

In a recent podcast episode of '[How Aye Built This](#)', our CEO [Paul Reid](#) sat down with show host [Liam Wilson](#) to chat about the inspiration behind the creation of the Trickle platform.

Starting out as a rookie software engineer, Paul's journey to CEO of his own highly successful market leading company Sigma Seven, has provided him with unique insights as to why employers should be listening to and giving their people a voice.

In this interview, Paul shares some key lessons he's learned over the span of his 25 year career that have shaped his approach to employee engagement and wellbeing; and ultimately led to the creation of the Trickle.

This is an abridged version of the original podcast, listen to the full story below.

## Lesson 1 – Understand that your people have great ideas

After graduating with a degree in software engineering from Napier University, Paul became employee number four at an exciting newly formed tech startup. It was during his time with this company he saw the power, impact and need for employers to actively listen to their people.

"I was employee number four and in a year we had maybe 20 or so employees. The founders were really clever people and focused on growing the company; and in the background the people that were coming in, like myself, had various niggles that were building up over time," he explains.

It was sometimes simple things he says, such as being based out of the founder's house or having non ergonomic furniture, "you're sitting at a kitchen table, at a bench essentially, and you're thinking wait a minute I'm getting a sore back, is that because of this? Folk tend to be quite frustrated unless they get a chance to air their niggles".

Despite liking the company, these mounting frustrations pushed people to consider leaving, including Paul, who felt it was time for him to move on: "before I left I thought, this is pretty daft, everyone knows that there's so many problems here that are probably relatively easy to fix".

Paul asked his colleagues to share with him their top two or three issues, which he put in a document: "this was in the days of floppy disks, so I didn't put anyone's name on it. I walked down to the managing director's office once she'd left for the day and left the disc on her desk.

"The next day the director invited me out to lunch and it was really an eye opener for me because I thought they were going to give me a lot of hassle for giving them a document with 25 moans in it. But actually they said thanks very much for letting us see the extent of these problems."

Ready to remedy the situation, the directors said they could realistically address the top 5 or 10 issues, and asked Paul to help communicate their commitment to the team.

"I ended up staying for another couple of years because it became a really good place to work. I became a manager and ended up being more of a customer facing person instead of a raw techie, and that set the tone for my career really," he continues.

"The lesson there was listen to your people because the success of the company is

absolutely fundamental in that you're listening to your people and showing you're doing something about it".

## Lesson 2 – Listening is a major part of business success

Armed with his experience, Paul applied this knowledge to his next venture Sigma Seven, which would become a market leader in its field.

According to Paul, having great company culture, strong psychological safety and a supportive work environment was the key to Sigma Seven's success. Starting out with just four people the company scaled quickly to a team of 50.

"We used to beat massive companies with literally thousands of times more staff to contracts, and we took real pride in that because we were just a small group of people who loved what we did and were really passionate about helping customers," he says.

"It was a brilliant journey, but the main thing about it was the people. We had a fantastic culture and that was what really allowed us to outperform others, everybody really bought into it and felt they could influence it. It was a brilliant place to work.

"If it hadn't been a great place to work we'd have struggled to recruit, especially in the 2013 period when loads of big tech companies in Edinburgh, like Skyscanner and Microsoft, were competing for tech talent, but we still managed to get really good people working with us. I loved that 15 year part of my career."

## Lesson 3 – Early interventions yield better results

A criminology study called 'Broken Windows' laid the first seeds that would eventually blossom into Trickle.

The research focused on the vandalism of derelict buildings in the US: the study found that if a building was in a derelict area but was secured with perimeter fencing, warning signs of patrol guards, the building would remain in relatively good condition.

However, if a window was left broken and the signs were removed, the building would be practically demolished a week later. The findings suggest that if interventions are taken early on, and problems are nipped in the bud, escalation of the issue can be avoided.

As a result of reading this study, Paul implemented a system called 'Broken Windows' within Sigma Seven, which was the forerunner of the Trickle platform.

"If you can fix things when they are small then it really helps the environment become a better space for people to be in," he explains.

Each month Paul would lead meetups with his workforce where he'd ask people to shout out their ideas, issues or concerns. The purpose was to give people a place to get things off their chest and to vote on the top five issues that required more immediate attention.

Following this the company would take action where possible and then two months later everyone would reconvene to assess the improvement and to begin the process again.

At first people were reluctant to speak up; however, after a few months people started to see that leadership was authentically committed to the values of 'Broken Windows' and began to share their true sentiments.

"This exercise was absolutely fundamental to making sure that that business was really performing to its best ability," Paul asserts.

From simple adjustments, such as adding more office bins to providing quiet work booths, Broken Windows enabled Sigma Seven to work with its people to make impactful improvements.

## Lesson 4 – Show your employees they are valued

In 2015, the Sigma Seven was acquired by Capita, and the team was merged into the parent company's 70,000 strong workforce. It was during this merger that Paul witnessed first-hand the damage that could be done when the wellbeing of employees is left out of the equation.

Speaking about the acquisition Paul explained the transition from a family like organisation into a corporation was hard. People no longer knew who to go to for clarity and much loved company social events such as Pizza Friday were cancelled.

However, Paul notes that while this upset people it was an event called FruitGate that was the last straw.

"We used to get fruit deliveries twice a week and then the parent company decided we had to look at cutting costs across the whole organisation and somebody said, yeah we're going to need to look at the fruit.

"I said look this is going to be a disaster: if you take away the fruit, it will only save a few grand and it's really going to go down badly, but my voice wasn't strong enough in the grand scheme of the organisation.

"It was a disaster, people took it as a signal that the company doesn't care anymore. It caused more uproar than changes to bonuses and things like that, which also happened as a result of being part of a bigger company...yeah, fruitgate caused a lot of people to go."

"We lost about 30% of staff in a 12 month period; prior to that we had lost only two people voluntarily in the 5 years before it. It was a massive lesson in how people are absolutely crucial to the success of your organisation and that's where Trickle came from".

## **Trickle shows you what matters most to your people in real-time**

The Trickle platform is essentially Broken Windows 2.0: it takes people's suggestions, scores them, and then highlights the top five items raised by your people. People within the organisation can follow trickles threads through to conclusion and contribute their support or opinion to them at any point.

If something really matters to your people, or they feel very strongly about it, they can show this by adding flames to the thread. Once a trickle has been resolved, your people can then vote on that outcome to let you know how they feel about the result.

Trickle enables managers to identify the areas that require their immediate attention the most, opportunities for quick wins, and to collaborate with their people to improve things across the whole organisation.

To find out how Trickle can help you guide and develop your organisation's culture, get in touch for more information or to book a short 20 minute demo.

Alternatively you can trial Trickle absolutely free for 30-days, simply visit:

<https://trickle.works/freetrial/>

[Talk to us today](#) for a personalised demo of Trickle for your organisation.