll give you a couple, and I think it might have been from my training as an accountant.

But one is that numbers are objective. Believe that as an accountant, but now I understand that numbers are all forms of story and it's just it's something that we expect just because it's spat out of a spreadsheet that it's somehow objective. Take a survey, for instance, just because nine out of 10 people have told us something and it appears in numerical.

Doesn't really make it real behavior. So that's one. And the other one that I've had to learn, Richard and you may have not fallen into this trap with your writing, but I had the expectation that writing professionally was the same as

writing effectively. And that's not the case. So when I went through my education, it was all very passive language.

It was very [00:06:00] take all the pronouns out, strip it back. People just want the logic and the facts, and that's not the same as an effective communication. So those are two lessons I've learned along the way that I've had to unwind myself from,

**Richard Shotton:** I think that's a really interesting one and I dunno about the American and the Australian education system very well, but I think the British education system trains people to write in completely the wrong way.

I'm not talking about English degrees, but any humanities you are often. Rewarded for complexity, veracity impenetrable language, and then all these graduates are dropped into work where that is completely the wrong way of communicating if you want to get agreement and action from people. So yeah, I think that's, I think that's a brilliant one.

Love it.

**Bri Williams:** I see it all the time in when people are emailing me and you would've seen it as well. It's some, something as simple as. The benefit for the reader is buried usually in the [00:07:00] closing statement, and it needs to be at the very front of your correspondence. So what's in it for me to bother us to read this?

Because we're ego driven. We're interested in our own needs, and so we need to communicate that. And that's certainly not the way we're trained to write unless we're a copywriter, for instance.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Bri, if you could wave a magic wand, what's one preconception about behavioral change that you would erase from people's minds?

What would you just reset?

**Bri Williams:** This is probably a common one, but if we know better, we'll do better. So the more information and we're all empty vessels and if we people just have the right information, they'll do the right thing. And that's just proven time and time again that's not the case.

And so we under underestimate impacts, for instance, like form design, if you make the form sections smaller people are going [00:08:00] to write less. Or if you make them larger, people will. And so those sorts of constructs that if we just give people the right information or do the right thing is something I would like to erase from all of our minds.

**Richard Shotton:** Why is that myth so sticking? I agree with you. It's a misconception, but why is it, why does it last so long?

**Bri Williams:** Yeah, it's it's an interesting one and I see it all the time in the default position being more information. So we see it in government campaigns. And government campaigns I think are often formulated because you are never gonna get fired for putting more information out into the marketplace, are you?

So there's that safety of informing it, but it shifts the burden from. The people trying to instigate or initiate the behavior change onto the recipient, and I think it's probably through the educational system. It's probably through the assumption that. For babies to [00:09:00] grow, we need to teach them.

And teaching seems to be very much still numerical and written rather than behavioral, which is a real shame or at least explicitly because of course we're learning a lot behaviorally through those that we see around us and that sort of attunement. But yeah, it is sticky and I dunno exactly why.

Richard, do you have thoughts?

**Richard Shotton:** I think because so much of. Business understanding is based on asking the consumer or the employee why they do the things they do. And if you. Sit an employee down and ask them what would change their behavior. They'll probably say give me the facts. I'm a very sensible, logical person.

I'll weigh those up and come to my own decision. So we base a lot of our interventions. I think when they go wrong, they're, because the interventions are based on what the audience has explicitly asked for. So this kind of inaccuracy of claim data, [00:10:00] I think is at the heart of a lot.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Bri I'm intrigued also by the point that you made that sometimes the incentives aren't right.

If you're an owner, you're a CEO, you're a manager listening to this and you're not getting the outcomes that you want. It may be helpful to look at what you're celebrating, rewarding and giving raises to because real test and learn

environments, if you really wanna see what's gonna work in the world, you have to have both successes and failures.

And so if Bri, you said nobody's gonna get fired for putting too much information in market, and that's probably the longest route to getting somebody to actually learn what you want them to learn. So it, what we incentivize and celebrate makes a big difference.

**Bri Williams:** Yes, we default to it and all our mechanisms in business are around that.

And you add to that, I've forgotten who wrote the book Subtraction that concept of we default to addition rather than subtraction, we tend to want to [00:11:00] do more rather than do less. And so doing more usually invariably is give them more information because then we can't, they cannot argue that they didn't have the answers they needed.

