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Posted April 30, 2020

Pete Moore:

This is Pete Moore on HALO Talks NYC. I have the pleasure of having Celeste Headlee, a public radio journalist, top 10 speaker and bestselling author. She's going to learn about our industry and she is going to give us expert advice on how to listen to our members better. So Celeste, welcome to halo talks. Thanks. Thanks for having me. Awesome. So you want to just give you a quick background. I gave the highlights here but how you became an expert in decided to dedicate your life to helping others.

Celeste Headlee: I've been a journalist in public media, NPR, PRI PBS for over 20 years. And they, when I very first started out studying communication and conversation, it was because I wanted to get better at what I did. I wanted to be a better interviewer and you know, this and the interview is just basically a formal conversation with other rules. So I started reading the research on how to have better conversations. And then I was able to go in and, and try that stuff out. You know, when they told you to maintain eye contact, I could go back to my studio and try that for a couple of weeks and see if it improved conversations. And what I found was that the advice we've been getting for a really long time was terrible and it was not effective. And basically what I discovered was that base in order to get that advice, what they did was they, they watched people having good conversations and they said, Oh, when people are having a good conversation, they nod their head and they say, aha. And they gesture and they maintain eye contact. So if you do all those things, you'll have a good conversation, but it just doesn't work that way. So I had to start from scratch.

Pete Moore: Gotcha. So in our industry, health clubs, boutique studios have gotten hammered by the pandemic. A lot of members have left either. They're, they're afraid to go in which rightfully so. In certain instances, if you've got underlying conditions or you're a certain age, it's probably not a good idea to go ahead and socialize it until you have the vaccine. But I think one of the issues in our industry has been communication. One it's been messaging, you know, why you should come to a health club or why you should care about your health, to why you should join our community. And also once someone is a member, how we actually continue to communicate with them real-time and I find that a lot of people use the data and just run reports and forgot that they actually have people walking physically into their location and it can have a conversation with them. And they use technology almost as a default. They, Oh yeah. I do communicate with my members. And, and I say, you know, you can look into data, but trust your gut and also talk to people. So I want to get your, your viewpoint on that and have a debate while I'm not multitasking. And I'm solely listening to your advice.

Celeste Headlee: There's a, there's a lot in what you just said. So let me try to pick it apart. The first thing is this trust that we have technology, there is an assumption in all kinds of industries that a

digitally mediated communication is more efficient. Email is more efficient. It takes less time. And we think, we think that texting is more is, is more efficient and more clear, less prone to miscommunications. We are have these fears that if we get on the phone with somebody, it we're going to be stuck there for 20, 30 minutes. All of this stuff has been tested. I can't even tell you how many times we have taken all of these assumptions into the lab and they're all wrong. A email is not faster than the phone conversation. We have tested that over and over and over again. B email is actually more prone to miscommunication than phone conversations.

Celeste Headlee: In fact the number one cause for project failure among businesses is miscommunication. The number one cause of miscommunication is overuse of email. And finally email we know, Oh, you know, we mail has been around for a very, very long time. And it actually makes people more prone to irritation. They are more likely to escalate conflict. They're less likely to be cooperative. They're not going to answer your questions if you're sending out surveys to your members by email. So all of those assumptions that you make that make you avoid that conversation are just factually wrong. Now you said, I want you to trust your gut. I say, please don't trust your gut. And the reason I say this is because 15 years of research has shown me that our guts are, are wrong all the time. We like to think as human beings, that we're quite logical, that we're reasonable, but we're really not. We're quite emotional. And your gut because your gut makes decisions on an, on a, almost a subconscious level. It means it's the most prone to bias. Your gut instinct is the one that is going to make decisions over and over based on what, you know, what you like, what you think is right, as opposed to logic and reason.

Pete Moore: Got it. So your advice to a health club chain that let's say has 300,000 members a year ago today, and now has a hundred thousand members because all these people have canceled or they've bought their own Peloton bike or no to attract by Kubota mirror. And you want to get them back. What, what would be your advice to start that conversation?

