

# WTc 'Collective Intelligence' with Sabastien de Ghellinck

[00:00:00] **Angela Gardner:** Hello everyone. This is Women Talk Construction and I'm Angela Gardner, your co host. And I'm here with Christy Powell. Hey, how are you doing today, Christy?

[00:00:11] **Christi Powell:** Good, thank you. Glad to be here on a Friday. It may not be Friday for our listeners, but today it's Friday for us, isn't it? Yes.

[00:00:17] **Angela Gardner:** And it's wonderful.

How are you doing, Sebastian?

[00:00:20] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** I'm great. Thank you very much for having me today. And it's actually Friday the 13th today.

[00:00:25] **Christi Powell:** Oh no, we don't want to talk about that.

[00:00:29] **Angela Gardner:** Oh goodness. Well, you know what? I do want to get I just started on a conversation because I know that Christy and I have had like, it's probably been just a whole year of 2023 of having just so much happening in our lives and we're so busy and you know, there's so much going on.

Tell me Christy, how are you dealing with just navigating and coping through all of that that you've got going on? Because we both do and I want to hear how you're dealing with it.

[00:00:56] **Christi Powell:** So I'm not. No, just kidding. I wasn't like, honestly, I'm just. I wasn't, there was a couple of bad days, right? Where I just couldn't get out of a funk and just knowing so many amazing people like Sebastian and yourself, and you know, I have a pretty awesome group of friends all over the country that hold me accountable.

So, um, that accountability helps a lot. And I know that when I get in a funk and I'm not talking to anybody for a couple of days, my mind starts thinking, what do you know? What have you been trained to do? How do you keep yourself where you need to be while You're going through this, you know, whatever this challenge may be.

Honestly, the three things that are helping me is what a lot of people who've been through recovery do. They remember to get enough sleep. They remember to eat and I have to move. I have to be outside and I have to be moving. It can be hiking. It can be walking. It can be playing golf, but just podcast in my ears, that's uplifting for me that I know that's going to get my mental state in the right place has kept me.

from, to be honest, spiraling in a downward trend that maybe I couldn't come back from, you know, and I've been there before in my life. So hopefully those three things will help somebody else that's listening today. And I know that Angela and Sebastian, we've had this conversation a lot. We've been there and, and, and the reason we have Sebastian on today is even though September was mental health month, we believe that every day needs to be mental health day that we ought to be thinking about it.

We ought to be. Thinking about what it takes for us to be okay, right. And to think about, you know, taking care of ourselves first and how do we do that? We, I do it with faith and exercise and you know, all the tools that I've been able to have at my fingertips. And speaking of tools, Sebastian is on today because skill signal is really throwing some tools out there to help us navigate life.

In, in a space in construction that isn't always even talked about. So we love what he's doing. Sebastian Gay Link. Thank you so much for joining us today. I love Sebastian. I fell in love with everything they were doing. The first time I met him online, Angela just got to meet him today. He grew up in Belgium and his family has been in construction and real estate.

And he's now the co founder and owner of Skill Signal. And we just can't wait to have this conversation with Sebastian today.

[00:03:26] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Thank you so much again, uh, Christy and Angela. I think you hit it on the head right, right away. I think, you know, mental, mental health and, um, the, you know, our, our minds and our brains are the most wonderful things in the world and they, they allow us to do so many amazing things.

And I think, you know, when you think about construction, they allow us to build all of the things that, that are being built. But at the same time, they're, they're also, they're also the things that, that, that are, you know, the hardest to control and, you know, we have our impulses, we have our, we have our, you know, pain points, we have our, our history, right, as adults, we, we all have, you know, struggled, we have, we have, um, it, you know, it's, it's, it's always

very personal and so it's so, so, so important that you, uh, As Christy, you, you mentioned, it's so important to get those routines, to get those tools so that you keep, you can keep yourself thriving and, and, and uplifting and anything that, that helps you is, is a good thing.