**Richard Shotton:** Is there a brilliant campaign or intervention based on behavioral science that you wish you'd come up with?

**Bri Williams:** This will date me, but when I grew up and in, in Australia we have a very high incidence, unfortunately, of skin cancer. And so this campaign, I don't dunno if you've heard about it internationally, but in 1981 they launched the slip slot SLAP campaign.

And it it had a cartoon like I think it was a. Stalk or something. So there's a characterization of this slip on sunscreen see, I've even forgotten a slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen and slap on a hat. And it changed attitudes and behaviors around [00:12:00] some protection in Australia and to this day, people talk about flip flop, slap, and I think the campaign worked in a couple of ways and why it's top of mind for me is that I've actually used the construct of slip, flop, slap and some work I've been doing recently, but it used the iteration, which people like.

But also it had a jingle, and I'm not gonna sing it for you. People can find it online, but it a very easy jingle for people that was behaviorally based. And so it became part of the vernacular in Australia now where it seemed to go off the rails for me was a second version of the campaign when they extended it to five instead of three actions.

And so that now it's seek out shade. Slide on sunglasses. And so now it's too cumbersome. They tried to shoehorn in a couple of other s words and I think it's

really lost its punch as a [00:13:00] result. But Fabulous campaign really has changed people's awareness and actions around Sun Protect.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** We've talked in the past, and we can drop Bria if you'll share it with us.

We'll drop in the show notes for everybody to, to see the campaign. We've talked in the past about System One, a UK based market research agency that does work at, did a bunch of really important work on fluent devices, and they talk about the power of jingles. They talk about the power of characters that, that, that stick in people's minds.

And it feels very relevant. We can talk more about it if it comes up.

**Bri Williams:** And the other one is cheeky, but I'll keep it on. And I know this is again, quick fire, but I keep this on my desk. It's a wine cook.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Ah.

**Bri Williams:** Because I don't know what it's like in the US and the uk, but wine corks used to be the default mechanism for sealing wine bottles.

But in 2000, some wine producers in the Clear Valley in South [00:14:00] Australia decided to use screw tops on their wine bottles. Now. If that is a massive exercise in changing people's and consumer behavior around this, because the ritual of popping a wine cork out of your bottle and even the way the wine bottles were constructed so that they would fit cork, throwing 'em in screw tops.

It was amazing because cup two today and screw tops are the number one way of sealing wine. And so I, that was more, I keep it on my desk, not because I drink at my desk so much, but I keep it on my desk as a reminder that people's behavior can change even though it might seem insurmountable if you do particular things.

And so that, that was a really interesting, change in. Yeah. As I say, ritual assumptions around what it is. Have wine all of it.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Final quick fire [00:15:00] question. What insight from behavioral science do you think is criminally underused?

**Bri Williams:** I don't know if it's an insight from behavioral science so much, but I, for marketers, I like them to instead think of buyer behavior.

I like to remind them to use buying behavior. So buyer behavior concentrates you on the end consumer that the purchaser, but buying behavior focuses you instead on the actions around the decision to buy. It also reminds the marketers that they are buying someone's behavior, as in they're investing time, money, effort in buying an outcome.

I'm putting this campaign in market. I'm writing to these people because I'm buying an outcome. And so I like that sort of slight [00:16:00] reframe away from buyer behavior to buying behavior, which I think that puts us in the right mindset. From behavioral science more particularly I think the hot state versus cold state and that empathy gap between imagining how people are in this moment versus that moment or in this circumstance versus another is important.

I actually, I wrote recently on, there's a INE airline safety ad. I don't know if you've seen that recently. It's had over 5 million views because it's garnering a lot of attention because. The safety Briefing you watch it as you're sitting on the flight is constructed on the basis of a romance.

And so it's the story of this woman marrying the wrong man and they have oxygen. Masks dropping from the ceiling of the plane. So they intersperse behaviors in the airplane. That [00:17:00] a safety message in this narrative. And my point was great for non-emergency behavior. In an emergency, you're gonna learn.

You're gonna remember things like flip, flop, slap. You're not going to remember things like, oh, now when she was walking down the aisle and she was storing the bag, and all those sorts of things. And so I think that's an example of designing a communication for a cold state, which has no bearing on what the ultimate hot state would be, which is.