Celeste Headlee: I would say get a random sampling of people and start making some calls and say, look, I absolutely understand you do not have to defend your choice, your choice to leave the gym, but can you give me five or 10 minutes and give me your ideas on what might bring you. We really underestimate the power of crowds. We, again, I hate to keep hearkening back to research, but the fact of the matter is, is that research going back to the 19th century shows that a group of people, random people with no expertise in the subject matter actually are more accurate in their predictions and their decision-making than even the most experienced expert that you have. So if you can crowdsource it, if you can start getting ideas from people who've left and said, what would bring you back? Just tell us, you might find that there are, they have, they have ideas on how to make that happen.

Celeste Headlee: And not only that, but those, the power of the human voice to create impact that bonds, that Mike that might spark some loyalty that might make them rethink that decision. That you're a business, that there are people in your employ that you are also hurting during the pandemic that might spark a feeling of I don't want to say guilt, but it might inspire them to say, you know what, here's something that I can do. Maybe I can go to a class where we're all distanced apart, maybe what are they doing? You can get that information out there because they're just not going to pay attention to the email.

Pete Moore: Got it. So when you take a look at, you know, let's say you were, became a consultant to a group and your advice was looking up to call everyone. They say, so I, you know, how can I call, you know, 200,000 people, you know, you don't have to. Yeah, well, I mean, I, wouldn't one of the, one of

the points I just want to get out there is that, you know, 200,000 people divided by the 1400 employees that you have is only, you know, X amount of calls. What does that, so like, I don't know, a hundred calls per person or something let's say, right? So like some people view it as daunting until you kind of break it down to the granular level. And there, there should be relationships that get built, you know, not on email or not on text message. And I just wonder if, you know, the tech technology has gotten to the point where it becomes the, the sole solution.

Pete Moore: And I know you talk about this in some of your Ted talks, you know, about what are you going to learn? Like what, like, if I'm going to go into a conversation, I want to learn something from the member that I don't already know. And I think a lot of clubs assume that they put out an offer and that offer is going to be taken by a couple, you know, X percent of the people. And that's, that's like a positive marketing campaign when they didn't invest the time and actually understanding what resonates with people.

Celeste Headlee: Yeah, absolutely. And the other thing that I want people to remember that is that when it comes to communication, we do not have tech that is better than our ears and our mouse. It just is not, it doesn't. In fact, I asked one scientist, is it possible that at some point written communication will be as effective as the voice in terms of relaying messages and creating those kinds of bonds. And she said, it's possible. In five to 10,000 years, we have spent 300,000 years becoming the best communicators this planet has ever seen using our voices and our ears. We are biologically designed to communicate that way. And just because smartphones sprung up in 2007, we can't evolve that fast. It we're just not there. And so in the meantime, the most effective way you have of reaching your members and, and getting information from your members is to talk to them.

Celeste Headlee: And you are correct that if you go into those conversations, hoping to learn something you're going to have a better communication. The other thing I would like to mention at this is that one of the phrases that almost every human being responds to in any culture and language is, can you help me? And if the clubs are approaching their members or even former members that way, can you help us out? We need some advice you might hear. I'll give you a prime example, a woman down the street from me. She belongs to a boutique gym and she quit as soon as the pandemic landed, of course. And they called her and they said, look, we're about to go under what, what would help you? We don't want you to not work out during this pandemic, what would help you? And she said, you know what?

Celeste Headlee: I don't have any motivation and you may get up and do exercises even in my house. And they started a business of saying, okay, you give us your schedule. We're gonna, we're gonna text you on that morning with a PDF of the, your workout for that day for you to do at home. And that's become their way to stay afloat is that they found a bunch of their Mo their members weren't working out and they needed that extra boost. I have no idea. This is not my field of gyms is not what I do, but I, so I have no idea if that's practical for a lot of people, but it is an idea that they got by reaching out to someone who'd left.