But certainly in construction, I think it's, it is definitely something that we, that, that, that's, that needs to be talked about more. Right. Just because construction, when you look at our industry. It's, uh, it's hard, right? Yes, very hard. It's, it's, it's physical labor. People

[00:04:48] **Christi Powell:** get It's not emotional either.

Well, it certainly is, but nobody wants to say that it's

[00:04:57] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** emotional. Correct. And, and while it actually is, because we, because people that are building stuff and, and, you know, constructing stuff, they need to be there with their whole minds and their whole bodies because otherwise it won't work. It won't happen.

So, so there is actually a full investment of your entire self to, to get things done. And, and that means again, that you can get into some very vulnerable stages, uh, while, you know, on a construction site, it's just, it's just the way it happens. And so I think that, that we are, we're seeing that there is a crisis, a crisis is probably not new, but the good thing is that we're starting to talk about it.

And, and that's always the first step, you know, start talking about it, start recognizing that something is going, something's going on. And then once you start talking about it, you can start building things around it and better and start making improvements, hopefully, and, and start impacting people and, and just, you know, uplift, uplifting them.

Yeah. So, so we, we, with that said, I think, let's recognize that first that construction is something that's, that's, um, that is hard, that is tough on bodies and minds. And, um, that it's, it's going to be very, very important that we do that all of us and, and everyone who has a voice in, in construction, um, does something about it.

So I'm, I'm the founder of SkillSignal and it's, uh, our company, um, and I have a co founder, Vivian, and, and she's, she's, she's the best. And, and we, um, we're, we're focused on safety compliance and risk control on job sites. Thank you. And, and as you said, I kind of grew up in, in construction, real estate.

And, and so, so, you know, on the other side of, of the Atlantic, but still we have, we spend a lot of time on construction sites, Vivian and I, we spend, obviously we, we talk to our clients all the time, but we started noticing that when you talk about safety, when you talk about risk, you're also talking about mental health.

You're also talking all of these things that can have an impact on people getting injured. I'm always saying, like, construction is, you're, you're actually using tools that can, that can so easily break or, you know, or actually hurt you and, and, and so, so people that are using those tools should be very present, should be not only skilled at working with them, but also should be present while they're using them because Not distracted.

Correct? Yes. Any distraction, I was going to say, any distraction will actually result in In something that could be, you know, very very bad. So we started seeing that mental health was definitely something that we needed to include. So we, um, we were very fortunate. We, we partnered up with, um, with Princeton University.

Yeah, and and and so so that was with their behavioral science department. And we started doing research. We started, we started just, you know, having a lot of conversations and this is something that's, that's on the side. This is more of a passion project, right? And so we started having hundreds of conversations with construction professionals and start seeing, like, how is it affecting you?

What is your, what are your views? What are your opinions? And then finally, I think we got into a stage where we said, like, okay, so what's possible to do about it? And I'll give an example late last year in 2022. I was at a conference and, uh, there was a keynote speaker that was talking about who was talking about mental health.

And, uh, it was about 200 people in the room, all construction people, and during the half hour of the keynote speaker making his, his presentation about mental health, and it was about mainly suicide prevention, that room full of noisy and energetic construction people got silent. I mean, nobody, you could hear a pin drop.

Wow. And once he was done, what was interesting is that people were extremely moved. People recognized that this was a, this was absolutely an issue and, and even, even further, I think a lot of people had a first person experience of, you know,

[00:09:27] **Christi Powell:** like, yeah, I understand

[00:09:29] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** that. Yeah. Some people who, you know, some, some people that had actually taken their own lives.

And so it was very, very personal. Yes. But it became, it continued to be silent in the room. And, and I think That was sort of an aha moment for me saying, like, it looks like people, people know that this is going on, but at the same time, they seem to be very overwhelmed, like, I'm, I'm an HR professional, I'm a construction professional, I work for a construction company.