Something's gone wrong on the plane. What on earth do I need to do here? It's an example, I think of a campaign that will get accolades, that will get awards, and obviously is getting views, but it's only serving the cold state, not the hot state, which may have been their intent, but I just wanted to make the point about that campaign.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Bri, you're the author of the Williams Behavior book [00:18:00] 50 Models to Influence Action, and you shared one of your aims of the book is to prevent people from working on the wrong problem. Can you talk

a little bit about how you see behavioral science helping address this, especially when changing behavior internally?

**Bri Williams:** I wrote that book because I don't know if you've been through the airport recently and you've seen a book called The Decision Book.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Yes,

**Bri Williams:** it's it's been a bestseller and it grabbed my attention 'cause oh, I thought, oh, this will be interesting. How does it help me make decisions? And I cracked it open and it was a concise version of things like the SWAT model and other probably Porters five forces. All of the models that we've probably been, if you've been through a university marketing course or business course you've probably seen before, I thought, oh, that's interesting. They've made an international bestseller out of compiling these models.[00:19:00]

So I was getting a little bit annoyed by that, to be honest. 'cause as I, that's, I find that derivative. It's clever packaging, but it's driven. So then I was thinking what if I came up with my own models around behavior and behavior change? And so that's the instigation of the book. Whether I did it successfully, of course is for the the reader to, to make an assessment of.

But very much the work that I do is rooted in the issue of the wrong problem being we focus not on the behavioral objective. So we focus on perhaps. We need to have an execution, but we forget to ask ourselves what are we trying to get people to do Now that sounds so overtly and obvious that but I had 15 years in the corporate sector before I started my work in behavioral science.

And I can tell you most of the work was not discussions around, [00:20:00] hang on, what are we actually trying to get someone to do? And that goes for not only our end. Consumer, but our colleagues, if I'm sitting down to write an email, what do I want the person reading this to do is the question we never ask ourselves.

And so that's what I mean by the wrong problem. We jump into solutions without clarity around what are we trying to get people to do, and the natural extension to that is what are they doing instead? Because by asking that second question, so not only do we, what do we want them to do, but what are they doing instead?

That gives us a dimension for the scale of the task. Are they almost doing what we want? And so we don't have to shift them much or are they using a

competitor or et cetera. So that's the wrong problem that I'm trying to get people to focus on. And the other I guess subtext to that is that.

We often [00:21:00] predicate our work on getting people to move towards something. So towards our product, towards the project that we're trying to get them to collaborate with. We have to also think about what are we getting them to move away from what do we now have to wean them from in order to move them towards something?

And often we get very excited and just think about what we want them to buy or do differently without imagining that they're currently doing something else. So what do we need to move them away from?

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Have you found that there's certain. Tactics that you've used to best get folks focused on that challenge like that, when you say it is very activating to me. And then I would imagine people listening to this are gonna go back to their desk and they're going to go back to the way they were working right before they listen to our podcast.

So is there a, is there things that you've done that have [00:22:00] helped you keep this focus? I love the example of the wine cork on your desk. Is there tactics that there's, things that you do to help focus your clients and teams on this?

**Bri Williams:** In my training I am a fan of a memory aid in mnemonic.

And so in my training, for instance, I get people to hold up their left hand and on their thumb is the letter A and on their pinky as the letter B. So the task very much is to move people from their thumb to their pinky. So from A to B, current behavior to desired behavior. But the rest. For most of us, three fingers in the way of that.

And and that's where my behavior change model comes in, which is in order to get people from here to there, we need to anticipate and address only three barriers. Which leads us into, of course what we're talking about. So from a training perspective, that's one of the [00:23:00] tactics I use because oftentimes training can stay in the training book or in the materials, not the beautiful folder that the, or whether it be digital or physical that collect dust metaphorically or literal.

And so I like to bring it into. The embodiment quite literally of behavior because I can imagine people like I have sitting in a meeting and you you

randomly look at your hand and that can be a trigger point to remind yourself that I need to get clarity on what I'm trying to do and this is how I can go about it.

**Richard Shotton:** You mentioned the three kind of problem states, so what are those problem states and how can people trying to change behavior and navigate them.