Pete Moore: Got it. What's your thoughts on doing town hall meetings or doing group, you know, conversations or whether it's over zoom or in person? Do you feel like people are more apt to be honest in a group or, or more on a one-on-one type of call?

Celeste Headlee: I mean, I, I think, well, listen, people are going to be more honest with you when it's not a group, because when you bring a group dynamic into it, then there's, there's a performative aspect, right. Then they're worried about how they're coming off. And it's also much more difficult to

create a kind of connection between two people that makes me want to tell you the truth. If they're spread out across a whole bunch of people, you and I are not going to get that. So, yeah, it should be a one on one-on-one

Pete Moore: Given that the woman down the block was, was part of a boutique fitness gym. Are you, do you belong to a health club or, or a studio?

Celeste Headlee: I do. I belong to LA fitness.

Pete Moore: Okay, great. Is there, is there any,

Celeste Headlee: Since June

Pete Moore: One of ours you know, they, they take a relatively hands-off approach when, you know, the member communication is not something that they're known for. They're definitely known for a great place to work out. They outsource all their personal training, they outsource most of what they do. Do you view that people going forward are gonna, are gonna want to be more self-directed or do you see after the pandemic, people are gonna say, you know, I'm yearning for that community?

Celeste Headlee: I think you're going to have both I think that people will be so anxious to get back into every place, the gym and everywhere else to find that feeling of normalcy, even that I think that's going to be a strong motivator for people. You know, I have, I haven't quit LA fitness. I still belong. Cause I am hopeful, optimistic, even though I haven't been back, but I bought a mirror. So that, which has been my lifeline during the pandemic so that I could keep working out at home. I really like that. I don't see myself not using it anymore after the pandemic. And yet I will also be rushing back to my gym because I want to get that back. So I think what you're going to find is that there's, there's some of both, and there's no reason why gyms can't meet both of those needs.

Pete Moore: Right. Right. Okay. Some of the advice that we've been giving clubs is when people do come back, find out from them what fitness equipment they've, they've purchased for their home and actually like give them a prescription that includes their home and not, not look at as like competitive. Like I don't want to have to call you up Celeste and say, well, the reason why mirror sucks is because, Y, Z. And I want to say, Hey, that's awesome. Like, what are you do these two workouts on the mirror? Why don't you do these three workouts in the club? And why don't you do this group exercise class? And instead of fighting technology, absorb it and some work with it.

Celeste Headlee: Absolutely. And save time. Or if I get a notification this morning saying if you're using your mirror, here's what you should do. If you're coming into the gym, here's a little suggested workout for you. That's worth it to me, especially that personalization also helps with the fact that I have a horrible knees, right? And so I I've been able to personalize at home in a way that you can't when I go to a class for the most time at the gym. So if, if gyms find a way day to adapt to that, that again is about communication, which is two way communication. That's a gym actually asking me what my needs are and then responding to them rather than the gym being prescriptive and saying, here's what you should do. We know more about fitness than you. Here's what you should be doing. Which actually, when, when gyms do that to me, it actually makes me feel more distance from them. It makes me feel less like we're in a relationship because when they're, when they're telling me what I should do, and in my mind,

I'm thinking, no, I shouldn't, that's not the right workout for me. I have horrible knees. Right. That makes me feel like even, even less relationship with my gym than if they'd done nothing at all.

Pete Moore: Got it. So some of the health clubs in boutique studio operators have so many members have never shot in the DNA and the culture base to communicate. Right. And so after I listened to your Ted talk, you know, it made sense to me, some of the things I do, I need to improve on some of the points you brought up that everyone's an expert at something that though was intriguing to me. How do you pivot a culture, you know, to communication and caring when maybe the business model never really had that,

Celeste Headlee: Anytime that you're talking about culture, we like to think of culture only in the positives. In other words, we think here's what we do. And this defines our culture. What we forget are here's the things that we don't do, which is also part of your culture. And here are the things we don't talk about. And again, undiscussables the things that are like the unspoken norms. That's also part of your culture. So in order to become a more, I guess, more, your you're saying a more caring organization, I would say the first step is honesty. You have to get a good picture of what your organization is, its personality and its culture. That's how you change first is to figure out who you are and what you do, not just the proactive things, but these reactive things as well, that make up part of who you are.