What can I do right now to make things better? Right. So,

[00:10:03] **Christi Powell:** so. But we should be, we should be asking ourselves that question no matter what we're doing, right? Yeah. What can I do right now to make things better?

[00:10:11] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Exactly, exactly. And sometimes, and we get it, like, when you are looking at something that's, that's an enormous problem, right, or an enormous crisis.

You feel only overwhelmed. Right,

[00:10:24] **Christi Powell:** right. It's intimidating.

[00:10:26] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** It is, it is. And so, so, so it's hard to start thinking like what can I? I'm just one person. Yeah. I'm just one individual. I can probably not even change anything because I'm too small. I'm, I'm, I'm. You know, that's what you,

[00:10:42] **Christi Powell:** that's what you think.

That's what keeps you from moving, right? Exactly.

[00:10:46] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Exactly. And unfortunately that's, that's what keeps things not moving along.

[00:10:58] **Christi Powell:** Let me tell you about the commercial real estate ecosystem that they've developed at Align Capital and why it's such a revolutionary idea. Do you think all commercial real estate brokerages are the

same? Does your commercial broker help you with financing your deal? What about helping you navigate through the rising cost of insurance?

Does your current broker handle full spectrum property development? And project management, and do they offer it all under one roof? If they don't, then you don't need a brokerage. You need an ecosystem built for the real estate investor to thrive. Contact Align Capital today at [AlignCapital.com](http://AlignCapital.com) to see how an advisor can redefine the way you experience services in commercial real estate.

[00:11:49] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Thinking back about that experience was, was again, was an aha moment because I thought, like, we should be putting tools and ideas and solutions and interventions. So that people now feel empowered, feel like they can start doing something right now that will make a change by the end on the job site, right?

So, because everything is focused on construction. Yes. So that sort of really was an additional fuel. It was kerosene that we put on that fire that we were trying to, to really, you know, go through. And the challenge is that, again, you, you, it's, it's such. It's such an overwhelming, it is so, so challenges all the time.

I mean, it's, it's when you talk to people, it's, it's, uh, you know, I'm, I'm trying to do the best I can, but I, I don't know if this is even going to have an impact. I don't know if it's, if it's going to change anything. Right. And so that, that I think is the challenge. So how do you overcome that? So, so I think, I think you overcoming them is I, I stopped looking at, at, you know, finding a solution or overcoming.

I think the, the problem is always, you know, so complex that you need to, you need to just keep moving forward. Yeah. It's fluid. Yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. So, again, we went back and we started having those, we continued having those conversations and, but now we're asking, like, what have you maybe done on your construction site to.

You know, some, some mental health issues, some, some, you know, people having depressions. I think people were coming still out of COVID. So that was some, some very big impact. And that's when conversations started to be super productive and also extremely interesting. And I'd love to give you a few examples of, yeah, absolutely.

On their job sites in construction, what they did to kind of, you know, start moving things forward, not solving the entire crisis, not, it's not, it's never, it's

never a silver bullet. It's never, you know, we do, and the problem is solved, which we like in construction, right? We yeah, problems every day. And we like to have like, okay, there is a problem.

That's the solution. Let's do it. And the problem is over. We move on to the next one.

[00:14:11] **Christi Powell:** Right. To the next problem. It's

[00:14:14] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** not one of those problems. It never goes away and it never, it's never really completely solved, but there is hope and you can still move forward. And you can still make a change. So let me give you a few examples that I found, and I'm going to focus on the ones that are, that you could start, you know, the, the listeners today could do on their jobs today and, and have shown on other job sites to make a difference.

So let me start with a very simple one. This is an example. This is a conversation that we had with a superintendent. A GC in Pennsylvania, they do a lot of commercial health care work, and so they have been struggling with people, you know, breaking down and, you know, coming out of COVID and, and everyone was on the edge.

And so what they simply, what they simply did is when new workers were coming to the job, they were getting their induction, their safety orientation. And part of the safety orientation was they received a sticker, just a white sticker to put on the hard hat, but they were asked to put their first name on that sticker, you know, legible and, um, and then what they started implementing was.