**Bri Williams:** And this was very much born of my my desire to, and we've all had this synthesize, this sprawling field of [00:24:00] hundreds of biases and heuristics that are available to us.

That's impossible to do anything with because some of them contradict each other. And then it's how do I write an email effectively if I've got all of these hundreds of biases to, to deal with so that this is my attempt to. Condense and synthesize for me the core drivers of behavior or resistance to behavior.

So the first is, and I use the language depending on the audience, I use the language differently. In a colloquial sense, I call it laziness, but in a more formal sense, I call it apathy. That's very much about system one. The first problem if we're trying to get people from what they're currently doing to what we want 'em to do.

So A to B is getting them interested enough to bother. So that's the first. The second is confusion. So that is a paradox of choice, for instance. So if we overload people with choices [00:25:00] that they ask for, we're going to get further away from a decision point or an action. So the second is confusion, and the third is fear.

We started the conversation with psychological safety and fear, I think is the. Most unspoken of the barriers to behavior change. For instance, in your organization, if you're trying to get people to do things differently, they or a customer, if you're trying to get 'em to buy there, they often cite things like price or the processes convoluted.

And so I just need more information, which takes us back to the point of giving them more information and not changing behavior when underneath it all it's going to be. Am I going to look stupid if this goes wrong? If I back this supplier as someone in business and they embarrass me, what does that do to my status for a customer?

Of course, it's going to be how am I going to be financially worse off if this goes wrong? And so loss aversion and fear is very much that third [00:26:00] barrier of behavior. So in order to get people from current behavior to desired behavior, we need to get them interested. So apathy isn't an issue. We need to be clear in what we're asking of them.

So confusion isn't an issue, and we need, in order to overcome fear, give them nothing to fear if they proceed, but something to fear if they don't. And that's the Williams behavior change model.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. And for each of those, I think the moving to a state of clarity, getting that interest removing the are there specific tactics?

Maybe just take us through one per, per challenge that someone can practically take and.

**Bri Williams:** Yeah, so apathy is often the, and they tend to fall within a cycle of a project. So often in the early phases of a project, it's about getting people interested and a useful frame to think about.

There is a simple [00:27:00] equation, effort versus reward. So the more effortful something is, and the more friction we have in that process. The higher the reward needs to be. So in other words, if I'm going to bother doing something, you better make it really good for me and so blank. And conceptually what that means is making sure that they know that they're getting rewarded.

Now, we talked Briefly about an email, for instance, and having a what's in it for me at the end of your email? That's no good. You need to front end it. So making sure that the what's in it for me is explicit so that they know that there is reward because you are going to hit them with effort somewhere else in your correspondence, but also things like you would've seen I see it on multiple sites, sign up to get 10% off.

The problem with that statement sign up to get 10% off is the benefit is at the end of the statement. If we reverse that and say, get 10% off by signing up. [00:28:00] We front load the reward and so the effort comes later. And so top of mind is going to be the benefit for some people. So I call that my get before give rule.

So tell people what they get before what they have to give you.

**Richard Shotton:** That's really nice. That's really nice. Is that something that's been put to the test? That idea of even flipping the the giving and the getting.

**Bri Williams:** I, it would be somewhere Richard, but I couldn't pinpoint it. Yeah. Yeah. Because it's one of those things that I've amalgamated from all of the research Yeah.

Replaces,

**Richard Shotton:** yeah.

Sort of

**Bri Williams:** read over the years, but very much that sense of doing it differently and making sure that you're bringing to mind what payoff is going to make people more interested. And likewise, I've done this in some of my work when we're speaking a sequence of language, also making sure that it's.

You make sure that you tell them what you've done before, what they have to [00:29:00] do. So I was working with a bank, for instance, and due to a change in their bank number, they had to get all of their customers to change their direct debits. Now that is horrible. Imagine being a customer and getting that piece of good news.

And so how we soften the blow there was telling them what we've done. So we've already taken care of X, Y, Z. So what you need to do is this. So done before, do. So oftentimes when we are communicating with people, it's a simple challenge of sequence. So making sure we're sequencing our sentences. And I know is it Jonah Berger who's done a lot of work on language and words, but also sequence of words.

