

**ATTENTION!
ENGAGEMENT!
INFLUENCE!**

HOW TO SPEAK HUMAN

**A practical guide to getting the best
from the humans you work with**

JACKSON & JACKSON

From award-winning employee experience company, Jaxzyn.

WILEY

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First published in 2018 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd
42 McDougall St, Milton Qld 4064

Office also in Melbourne

Typeset in 11.5/13.5 pt Adobe Garamond Pro

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Cover design by Jaxzyn

Cover typography by Luke Lucas

Internal illustrations by Barry Patenaude

Printed in Singapore by C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

10 9 8 7 6 5 3 2 1




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For M.L.T.

One of our favourite humans, who taught us the value of words.

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About the authors

Dougal and Jen Jackson are a couple of curious humans with a fascination for what makes people tick. Founders of employee experience company Jaxzyn, they consider themselves mighty fortunate to work with a diverse team of thinkers, communicators, creators and doers, discovering and implementing ways to make our workplaces more human.

Jaxzyn is a small company with a big vision: an unshakable belief that organisations *can* have it all. They can be profitable. They can be good for society and the environment. And they can be wonderful places to work, where people go to work happy and return home happier, better for having gone to work that day. Perhaps we're a little starry-eyed, but we'd rather be part of a world that believes that better is possible.

Along the way we've been privileged to work with like-minded folk from organisations such as PepsiCo, Mattel, Novartis, Amazon, Nestlé, Probuild, Origin Energy, Urban Utilities and Blue Care. It's these few—the difference-makers and visionaries, trendsetters and forward-thinkers, influencers and leaders—that move the many. These are the people who push departments, organisations and industries forward. People, just like you and just like us, who believe in possibility. Believe in *human*.

Dougal leads research and development at Jaxzyn. He spends his days researching, writing, making, thinking and surfing (and thinking *about* surfing). He draws on a background in design and communication to bring an unorthodox approach to a corporate

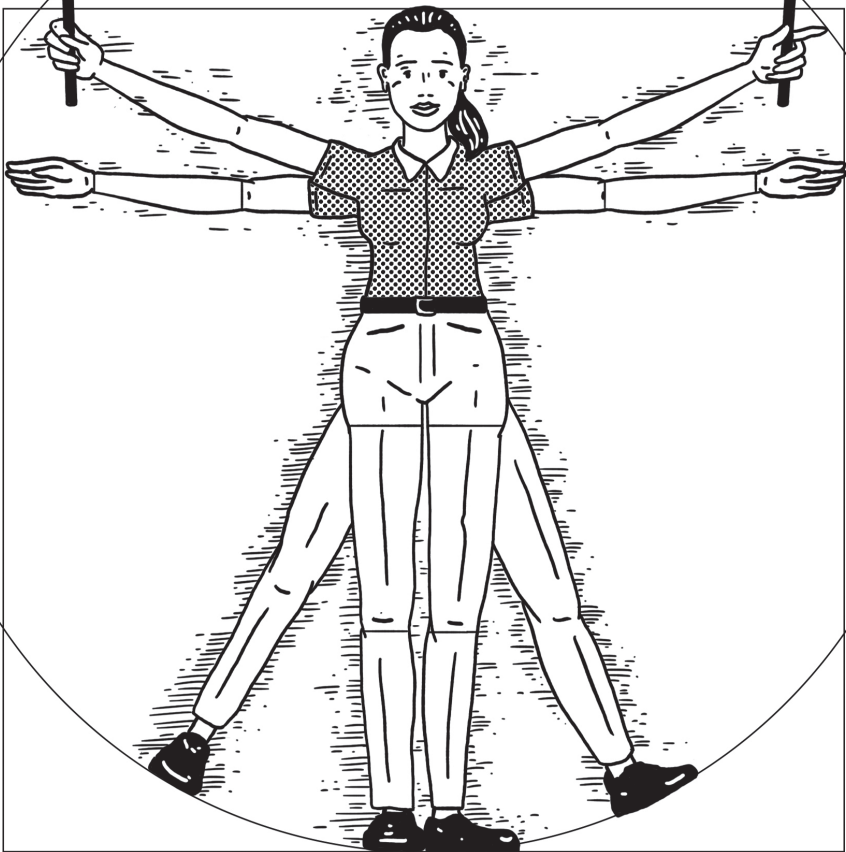
landscape typically starved of creativity. Dougal holds an unwavering belief in the power of ideas, and human-centred design as a tool to connect with people at all levels of an organisation. You'll hear his voice in the flamboyant exposition and rumination that abound in this book.

