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## EPISODE 7: TIM MURRAY – COMMUNICATING CHANGE

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### Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from all across the world. We share the strategies and tactics that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Change, it happens constantly in organizations of all shapes, types, and sizes. And for many employees, strategic change can be upsetting. An organization can be brought to its knees if the people on the team don't embrace the changes the leader has deemed necessary. As a result, leaders must be skilled at being the face of change. Our guest today has been successful in that arena. Working with thousands of employees, Tim Murray has taken Aluminium Bahrain, known as Alba, to new heights. Born, raised, and educated in the United States, Murray has been the CEO of Alba in Bahrain since 2012. Before that, he served in a number of capacities at Alba since 2007. He has great advice on how to effectively communicate change and on being the face of change. Here's our conversation with the CEO of Alba, Tim Murray.

### Ken White

Being the face of change, what does that mean?

### Tim Murray

To me, the face of change when you do any kind of change management program where you're trying to change behavior. You have to be out there. You have to be visible. You have to be seen. An example for us is our safety program. We made massive changes in our safety program. We had, unfortunately, had a few fatalities a few years back. And so to change the behavior, to raise the awareness, you have to be out there. They have to see you. They want to see you. Particularly where we work in Bahrain, the way we're structured, we have a lot of operators of our plant. We have 2300 operators out of the 3000. So we're heavy. It's shop floor labor.

### Ken White

Right.

Tim Murray

So if you want to change something, you have to physically go out and let them see you. And when they see you, and they see you, then they'll start believing. And then, when they believe, that's when change happens.

Ken White

So we're talking face to face. You're talking thousands of people. How do you do that?

Tim Murray

I mean, for us, for me, it's just going to the shop floor. So Alba is one giant facility. It's a three-and-a-half square kilometer facility, very big facility, but it's all in Bahrain. So I can go visit any part of the plant whenever I want, any day of the week, anytime. And they're really happy to see you. They also want to see you. If you look, particularly when the head guy comes out, just you say hello, you say their name, you shake their hand, you say thank you. Culturally, they're very family-knit people in the Middle East. So they really want to see you. And they look up to you. They say okay, the boss came today, and we had to do this. So you can do it. Okay. It's a lot of time because it is 3000 people. So it's not an easy thing to do, but you can do it.

Ken White

Do you try to divide into groups, into areas of responsibility? How do you get to all of that?

Tim Murray

We do. I mean, if you look at it's not just a one-man show. So I mean, we have the executive team, the management team that does it. And we do like if we have a safety campaign, we will break them into different groups. You may have a visit during the day. You may have one after hours or on the weekend because we're a 24-hour, 365-day operation. It's a process flow. It never stops. We do break it up, and we rotate them around, and we bring different departments, we go to different departments. So you may have accounting go review operation or operation come into a different part of operation. So we want to have a different perspective from other people that have not been in the operation. Because I find that very valuable that you see take myself, I'm a finance person. So have a financial person go into operation and ask silly questions of why is this there? Or is that crane supposed to be there? Is this scaffold? You will ask the silly question because you don't know. And actually, usually, the silly questions are good questions because people that are so close to the trees, they don't see the forest, as we say.

Ken White

Right, or it gives them the opportunity to explain what they do to you.

Tim Murray

Exactly.

Ken White

How much of it is speaking? How much of it is listening when you're trying to communicate?

Tim Murray

I personally try okay. When you have speeches or formal things, you speak. I try to listen more because I find as when you're the boss, once you say something, that's it. And so if we're dealing with an issue or we're trying to coach or whatever it is, I would rather hear from everybody first before I say anything. Because typically, once the boss says something, then everybody maybe they wanted to say something, and now they won't say it because it conflicts with you. So I think trying to listen is very important because most of the time, again, they want to talk to you. They want to take a picture of you. They just want to say how's it going or very simple things. So I prefer not to actually do most of the talking.

Ken White

You mentioned it. But I think people forget the effect and impact it has on an employee to see the boss. What kind of reactions do you get when you see people?

Tim Murray

I think it's a huge benefit if you do it correctly. My former CEO had this philosophy called the CEO to the Worker, which I explained in the presentation today. And so when you communicate, and you're a big company like Alba, you have seven levels. You have the CEO, you have the executives, you have a director, you have a manager, you have a superintendent, and you have a supervisor, and then you have shop floor. So to deliver that message, even if I want people to deliver it correctly, maybe they want to say it correctly, it has to go through seven layers. So by the time it gets to the 7th level, the message is lost.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Tim Murray

So the more you can speak directly, the better because then the message is not twisted.

Ken White

What types of communication activities have you taken part in a town hall, a face-to-face? What do you like? What's effective?

Tim Murray

I mean, we do a lot of the shop floor visits, particularly on safety at Alba, since I've been CEO. We did implement town halls, which is something new to our company, as well as, I think, the region. Most companies don't do town halls. So we have a big meeting hall where we have roughly 200 people can fit. Okay, we have 3000 people. So we had over the month of January, we hold 15 sessions, and every employee gets to hear my update of how did we perform, what are the big issues and then what are the goals and objectives for 2015. So we've done that for two years now. And it's extremely effective because most of the time, the questions you get, I don't get that many questions. It's more after the meeting, we spend more time taking pictures that people can take the pictures and post them in Instagram and selfies, and they're more interested in that, but just the fact they say, okay, I heard what the CEO said, we did good, or we did bad. Whatever it was and what they're facing, they leave, and they say, okay, now I know what's. So in terms of alignment, it's a very powerful tool. I mean, actually, far more than I realized because, in the States, this is something typical that you would see.