That's probably what's germinated in my mind in terms of a lot of these concepts. So in terms of apathy, sometimes it's really just taking what we were going to say and shuffling. Shuffling the way in which we say it. So when it comes to [00:30:00] confusion, so clarity is that that's very much about. I often suggest keeping options to a manageable number, and that tends to be three, the rule of three, and making sure you're being explicit about your call to action.

So not using ambiguous language in your call to action, making sure people know what is being asked of them, not using too many calls to action. We've all had correspondence before where it's, you can do this, that, and the other, and

it's oh, now I'm really. Confused. So making sure you have a hierarchy of calls to action, and that even goes to how you design your calls to action.

So color schemes and things, and making sure that the most important action is always the most obvious action. And then with fear there were two, two ways we deal with fear. There's giving people nothing to fear, so those are naturally things like assurances money, back guarantees, satisfaction guarantees.[00:31:00]

If you do this, you'll be okay. And leaders, for instance, back to the point about Amy Edmondson's work and psychological safety, making sure that people know I've got your back. So nothing to fear if they do make the change, but something to fear if they don't. And that's where the ramifications of. Inion or the downside of the status quo become important.

And a simple way to do that, for instance, is making sure that you put ticks or check marks in America ticks next to the options. For instance, you want people to take, but some cross marks against those that you don't, so that you are making it obvious about what the downside of the, of an option versus another option is.

Make it clear to using fear to drive that action. So really making the yeah, making some options unpalatable, which is not something we like to do in business. Killing our darlings. [00:32:00] Yeah, we need to do that in order to stimulate a desire for taking action. Yeah.

**Richard Shotton:** Throughout the book you pepper it with a lot of these ideas like you talked about done before, do and give, before get you've got a real gif for coming up with really pithy, clear names.

I think of all the ones that you talk about, one that I like best, it's your name, the Zoro Technique. Could you tell us a little about that and how that can be used to encourage internal behavior change?

**Bri Williams:** Yeah. A lot of the behavioral science is of course designing the environment and what have you, so that you don't actually have to talk with your customers or your your colleagues to motivate change the Zoro technique, if you imagine for listeners, a giant ZZ in the middle of a page, and now we've got four points of that z.

This is based on motivational interviewing. So it's four questions again in a particular sequence in order [00:33:00] to get people to build a case for change

in their own minds. So this is something you can do either in your planning phase by yourself, so you can anticipate what people are doing, but you can also workshop people through.

So this is an example of actually talking with people and leading them through a process. First question is, what's good about now? What's good about what we're doing? And we ask that question first because we wanna celebrate that we are working and we are doing good work. That gives people license to get that off their chest.

'cause otherwise they'll end up resenting things. So what's good about now, and then we ask the question number two on the top right of the letter Z is what are some concerns about how we're doing things now? And that gives people voice for. Oh yeah. Life isn't perfect And there are some things that [00:34:00] are frustrating.

'cause of course there are, I'm really this isn't getting the traction that we expected or what have you. So we ask that question. Second, third question, bottom of the Z on the left is if we did change what we do, what concerns do you have about that? Again, naturally people will be a little bit nervous about what that will do to their work or their finances, whatever their concerns happen to be.

And then the fourth and final question on the bottom right of the Z is what's the upside for changing? So we are leaving them on a high by asking this question. So what's the upside? What are the good things about if we do change what we are doing and that gives people a sense of optimism? Now we ask.

So if you imagine the left of the DZ, which the questions there were, what's good about now and what concerns do we have about [00:35:00] change that effectively is the case against doing anything. So life is good now, and I don't wanna change because I have concerns about it. On the right of the Z, we've got, what are your concerns about how we do things now and what's the upside of changing?

That's the case for change. And so by asking these questions in this sequence, people convince themselves of the need to change. They build the case. It's amazing. I run this often in my workshops and I fa have my clients facilitate this as well. And it's amazing the transformation people go through because it really gives them voice to whatever they want to talk about, they talk about, but it ultimately drives them towards.

A reason for bothering to change.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. And I like your point, you mentioned people persuade [00:36:00] themselves now, I think there's an argument that's far more effective than it being mandated from a higher power as it were.

**Bri Williams:** Very much. I think one of the challenges with change management programs is it brainstorms a lot of activities.

Facilitates a lot of sessions where people give voice to things, but not in a, necessarily, in a way that drives the project forward. So it's about venting, but it might not be about doing that persuasive task, which is what the Zoro technique is very much designed to do. Go.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** So, Bri, if you're excited, you're listening to this and you're hearing, oh, this is a technique I.