Everyone on our jobs get addressed by their first names. And instead of, you know, calling, you know, Hey, Hey, you, Hey, you know, Hey, right way guy. I like that. Yeah. That's because that's, that's usually what happens, right? Yes, for sure. Exactly. And it's, it's not great. And there is that, you know, that there is that wisdom that says, you know, the first name is the sweetest sound, right?

It is. It really is. It is. It is. And so they started, they just had this one rule. People were putting a sticker on their hard hats and everyone was, was, was addressing each other by their first name. Nice. You don't need a budget for that. You don't need, you don't need a huge effort. You don't need, you know, thousands of dollars.

It's a simple thing. And the superintendent told us that it has actually changed the general atmosphere on their jobs. I bet. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. People feel like they're, you know, they're, they're being, they're being treated better and they're being seen exactly. They're being seen. And so, so it had, it had an impact.

So that's one example that I

[00:16:36] **Christi Powell:** thank you for that.

[00:16:38] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** And it's again, simple enough doing this on your job site tomorrow. Right. Another one that I like is this is coming from, from England. Um, and this was a concern. This was a conversation we had with a, with a general superintendent. And he used to be a combat diver in the British army or the British Navy, I suppose.

Wow. Um, and so, so there is one thing that you need to know for people that have never tried, but when scuba diving, which he was doing as a combat diver, scuba diving is always done with a buddy. So you're always. Oh yeah.

[00:17:14] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. You can't go alone.

[00:17:16] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** Exactly. You can't go alone. And so, so your buddy will stay with you and you have, you develop this relationship that even underwater, you can actually, you can actually understand each other.

And so you're, you're looking out for your buddy. And so everything is done in coordination. And so when he came to construction. He said, you know, that's something that I've known my entire professional life while I was a combat diver. So he said, and it has worked very well for me. It saved his life a couple of times, he mentioned.

So he said, I'm going to do exactly the same thing on construction sites. And so he started pairing up people on those job sites. And he said, at first I was doing it very randomly, right, I was taking two or I was taking a superintendent or a project manager and I was pairing them up with, you know, someone else.

And now he's kind of developed a little bit of a science for it and a lot of experience. So he's doing it much, you know, in a much more thoughtful way. That doesn't matter. What you do is when you're pairing up people, you're creating, creating connection. Yes. And, and your collaboration, collaboration, connection, you're making it personal.



And he said, the only thing that you need to give. So again, it's not something where you need to have thousands of dollars or get distracted from the job that needs to be done. The only thing that it requires is that you give them regularly, you give them five, 10 minutes just to have coffee together.

Nice. Right. So, so they have those five, 10 minutes to just buddy up, get a cup of coffee together, you know, go to the store, get, get a, you know, an apple, let's not say doughnut, but an apple.

[00:19:04] **Christi Powell:** I don't need any more doughnuts.

[00:19:06] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** Just connect with each other. Talk about kids, talk about family, you know, getting that real personal connection.

I love it. What's, what's happening on those jobs when you're starting to create connection is that people will, will actually look out for each other. They will be safer. They will be safer. They'll be safer for themselves because now, again, it's, it's being seen. It's being, you matter. You, you, and you have a voice, right?

And so,

[00:19:35] **Christi Powell:** um. It's actually. way underrated to feel alone. Yeah. Right. Like a lot of people, they call themselves loners, right? They think that's great, but being alone all the time is not good for your mental or your physical health. And sometimes you don't even know any better, right? You, you, you know what, you know, and sometimes you just don't know.

I love it. I love that's what they're doing. That's how they're combating it.

[00:20:00] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** And I think loneliness is actually one of the, you know, it's, it's, uh, it's, it's a mental health crisis on its own. Interestingly. In another conversation, because all of these are conversations. I have not invented anything and I don't, you know, we, we, we don't take any credit.