Jen is head of strategy and business development at Jaxzyn. She spends her days chatting, caffeinating and strategising with co-conspirators (aka clients) from around the world. Making her way from farm to city, Jen champions humans of all stripes (and plaids). She has a unique ability to slice through layers of complexity, cut to the core of the matter and communicate with creative flair and dairy farmer simplicity. You'll hear her voice connecting the theory with real-world practical application.

And that's all you really need to know about us. There's more exciting topics ahead, so let's get on with it, shall we?



HELLO.



Hoisting the banner for human

What a glorious age to be alive, mates.

Rapidly disappearing in the rear-view mirror are stiff, impersonal workplaces painted various shades of beige. Here and ahead lies a profound shift towards human, a fast-approaching future where people are celebrated. Not just customers or shareholders either, but the vast majority of folk inside our organisations—the people who keep things moving.

Sure, the rise of the Silicon Valley start-up scene brought office slippery slides, pinball machines and other wonders. But we're not talking about ball pits or other gimmickry. Peel back the layers and peer behind the superficial veneers; there's something far more real.

It's a restlessness, a discontent with old ways and outdated methods. After decades spent stripping all the human out of business, there's a movement towards putting it all back in.

Do we really need a book called *How to Speak Human* to help us, though?

Sure, it's a cute title—intended to twist mouths into wry smiles. But we can't be for real, can we? After all, we're all humans. And speaking is just a matter of opening our mouths and letting the words fall out. As natural as nudity in nature...

Yet somehow it isn't.

Somewhere along the way, amidst the busyness, the business, the technology and the professionalism, it became harder to connect with the people around us. Harder to speak human, to get attention, to influence, to engage.

For folk who've been thrust into leadership positions, connecting with people, despite technical skills and the best intentions, can seem like it requires a whole other language.

But the good news, friends, is that like French, German or Japanese—though not so much Latin (because that shit is complicated)—it's a language that can be taught. Heck, it's a language that's already in all of us, though often buried, like a shy tortoise that needs an encouraging finger to coax it from its shell. It's the language of human.

Here and ahead lies a profound shift towards human, a fast-approaching future where people are celebrated.

So here we are. Smack bang in the middle of a movement driven by savvy folk (like you) to bring human back. These changes are happening right this moment, as we type, and as you read. But why *now*? What created this perfect climate for change...or the perfect storm for any organisation, leader or individual who doesn't keep pace?

A paddle but no canoe

Only a few years ago it was pretty common for us to be working on five-, even ten-year strategies. But in the last couple of years it's more often 12-month roadmaps, with only the haziest vision for beyond. This parallels the rapidly changing nature of the world we live in, a time when we have only the slightest inkling of what might come next.

With industries seemingly being disrupted (excuse the buzzword) daily, our workplaces are volatile environments. From transport to communication to currency, like time, tide and taxes, change is our new constant. If we aren't dealing with it personally, we're guiding others through it. Then, just as we get it all figured out, everything turns downside-up.

With all this volatility comes a healthy amount of uncertainty. Where is our industry going? How do we stay relevant? How do we stay ahead? Will our role even exist in another 12 months? And what about artificial intelligence coming to steal our jobs?

These are complex questions, and unfortunately there's no certain answers to any of them, friends. We're adrift in ambiguity, with a set of oars and no canoe.

Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity—this is the world we live in, and these the challenges we face daily. So much so that boffins have even given it a catchy, yet particularly wart-sounding acronym: VUCA.

The problem is that many organisations still move at a glacial pace. Taking six to nine months to approve a 12-month roadmap for distribution is the opposite of agile. Humans hardly respond well to change either. Of the ten most stressful life events (according to the Social Readjustment Rating Scale), all involve some type of change. Heck, some aren't even inherently negative (we're looking at you, marriage and retirement).

