

The Human Conversation

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Get To Know Our Guest
**DR. NIGEL
PAINE**

Dr. Nigel Paine is a *change-focused leader* with a worldwide reputation and a unique grasp of media, learning and development in the public, private and academic sectors.

He has extensive experience in leadership and consultancy with public service broadcasters, SMEs, global industry players, government and education institutions.

Nigel focuses on the use of learning technologies, organizational development, leadership and creativity with a spotlight on maximizing human potential, innovation and performance in the workplace. Nigel is a strategic thinker, able to motivate, lead and drive organizations forward to deliver business and training objectives.

Nigel has been involved in corporate learning for over twenty years. He was appointed in April 2002 to head up the BBC's Learning and Development operation. Under his leadership, the team developed a brand-new on-boarding experience, a comprehensive leadership development programme for over 6,000 staff, an award-winning intranet, and state of the art informal learning and knowledge sharing networks.

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DR. NIGELPAINE

He left the BBC in September 2006 to start his own company that is focused on building great workplaces by promoting creativity, innovation, values based-leadership and learning and the link between them.

He speaks regularly at conferences around the world, and teaches on a doctoral programme at the University of Pennsylvania and for Chicago Booth Business School. His first book, *The Learning Challenge: Dealing with Technology, Innovation and Change in Learning and Development* was published in September 2014. His new book on *Building Leadership Development Programmes That Work* was published in November 2016. He is currently working on a new book re-examining learning organisations and learning culture. He recently co-authored an eBook introduction to *Neuroscience for Learning*.

He has a Professorship from Napier University in Edinburgh, and is a Fellow of the CIPD, LPI, the RSA and a Masie Learning Fellow in the USA. He presents a monthly TV programme (*Learning Now TV*), shares a weekly podcast (with Martin Couzins) called *From Scratch*, and regularly writes articles for magazines and journals about development, technology and leadership.

Nigel has written articles and white papers published on subjects as diverse as 'Creativity in the Workplace', 'Building Corporate Heroes' and 'The Future of E-Learning'.

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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **DR. NIGEL:** One of the things that I've come more and more and more to believe is that I *value decency and kindness*. And I think organizations are far too harsh and toxic and do not value decency and kindness. And the research from the book really indicated that *if you do not value decency and kindness, you will never get the best from your staff. You can flog them, you can force them, you can cajole them, but if you really want motivated staff, they need to have unsolicited, unconditional effort, and that comes from decency and kindness. Increasingly, that's my belief, and I don't care what anyone thinks. I'm promoting that, and I will continue to promote it.*
- **DR. NIGEL:** Even though some people think I'm being naive, I actually think I'm being realistic. Because the kind of world that we live in is so volatile, you can't get the best out of people by mistreating them and then saying, but give me your ideas, give me extra commitment. It doesn't happen. It doesn't happen.
- **KG:** *What do the terms ethics and integrity mean to you as you bring your expertise to the world?*
- **DR. NIGEL:** When I started my own company, I made three decisions which have been helped. *The first decision was I would never work with people I didn't trust. The second decision was that I would not stick to doing the same old, same old, same old. I would develop and move forward and think it through. And the third was that I would try to help organizations become less toxic in whatever, by whatever, whatever route. And I've tried to do that. I've maybe failed a lot, but I've tried very hard to live by those values. And it's really an ethical approach.*



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- **DR. NIGEL:** Integrity is very important to me. *If I lose my integrity, I lose everything. If I lose a bit of money, I lose a bit of money. That's not the end of the world. I can get money back. I can't get my integrity back.* So no one has ever tried to buy me or if they have, I've resisted it forcefully. And no one has tried to make me say things and no one has encouraged me to support bad treatment of staff or a bad culture. *I'm trying to create a culture where people grow, learn, flourish and share.*
- **DR. NIGEL:** *It's very important to me to have an ethical foundation and values.* And I like organizations that have ethical foundations and values and they live by them. They don't just stick them on the wall, they actually live by them. So I think that's very important. *I believe and nothing has ever shaken that belief that basically people are good and that people the vast majority want to do good work.*
- **DR. NIGEL:** I really genuinely believe that we can make work better, we can make work work, and we can have people who really enjoy going to work do fantastic work and increase productivity for the organization. Productivity and a decent workplace aren't contradictory, but some people think they are, and I don't understand. Because there's no evidence to show that they're right and I'm wrong. No evidence. There's more evidence to show that I'm right and they're wrong.
- **KG:** *Do you have any words of encouragement or advice for professionals who are not so powerful in those organizations, mid-level or early career?*