Pete Moore: So at 15 years ago there was a health club chain called the Bally's fitness. And you know, Bally's was known to sell people, three-year contracts and then, you know, have a heavy and pretty hard collection process in place. And someone was buying the company and they said to me, you know, what, what would you do with this company right now? And I said, the first thing I do is I take every sign down. I bring it into central park and I burn it. And I do a public apology because this brand did not have a promise. Like they basically broke their promise and I'm basically burning that and I'm apologizing to everyone and we're going to put up a new brand. So do you think that in certain instances there are brands that need to go away and redefine who they are? Or do you think that they're rehabilitatable if that's a word, but you may have just made up that word. I like it though.

Celeste Headlee: I, I'm not sure that every brand is, can be rehabilitated, but I, one of my best exam, my favorite examples comes, I, I included in my book and it's Domino's pizza because there came a moment in time when Domino's made a million dollar gamble, multi-million dollar gamble. And basically they said, this must've been the early two thousands. They said, look, we've done the surveys. Our pizza is terrible. We've eaten it. It tastes terrible. And they did whole, a whole ad campaign. Do you remember this saying our pizza is awful, but we have spent the past years coming up with pizza that tastes really good. You don't have to believe us, come in and try it. And if you don't like it, your pizza's free.

Pete Moore: I remember that. I remember, and every

Celeste Headlee: Advisor was like, please don't do this. You're just basically trashing your brand. You are trashing your brand, but actually it was one of the most phenomenal turnarounds anyone has ever seen. And it's that kind of honesty I'm talking about. It's that kind of acknowledgement that these are the mistakes we've made. This is what we're doing well, which is what companies like to focus on, but they don't focus on actually being honest. People have relationships with their gym, especially this is not just

some ATM machine where they're going and making a, a faceless transaction and they have a memory. If they have bad experiences, they remember that you can't just as a company move on and pretend like it didn't happen. It's awkward. It's it's upsetting. And so you need to acknowledge the mistakes that you've made and say, you know what, you're right. You are right. That was a screw up. And here's what we're doing to make this better.

Pete Moore: Yeah. I think that's great advice for companies that may be listening to this, instead of saying, you know, I'm under new management and I'm under new ownership. I actually like take, take the elephant in the room and tell us why you're under new management, why you're under new ownership and call it out. I think if you call it out for yourself, then it becomes one of your guiding principles to not screw up again. You know, you've actually made a public statement that, that you can't reverse. So that's really interesting. What, what kind of work do you do directly? I know you, you, you do a lot of public speaking. What do most companies bring you in for, or what a groups bring you in for? What are they, what's like the, the essence of the essence behind why they, they have you come and talk to them.

Celeste Headlee: It's always some form of communication problems. So I, I, I do a lot of sort of in-depth workshops right now. A lot of my work is focused on diversity inclusion. I also get called to talk, you know what, it's funny? Cause one of the workshops that I do with companies is I call it the elephant in the room. And it's about bringing out those undiscussables that we're talking about here, finding out what someone's culture is and, and letting sunlight be the best disinfectant. I often work with people in terms of teamwork. People have sort of the wrong idea about teamwork, but teamwork is actually what is going to lift your company up and above expectations, not hiring these transformative people, which is a mistake. People make all the time creating better teams and getting people to work together is going to have a much bigger impact than any single hire that you make. And another thing that I, the final thing that I sort of get called in on is meetings. Meetings are terrible. They're designed the way they were back in the 1940s and fifties. They're awful and we can do better. So I, I help people transform the meetings that they have.