I would love to try. I am interested in trying. Can you talk a little bit about the things that you've seen? How do you know when you're on the right path, where it's working and solving issues or maybe, and is there any watch outs or things that you've seen when you've used it [00:37:00] that good to know as people start to wanna research more and try this?

Can you give us any reflections or top takeaways because you've used it so much? Yeah,

**Bri Williams:** it's a really good question. I think one of the challenges, depending on your session is if you haven't defined what the change is by the time you get to question three and four, which is what are your concerns about the change and what are the upsides of the change?

If you haven't defined what that change is, that can feel a bit. So sometimes I split the session and I have the first two questions, and then we have we reconvene about then what might change look like. So we start to talk about if we have these what we're doing now is good, but we have some concerns about it, then we can start to talk about what might we do differently?

But I use it in most of my one, one day or half day workshops, and I use it to build an appetite for behavioral [00:38:00] techniques. So I use it as a way of getting people. To reflect on their work today and to understand that there might be a gap in how they understand human behavior. 'cause the default position as humans, and I was like this until I came across behavioral science.

I'd work, I'd studied psychology, but I hadn't had this fusion point of, it's often what's unspoken that is, is the problem. And so I spend a lot of my time either in my keynotes or my training. People that they don't know everything they need to know about human behavior. I think because we're, we are human humans, most of us.

We seem to walk around the world like we, we know what it takes to influence people and we are influencing people every day. Every time you have an interaction with someone, you are influencing them. You may not be influencing them in the desirable way though. So [00:39:00] every time you send an email out, you're influencing someone, but are you influencing them towards what you want 'em to do or to ignore what you're trying to get them to do?

So I use the Zoro technique as a way to invite people to have an appetite about behavioral science.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** When you meet resistance, when there's not that appetite, what's been some of the best approaches that you've seen to help open people's mind to being excited about behavior change or being open to it?

**Bri Williams:** Yeah, so I suppose that's a bit of reactance usually. And I think the Zoro technique is very good at that because whilst I've talked about it, for instance in a workshop format, you could even have it in conversation without, for instance, whiteboarding, anything you would be saying. Oh, hi Michael.

Great. Thanks for we're having some time together. What's going on with you? What's [00:40:00] what's going well for you at the moment? Then you lead the conversation into do you have concerns or what's frustrating you at the moment about how you're doing things? And that then opens up the conversation because you're listening to people.

'cause ultimately people wanna be seen and listened to in a lot of these sorts of things. So the way to overcome reactance is often. Putting them first and foremost and listening. There's also a removal of pressure, so you language oh, feel free to do this or not. So you removing the pressure from people makes them have a stronger sense of agency because as soon as you're in impinging on people's sense that they get to make the decision or that they are a valid or autonomous decision maker, that's when you start to get into trouble.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah, it is one of the more bizarre studies and I think some of his later work was criticized, but there's, I think it's a [00:41:00] French

psychology, is it ga? And he comes up with this idea of the, but you are free principle, so as many psychologists seem to do, he runs an experiment about begging and he goes up to some people at a bus stop in France and says, can I have.

20 cents or 50 cents and gets a mediocre response. Other times he says, can I have 20 cents? But you're free to accept or refuse now. You could argue rationally that extra few words of, but you are free is irrelevant. Of course I'm free to turn a beggar away. But what he found is just by emphasizing people's ability to say no, it actually made them paradoxically more likely to be charitable and give money.

And I think it's something that. Again, going back to our point of we have this wrong model of human behavior. We often ignore some of these proven principles. So yeah, [00:42:00] emphasizing freedom, I think is a brilliant point.

**Bri Williams:** Richard, as a listener to this podcast myself, I just admire so much your ability to remember all the studies and bring them there.

Bring them to the table. I,

**Richard Shotton:** That wasn't the best

**Bri Williams:** example

**Richard Shotton:** because I'm a bit vague pronou out guys. I can't remember any results, but yeah. Okay. Thank you.

**Bri Williams:** No, I really appreciate it. It brings another dimension to. To the conversations, which I appreciate as a listener, that's for sure.