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- **DR. NIGEL:** You can behave in your area with your team in a way that is noticeably different from the rest of the organization. So the fact that the organization behaves in a particular way doesn't stop you doing something different. And sometimes it's like a contagion that you set something up. You put a bit of bacteria in the organization, then it replicates, at some point it becomes unstoppable.
- **DR. NIGEL:** The minute you know consciously that this is not what you should be doing, walk away. Just walk away. However much they pay you, however much they say this is only temporary or whatever, because otherwise you'll get caught.
- **KG:** It occurs to me that social media and technology are rather skewed towards negative stories, the stories of hatred and fear tend to be more attractive and clickbait worthy. But in your extensive experience, would you say large organizations and professionals are more towards the spectrum of kindness and decency and creating psychological safety in workplaces. Would you say that's your observation?
- **DR. NIGEL:** I think it's an increasing area of development in organizations. And it's not because they're just suddenly being do goody. We must do this to be good to people. They're doing it for very cynical, pragmatic reasons. If the more psychological safety, the more interaction, the more problem solving, the more creativity, the more productivity, it's all about getting the best out of people in the world.



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- **DR. NIGEL:** *And if you're not comfortable, you know what to do. You walk away and don't let that slippery slope start occurring. We compromise a bit, compromise a bit more, compromise a bit more. And then suddenly you've crossed a line. So that line still exists. These decisions are being made every day all around the world in organizations. So you know what to do. You know what the right thing to do is. But if you can do it without damaging yourself, then that's the best thing.*
- **DR. NIGEL:** I don't believe in confrontation or holier than thou, in big moral high ground. I just believe in quietly walking away because that's the safest thing you can do. Disappearing basically.
- **KG:** I think it is an excellent example of nonviolent communication and strategic conflict management because indeed it is counterproductive sometimes as professionals to be defiant and speak up in ways that burn bridges, you can certainly continue to do your work and speak up and establish a clean record for yourself while being polite.
- **KG:** *Do not bend your own principles. Make it clear what you will and will not accept, but continue to be polite and work while you might not see eye to eye with them on those activities, you're clearly outlining what you will and will not do. And therefore they know what to expect of you.*



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- **DR. NIGEL:** *People have to be conscious of the decisions they make and the impact. It's rather like Nonviolent Communication, that wonderful book that you've got to be conscious of the language you use and recognize the implications of the language you use. And it's learning something, that things that were invisible suddenly become visible. And I think that's what this is all about. It's making it visible and bring it to the fore of your consciousness, not stick it in the back of your consciousness so you don't notice it.*
- **KG:** *What are your observations on ethical dilemmas most relevant today? And what's your advice to leaders and professionals in these situations?*
- **DR. NIGEL:** *I just think as a leader, a leader who does not behave ethically, corrupts the whole organization. So I think you have a special responsibility and you may be under the most pressure. And we all know about ways that organizations do things that are not incredibly wrong, but are on the edge. I think if I'm a leader, I've got to have a clear indicator of what I believe. And I make sure the whole organization knows what I believe as well, so that you don't get people further down the organization misbehaving. But if I misbehave, I have no justification whatsoever for stopping anyone else misbehaving. And you tend to find these things cascade.*



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- **DR. NIGEL:** I love that idea that we are all in it together and I will be in an organization where *as if the people at the top rise, everybody rises. If I rise, so does everyone else.* That idea that we're connected, that we're part of a community and that we're not all on our own or I can disengage my success from everyone else's. So I can treat people brutally and be successful. I think that's a very short term view of the world. So I think it is a fundamental rule.
- **DR. NIGEL:** GE used to have a quote in their leadership center in Cronenberg and it said, *in a rising tide, all boats rise.* I completely agree with that. *You can be a massive ship or a little boat, little rowing boat. You all rise as the tide rises. And that's what you need to ensure, that you are building a rising tide and that you will ensure that all boats rise, all ships rise.* So that quote really goes to the heart of what I believe.
- **KG:** *How do you maintain the great quality of your writing and thought leadership?*
- **DR. NIGEL:** *Don't write when I know something. I write when I don't know something. So therefore, I'm plagued by curiosity and doubt and worries. And that's what prompts my writing.* So I want to answer a question. I've always got a question. someone said, I don't write when I understand. I write to understand. And that's exactly the same as me. There's always a dilemma at the heart of all of my books. And that's what drives me on.



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- It's like an itch. I need to know, I need to understand that. And when I start researching it and I start to come up with ideas, I then have a compulsion to write them down. So I write a lot.
- **DR. NIGEL:** *Writing is a habit in a way. If I have to write something, I can just write it. I don't need to worry. I never worry that I can't write. But a lot of people say, but how do you get started? And the answer is you get started by writing. You start writing, that's how you get started. And you just put words on a page and if they're rubbish, I write myself into understanding. So sometimes I write and write and write and at the end of the day, I discard everything apart from the last paragraph because that's my starting point. And that's okay. You write to edit to discard. You don't write to make it perfect. I don't agonize over a single sentence. I just keep writing. And if my writing is terrible, I just throw it away and start again. Because some days your writing will be terrible and some days your writing will be really something you can be proud of. But you can't predict it. But the only thing you can predict is if you write, you will end up writing something. It's as simple as that.*



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