Ken White

Right.

Tim Murray

I can tell you when I first did it two years ago, everybody's, what is this town hall? What are you going to say? Why do you want all the employees? Why would you want shop floor people to come? And okay, now that we've done it, people actually look forward to it. And actually, many people attend more than one session because they get the updates. Because I change the speeches a little bit depending on the group.

Ken White

What was the planning process? Because certainly, you have various messages, very specific messages you want to get across. How did you plan for the town hall?

Tim Murray

The town hall, I mean when I give the update for the town hall, I have three categories that I focus on. I focus on safety, health, environment, okay. I focus on people, and then I focus on what I call value. So how did we perform financially, production, and all those things so those are my three. If I look at a business, that's how I look at a business. So those are the structure of the presentation. So I give an update on how did we perform in terms of

safety, in training, in development, and production. And then, at the end, I give my expectations for the year. So this year, we have five expectations. Expectations for us we talked about LME, which is our London Metal Exchange, which is our price to expect a lot of volatility. We talked about we're going to have more training, we're going to continue to push on safety. And also we're preparing for our big expansion, our line six expansion, which would increase our capacity roughly 50%.

Ken White

When you talked to the MBA students today, you had a list of just good advice sentence phrases here and there. One of them was certainly be prepared when you get the opportunity to speak to others. How much preparation goes into your town hall? Any kind of communication.

Tim Murray

A formal speech I personally I put in a lot of preparation. Okay, when I speak, I don't use papers, and it probably looks very natural, but I can tell you I spend a lot of time preparing. I mean, to write a speech or a format or a presentation, it may take me a couple of days. Okay? Then I tweak it. Then I change it. Then I do it again. Then I'll do a dry run. I'll do in front of my wife. I'll prepare. So I mean to do something like a town hall, it's probably a three or four-day activity to get myself prepared. And then, each time, I get better. So like a town hall, I did 15 times.

Ken White

Right.

Tim Murray

So I can tell you, after I do it three or four times, I'm really clicking.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Tim Murray

And you feed off the audience. You see what they like, what they don't like. What was the question you may have got? And then I try to improve each one. So actually, it was interesting because a lot of people did attend more than one session, and they were surprised that each session was different. 80% was the same, but there was always a different message because maybe I learned something in the previous session, or I have a different group where I want to send a different message. So you try and tailor it. So no, to me, you want to over-prepare. Because when you over-prepare, then it's easy. To me, my philosophy is you're over-prepared, and then you walk out and say, okay, that wasn't so

bad. That's because you over-prepared, and you never get a second chance to make a first impression. So if you don't prepare and you're not ready, people judge you. And to change that first impression is very, very hard.

Ken White

How do you improve? What steps do you take to make sure you're getting better? Because communication is so critical.

Tim Murray

I mean, on giving speeches?

Ken White

Yeah.

Tim Murray

I think you listen. I think the biggest thing there's a saying. Maybe you hear me, but maybe you're not listening. And so when you listen, you really need to listen. Just because somebody says, I hear you. It might be one ear out the other. And really, when you do the speeches, you can see what works and what doesn't. Maybe I'll test something in one speech, or somebody asks me a question like, oh, that was a good question, and I'll take it head-on in the next speech. So you have to be, I would say, nimble. You have to be flexible. You shouldn't just be. Here's my papers, and I read. I can't stand when people read from speeches personally. It loses. To me, that tells me you didn't prepare. So if you didn't prepare, why should I listen to you?

Ken White

Right.

Tim Murray

So if you didn't put in the time, why am I putting in the time?

Ken White

That face-to-face with employees. You're putting yourself out there, you're being honest, and you may not have the answer every time. What do you do when you run into that situation?

Tim Murray

I mean, if you don't have the answer to me, you should be honest and say you don't have the answer. And actually, to me, in the words of wisdom, I said that talking about you tell bad news first. And if you have bad news, you just tell it. When you sugarcoat it, or you

dance around it, and you avoid it. I mean, to me, you lose credibility. So I think it's very important about being honest and being transparent and okay, yes, you don't always have the answer. And if you don't have the answer, say you don't have the answer. Don't BS people and try and trick them or say and make up some story. You just say, hey, on that one, let me come back to you. I don't have the answer in front of me.

**Ken White**

Great. Thank you. The talk today to the MBAs was great, and it's interesting to talk to you about how you communicate change and how you lead it. Obviously, you've got experience in this, and we appreciate you sharing it with us today.

**Tim Murray**

It was my pleasure.

**Ken White**

That's our conversation on being the face of change with the CEO of Alba, Aluminium Bahrain, Tim Murray, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization by designing and delivering a customized leadership development program that specifically fits your needs. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education, check out our website at [wmleadership.com](http://wmleadership.com). That's [wmleadership.com](http://wmleadership.com). Thanks to our guest this week, Tim Murray of Alba, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time, have a safe and productive week.