**Richard Shotton:** Oh, that's very kind.

It's very kind. Let me return the favor. I love Zoro technique, but I think even better was this argument you make around a technique called Army your advocate. Could you explain what that is and how listeners could.

**Bri Williams:** Arming your advocate came about because I was talking to a friend who was in sales and she was lamenting the fact that her champion at her client had left [00:43:00] and so she was then bereft.

'cause all of this relationship had gone out of the window and it got me thinking about the role. Advocates when you are not in the room. So when your work can't, you, when you are not there to talk for your work. How are you helping your advocates do that within the organization? Because it's critical.

'cause you ultimately, you hand over your, whether it's a presentation or a proposal or a piece of work, and often this stuff ends up in a drawer somewhere because it's too hard for your advocate to take it forward. I was starting to reflect on the difference between when we are making a decision for ourselves versus when we are making a decision that we then have to justify to others.

And I, I call it I or we or me versus we decisions. And this is particularly in a business to business context. So if I, as the customer am listening to a pitch. [00:44:00] I'm gonna have, first and foremost my me concern. So how is it going to help my career? For instance, what does this work do for me? Does it change my workload and what have you?

So I'm going to make a decision on the basis of my emotional reaction to whatever I'm being pitched. If then I have to take that artifact and then sell it up the line so I talk to my boss or my colleagues about it. My brain is going to shift from me concerns. 'cause it's not right to me to go to my colleague and say, Hey, this project is gonna make me look really good and make me really promotable.

So let's get on board. That's not gonna wash. Our brains then flip to we concerns. So how is the business going to benefit now as someone pitching for the business? We have then a twofold issue. We have to get the individual advocate over the line by [00:45:00] talking about how it's gonna benefit them or usually infer it more so this is gonna be this will make you look good in your career. But then arm them with enough, and it's gonna be more fact based than emotional based, but fact-based language and case studies or what have you, so that they can then sell it to others when you are not in the room. And this was I guess sparked by some research, I think from Huber and Huber and c so it's around 2001.

So they had. A study where, and it was a very small study on students, so we can caveat there, but three groups of students and they were charged, I think with making a decision about who needed to head up something a body. And one group would told ahead of time that they would be accountable to others for their decision.

So they'd [00:46:00] have to justify that decision, so they were told ahead of time. So that was called the pre accountability. Scenario then a second group

weren't told that they would have to be accountable for the decision till after it. And then the third group weren't told that they'd be accountable for the decision at all.

And what this research suggested was that when people are told upfront before making the decision that they would be accountable for it. So in other words, they'd have to tell others and explain to others. They went on a much more thorough search for information and answers. So they really needed a strong case.

When people were told after the case that they were accountable, they weren't looking ahead of time for answers, they were post rationalizing it. So it was all about how do I justify the decision I've already taken. The third group who had no accountability. It [00:47:00] didn't matter. They weren't really attuned to it.

But what was interesting about both this pre accountability and post accountability group is that they all sought out more information that they could then use. And I think that is the weak considerations. It's a long way of saying we need to do more for our advocate so that they can take it up the line and things like and I'll revert back to the flip top flap, but giving them language that, that can nutshell what your project or your initiative is or have an analog for it.

This is the Uber of wine corks or whatever it happens to be, so that they can then parrot you. In a session when you are not there so that they can then transfer that information becomes so critical. 'cause otherwise if you're not there, your work dies.

**Richard Shotton:** I love that idea of giving people like a simplified [00:48:00] version that's not to like cognitively taxing that they can then pass on.

Have you got any examples of people doing that, that, that very well?

**Bri Williams:** No, because I'm never there, Richard.

**Richard Shotton:** Ah, okay. Yeah, fair enough. Fair enough. Yeah.

**Bri Williams:** So for instance, but back to the Fliptop lap. So a lot of the work that I was doing on with this with this client based on that sort of concept Yeah.

Was that I saw it. I guess I seeded. Some language that they could then share with their colleagues to get other colleagues on board. And so it's really nutshell what the project is. And that can go to simple things like what do you call your

project? Making sure that or the attachment that you include in an email, how do you, what are you calling the attachment so that when it gets circulated, it's going to have a positive impact on the reader.

Having said that, attachments are dreadful because it's a point of friction, and so how do you even get [00:49:00] people to bother to click on the attachment? So it's those sorts of concepts of behavioral science, which I'm passionate about, because oftentimes we think of behavioral science as something that only external customers.

