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EPISODE NOTES · GUEST: GRAHAM ALLCOTT

The most useful thing on your clinical trial isn't in the protocol

Graham Allcott on why kindness — not niceness — is the quiet operating system behind teams that actually deliver.

It's not the sentence you expect on a podcast that usually concerns itself with EDC systems, biometrics and the unglamorous business of getting a trial to database lock. But it's the line that stuck from my conversation with Graham Allcott — founder of Think Productive and author of *KIND: The Quiet Power of Kindness at Work* — and the more I sat with it, the more it read like an operational observation rather than a wellbeing slogan.



Trust and kindness are rocket fuel.

— Graham Allcott, on Pharma Prescribed

Graham challenges a belief most of us have quietly internalised: that success comes from being ruthless. His argument is that the ruthless archetype isn't just unpleasant. It's inefficient.

Kind is not nice

Nice is about being liked. Kind is about being honest in a way that helps the other person. Nice avoids the difficult conversation; kind has it early, before it becomes a CAPA. Nice tells a junior data manager their listing looks fine; kind tells them where it doesn't, and why it matters. In an industry that runs on accuracy, that distinction is about data quality.

The mechanism: psychological safety

Kindness earns the "rocket fuel" billing because it builds psychological safety — the sense that you can flag a problem or challenge a decision without being punished for it.

Anyone who's worked on a trial that went wrong can usually point to a moment where someone *knew*. Knew the query rate was climbing. Knew the timeline was fantasy. And said nothing, because the environment had taught them that speaking up cost more than staying quiet. The errors don't disappear; they surface later, at lock, in an audit finding, in a regulatory question you can't answer well. Kindness lowers the cost of speaking up early.

Retention and critical thinking

The second-order effect is people. People don't leave the work, they leave the way they're treated while doing it — and in a business where trial knowledge lives in individuals rather than SOPs, retention *is* capability.

It also protects thinking. In fear-led cultures, people optimise for not being wrong, which means doing what they're told and thinking no further. That's the opposite of what you want from the people closest to the data — the ones who catch the "that's odd" before it becomes an unblinding risk.

Why this belongs on a pharma podcast

Every system we deploy ultimately depends on people telling each other the truth quickly. That's a cultural capability, not a technical one. Graham makes the case for it in language that survives contact with a P&L — and turns it practical, laying out concrete principles for engineering a kinder team rather than hoping one emerges from a values poster.

The uncomfortable takeaway, for me, is that most teams I've worked in were quietly getting a fair chunk of this wrong — mistaking pressure for rigour, and nice for kind.



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Graham Allcott *is the founder of Think Productive and the author of KIND: The Quiet Power of Kindness at Work.*