Pete Moore: That's great. Yeah. We invested in a company about 18 months ago called the athlete book and it's solely focused on bringing division one, two and three athletes related to diversity, hiring into the workforce into health clubs and studios as, as their first career job. And it's picked up a lot of traction with Amazon Tesla, NASDAQ, Oracle, JP Morgan, they're really focused on diversity inclusion. I think, you know, an employee base of a company needs to have the demographic pie chart, if you will or spectrum as does your, your customers are run through really, you know, it's like you're fielding a team that doesn't resonate with your fans, I guess is like the sports analogy. So do you think that, do you feel like everything has happened over the last year gives you confidence that that is going to happen? Or do you feel like it's something people are talking about now?

Celeste Headlee: I don't, you mean in terms of diversity inclusion? I don't have a lot of confidence right now. And the reason I say that is because when we researched the current diversity and inclusion programs, you know, these workshops people have we find that not only do they not work, but oftentimes they make racial discrimination worse. When we when you approach diversity and inclusion as some kind of checklist when you approach it as a liability problem, how do we manage liability by not getting sued for racial discrimination? You're never gonna solve it. And I'm sure the company you invested in knows this already, but bringing people into a, a, bringing nonwhite people into an organization that's not welcoming that does not have a plan and systems in place to make them feel included, to promote them, to empower them. You're going to have high turnover. That's all that's going

to be. So I don't have a lot of confidence right now because in order to make this, this better, it's going to require transformative change and companies are not great at that. They're just, yeah.

Pete Moore: Understood. Understood. Well, I think the, the, you know, use the term halo health, active lifestyle outdoors and the fact that it is focused on sports and fitness, I would hope change quicker than, than, than an average corporate job or, or a bank. Because I feel like the opportunities in our industry are more akin to, to athletes and athletes are more diverse on average than other groups. So I do, but I do share your, your concern that it's something that people are talking about now. And I think a lot of companies kind of hope it goes away.

Celeste Headlee: Oh, I'm sure because they want to go back to business as usual. And I bet you anything we can talk about diversity, but in what ranks are, are those non-white people in the executive level? Are they in manager and supervisor level? Or where are they in the organization? That's what really, you know, I always say I, yeah, your statement of support for black lives matter is awesome. But show me your organizational tree, show me your C-suite. And that tells me if you're actually committed to diversity.

Pete Moore: Yeah. Agreed. So it, it was great having you on, we usually end each podcast with a quote. So if you have any good quotes that you live by, or, or quotes that you like

Celeste Headlee: Yeah, there's this great quote from a researcher named Nicholas Epley in Chicago. And what he's talking about is how he's trying to encourage people to reach out to others. And he says almost nobody waves, but everybody waves back, which is one of my favorite quotes. Cause it's just like, be the one who waves.

Pete Moore: I love it. All right. Well, that's as positive a ending as we're going to find. So I'm going to wave here even though we're on audio wave back. Awesome. I will look when we get a chance to get together in person. We host these halo academies that we've been doing virtually with executives. Once the dust clears, we're going to start doing these in person. So we'd love to be able to coordinate with you. And and have you come speak to executives to do this in person as well, because I love what you're, what you're doing. And I think it could create, you know, a lot of change, much quicker than we could do it on our own. I agree. How can, how can they contact

Celeste Headlee: The easiest way just by website at Celeste Headlee dot com. And my last name is H a D like your body part L E and your book is available there, right? Yeah. It's available.

Pete Moore: Awesome. It was great talking to you. I'm glad we got connected here. So let's do so where do you live by the way? I live just outside DC. Okay. All right. All right. So we'll hit you up while we get our East coast Academy going. Yeah, absolutely all the best to you. Bye. Likewise, appreciate you. Bye. Thanks so much. Bye. As we continue to build our halo talks, email notification database, one to offer you a free \$10 instant gift card from our friends at promotion ball, also to show you how easy it is to offer your members and prospects and clients, the ability to get desired actions out of them and reward

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