Need to worry about. And we put on our our behavioral science pants and think, okay, this is a consumer facing or a customer facing initiative, so I'm going to apply it to that campaign, forgetting that all of the work about the campaign is getting the campaign signed off. And so all of your correspondence and your interactions with your stakeholders along the way is going to.

That's where you need to use behavioral science. It's about how are you influencing the people that make the decisions to use the campaign.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Bri, can you talk about evidence of success? How do you know when you've got you, you talked very compellingly that we are going, first you have to convince maybe more through inference rather than through direct language about [00:50:00] how this is good for their career.

Then you gotta give 'em the nutshell that they're gonna take in. Used to parrot your information further in the road. How do you know you're on the right road? What are you seeing amongst your direct client or how do you know that you're making progress besides just winning the request at the end of whatever that.

Statement is like what's your evidence of success

**Bri Williams:** besides, besides getting the work, Michael, that's the important thing.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Good point.

**Bri Williams:** No I must say that is that's what I judge it by, so I don't have any more formal aspects of it. But I, you certainly know that when things go to the dark side of the moon and you don't hear anything more about it, something's gone wrong.

And so I always take the absence of. Action as feedback, and I had to learn that early on in my career in consulting, coming out of the corporate sector, it was like I have to walk my talk. And I learned the hard way. In that case, I was putting up proposals that weren't using behavioral science [00:51:00] in the proposal, and a client actually called me out on it.

It was around anchoring, for instance, in my pricing. I hadn't used anchoring to provide a frame of reference to, for them to understand what the value was of this exercise. And thank goodness I got that in early on in my consulting career. That feedback. Yes, sorry. I'm gonna disappoint you with the the metrics there that is a shortfall of mine, but remember, numbers are not objective.

Michael, Aaron,

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** I was a I think you, you gave a lot in your answer actually, Bri, uh, because I think one of the things you said that really stuck with me is there's lots of information. And what you count is the win or the loss, but you look for non-action as a sign you look for are they asking for the nutshell of the idea?

Do are, did they repeat the nutshell of the idea back to you? So I think in your answer, yeah, it, to me it's very clear that it's a dialogue and you're looking as you go to, to grab the [00:52:00] information. So helpful.

**Bri Williams:** And the other point there, and which you've just prompted in me is that. Not relying on what our customers are telling us, because back to that whole point of what they're asking for might not be what persuades them anyway.

It's what they're not asking for that. We have to anticipate, which is I guess the work around the Williams behavior model. I have to anticipate how. To give myself the best chance of this being successful. How am I going to get them interested so that apathy isn't an issue? I'm going to make sure that I reduce as much effort as possible, but maximize their sense of reward.

How do I make sure I'm not confusing them in what I'm suggesting? I'm going to give them clarity about what I am asking, and I'm going to, for instance. Nutshell things so that they can parrot the the project and how do I make sure they've got nothing to fear if they work with me. So that's through credentialing and case studies and that sort of thing.

But how do I make them, and [00:53:00] this is what I'm not good at, giving them something to fear if they don't work with me. And so what's the downside of an absence of applying, for instance, behavioral science to the work that they're doing?

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** That is a lovely summary of what we've talked about today. And Bri the hour has rushed by.

It is so engaging for those that wanna learn more about your work, follow you, get engaged with what you're doing, could you share with everyone where they can get more information?

**Bri Williams:** Yeah, certainly. My website is probably the central harbor of that BRI williams.com. You can find most of it there, but I'm.

Pretty active on LinkedIn and I post a lot of my videos there. See, now I'm giving too many options, but TikTok and YouTube, you'll find me in different places.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** And your newsletter, if you want, if you are one that reads email, you have a great newsletter. Bri, let's not forget, let's give 'em three options.

We'll give 'em [00:54:00] three and to have you sign up there as well. Well, Bri, thank you for joining us. Thanks for being on the show today. For those that are listening that found this interesting and thought provoking, please do share it. It helps other marketers, others that are interested in behavioral change, learn.

For everyone listening, please comment, or follow our posts. It helps us reach more marketers just like you. Until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

**Richard Shotton:** And I'm Richard Shotton.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Thank you, Bri, for being with us today.

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