So it's also little wonder that the slightest sign of change at work causes people to behave like panicked beasts on castration day. Stressed and stampeding, snouts to the breeze, sensing blood. Not a healthy state for producing our best work.

If change is hard for most folk, it's particularly tough on leaders. It's difficult to speak in certainties when we feel like we're only a step or two ahead ourselves. It's challenging to chart a clear course of action for others when we're not entirely sure of what lies ahead.

Through uncertain and foggy seas ahead, mates, human is our beacon.

Same same, but different

Cheetahs, leopards, jaguars, tigers and bobcats. Similarly: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Generation Yers, and Generation Zers. Don't let appearances fool you. All are from the same family, but they're very different species.

A combination of living longer and working later means that for the first time it's not uncommon to share our workplace with five generations, each influenced by very different social, political and technological climates, with entirely different beliefs and expectations around what work should be.

These differences became blatantly obvious as Millennials began filling our workplaces. Oh, the uproar those upstarts caused! Growing up being told they could do, be and achieve anything, they approached work with an equal sense of possibility.

For younger generations, work is more than just a wage. There's an expectation that companies will provide purpose and progress. They want to work for brands they believe in, and to believe that their work contributes to something bigger than themselves or even the company. They want to know why they're doing what they're doing. There's an expectation of transparency.

For older generations who've weathered tougher times, banging away in undesirable jobs day in, day out, to support their families through times when simply having a job was considered fortunate, this attitude came across a lot like entitlement.

'We did it tough—they should suck it up.'

'Work is called "work" for a reason!'

But the times—and expectations—they are a-changin'. And the difference between resigned stoicism and naive entitlement is entirely a matter of perspective.

Then there's technology. While the older generations grew up in dark times before the internet (what did we even do back then?) and mobile devices, the younger generations have always been connected. Responding to messages seems perfectly natural, often to the disgruntlement of older generations that would never have considered taking a personal call at work.

Heck, the generations aren't our only divide. Technology and globalisation have meant many of us work with a massively diverse spectrum of humans from around the world. The disconnect between countries, cultures, departments, even between management and frontline roles, can be vast. It's not uncommon to feel like we're all speaking entirely different languages.

Fainting goats and other whimsy

You needn't go much further than your social media feeds to see how humans communicate in our natural habitat.

Go on, take a peek at what thrills us, but we warn you—it sure ain't pretty. If ever there was evidence that humanity is not quite as evolved as we may like to think we are, social media will confirm it.

The facts? We communicate in machine-gun bursts and consume in bite-sized chunks. We text, tweet, message, comment and chat across multiple channels, platforms and devices, to multiple people—often at the same time. We share YouTube clips of cats being terrorised by cucumbers. We create ridiculous memes based on pop culture references, then we LOL about it.

We talk about topics that make us feel something: funny, sad, angry or confused. We curate the content that interests us and ruthlessly block any that doesn't. We're frequently exposed to language and grammar that slaps the hallowed *Oxford English Dictionary* right in the covers.

But here's the kicker.

Of the 7.6 billion humans currently spinning around on this planet, about 3 billion of us leave home with unbridled enthusiasm for full- or part-time jobs. Here, we—the same people who're amused by videos of goats fainting, who send messages composed of single emoticons, who spend evenings WhatsApping and Snapchatting—do things, make things, invent things, fix things and sell things.

And while we're all at work—doing things, making things, inventing things, fixing things and selling things—guess what changes in our communication preferences?

Nothing at all.

We remain amused by fainting goats. We continue to 😊 at our friends. We continue to communicate with each other exactly the way we did at home.

Meanwhile, any guesses how the companies we work for typically communicate with us?

Yep. A xeroxed memo on corporate letterhead—straight from nineteen-fifty-bloody-three.

Apparently there are more than a few in the corporate world who'd be fascinated to discover the sheer number of communication options available to humans as viable alternatives to Microsoft PowerPoint.

Texting, visual languages, emoji, memes—myriads of entirely new and emerging technologies creating entirely new ways to connect and communicate. It's enough to leave you speechless.

The disconnect between countries, cultures, departments, even between management and frontline roles, can be vast. It's not uncommon to feel like we're all speaking entirely different languages.

Yet of all the possibilities for communication, many businesses barely scratch the surface. Even the behemoths of the business world, brands you'd expect to be right on point, frequently use methods lagging years behind the world beyond their office walls.

Weary old dinosaurs

Oh yes, everything has changed. Yet many organisations still have underpinning assumptions about people and efficiency that haven't changed since the industrial revolution.

Like a time capsule or Egyptian tomb, stepping into some established companies is like entering a lost world in a bygone era. Marvel at the archaic systems and processes! Wonder at their primitive beliefs! Take a deep breath of musty air, and do try to avoid the skeletons in the upper levels. I think they once called these architectural features 'the corner suite'.

We jest, of course.

The age of a business (or human) is by no means representative of their relevance or importance. However, age often equates to entrenched assumptions, made worse when they also happen to be old *and* large.

Small is agile, able to adjust course quickly with each gust or tiniest variation of the breeze. Larger is more cumbersome—the

biggest ships are hardest to turn. The great leviathans of the business world chart courses with only a vague notion of what lies over the horizon, leaving them vulnerable to the slightest change of weather. The smallest change to their trajectory requires time, money and all hands on deck. It's no wonder they tend to just batten down the hatches and attempt to plough their way through.

Perhaps it's outdated beliefs that treat humans like resources. It may be communication techniques from a previous decade. It's the failure to consider the unique drivers and motivators that engage different segments of the workforce. It can be archaic, multilayered hierarchies or a lack of diversity in leadership teams (pale, stale and predominantly male!). It can be obsolete technology that frustrates rather than facilitates connection.

It's the companies most set in their ways that face the greatest challenges in the unpredictable times ahead.

Nowhere to hide

Way back in 1998, while Tom Hanks was saving Private Ryan, McKinsey researchers declared that the most important resource for the next 20 years would be talent. They claimed that an organisation's success would depend on attracting, developing and retaining talented people.

And they were right.

Twenty years later, the *war for talent* is sounding a little long in the tooth, but the principles still hold true. Finding the right people isn't just smart — it's essential.

Making our courtship infinitely more difficult, though, is that we're savvier now than ever before. We live in an age of connection and transparency, where every hotel, flight, movie, meal and product can be selected based on peer reviews. So it's no surprise that when it comes to a decision as important as choosing where we'll spend the better part of our day, five days a week, we're just as diligent.

It's no longer enough to *claim* to be a great place to work; sites like Glassdoor are exposing the truth. With just a few clicks, we can find peer reviews that describe exactly what it's like to work for our

potential employer. These aren't carefully manicured press releases by public relations; they are raw reviews about the experience, written by people just like us.

Employer branding has become a fundamental function. A choreographed mating dance to find the perfect people for our organisations. But wooing them isn't where the courtship ends. We need to keep them happy.

In late 2017, LinkedIn estimated that around 73 per cent of its 400(ish) million users were passive job seekers, open to jumping ship if the right opportunity came along. We're dealing with a workforce that has one eye on the exit, with plenty of options if we aren't treating them right.

Rise of the robots

The people and businesses succeeding today and tomorrow are the ones keeping pace. But the ones who'll succeed in the future are already looking ahead ... to a time when many of our existing roles will be replaced by artificial intelligence.

Oh yes, the rise of the robots to take our jobs is as logical as it is inevitable.

Robots don't have short attention spans and aren't influenced by emotion. Robots don't have personal lives, or lives at all. Robots don't take lunch breaks. Robots are accurate and rarely make mistakes. Robots aren't concerned about the exploitation of robot labour. Robots do what they do without pay, and they do it unceasingly, unquestioningly, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

An age of robots and AI-driven efficiency lies ahead of us, friends. But this doesn't mean we need to start speaking android. The new roles that will inevitably emerge will be more dependent on our relationships with each other.

Yes, our work will continue to rely on humans. Creatures comprising 60 per cent water and 40 per cent unfathomable thought processes, unreasonable behaviours and unpredictable emotions. Filled with all sorts of psychological and physiological inconveniences. Capable of equal parts frustration and—absolute delight.