It's all coming from those, those conversations. And one of, of the people that we were talking to was a project manager and he said, we're, we're all islands on construction jobs. We're all islands. And I kind of thought about that and saying of yourself that you're an island means that you're lonely, right?

You're alone on that island. And so how do you bring those islands together and you actually create, you know, that connection, you create camaraderie. Yeah.

Exactly. Exactly. So, so I think, you know, these are, and I, I can go on and on and on. The one thing that I'll say right now is that the. If people are interested in, in this, um, in this subject and they want to find more of these ideas, interventions, things that other people have done, right?

So this is nothing, again, that we have invented or...

[00:21:10] **Christi Powell:** Right. You're pulling everybody else's resources together, right? The construction well being, that's what it's all

[00:21:16] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** about. Yeah, it's the collective intelligence. And I love that. That's if there is one thing I love is the collective intelligence because we're exponentially more intelligent when, when we are connected to, to the community, to, to, to professional community, a personal community.

So we have not invented anything. These are all things that we have. That we have heard from other people and that we just, you know, transcribes. And so, so we have published all of these interventions, uh, let's call them on a website. And the website is, um, it's a, it's a completely free resource. It's, uh, we've put it online in June and, uh, it's, it's very simple.

It's wellbeing. construction.

[00:22:03] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. I love it

[00:22:06] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** too. That's it. And that's where you can go, that's where you can go into that database, you'll be able to filter if you have budget, no budget, effort, et cetera, and you'll be able to find all of those interventions and ideas and, and, and things that people have implemented on their

[00:22:24] **Christi Powell:** job sites.

Tools and resources to be better at addressing mental health.

[00:22:30] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Exactly.

[00:22:34] **Angela Gardner:** Do you know someone in the upstate of South Carolina suffering from substance use disorder? Favor Upstate is a recovery community resource center that provides a compassionate and innovative response to the suffering caused by substance use. Favor Upstate helps rebuild lives, build families, and strengthen communities.

Recovery from substance use disorder is a reality. For more information, visit Favor Upstate.

And you mentioned this, the crisis in construction, the mental health crisis, right? And you're definitely tackling it, but It's kind of brand new looking forward far in advance, setting goals. How are y'all doing that for yourselves? And then also you kind of hinted about, you know, tracking that impact that you're making, because we think Christine, I always talk about, it's great.

You've got to track, you know, what you're doing to affect, you know, the mental health of our people. How are y'all going about doing that or thinking about that? Because that might also help our listeners, you know, as they plan their future too, five to ten years.

[00:23:50] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** Right. So I think it's, it's, we said it already several times.

It's all about the connection. And again,

[00:23:58] **Christi Powell:** All about the connection. Ok. There we go. There we go again.

[00:24:02] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** That's the key word. It's the connection. It's avoiding that we feel like we're islands. Yes.

[00:24:09] **Angela Gardner:** But it's a meaningful connection, right? I mean, it's not a connection where you're yelled at or where you're... Told that you're not doing well or it, it matters, or

[00:24:18] **Christi Powell:** you're not feeling like you're just not adequate enough for your job, or you just come in and you think you don't have the right clothes on.

You know, it's, it can be anything. Our minds are all different, but they

[00:24:29] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** all matter. Exactly. So the connections need to be meaningful. They also need to be, they also need to be constructive. Mm-Hmm. . Mm-Hmm. . Right. Agree. Said it's, uh, you know, I don't see a connection when, when somebody is yelling at. And that's another thing, um, was funny it's, it's, and again, not for me, but someone construction is probably one of the last places where two, you know, let's say two adult males scream at each other, right?

[00:25:04] **Christi Powell:** It's one of the last places or the first place? I

[00:25:08] **Sbastien de Ghellinck:** hope so. I hope so. And I hope it actually goes away at some point as well. I do too. But it's, it's, uh, it's, um, when you think about it for a second, but anyway, I think, I think the connection is really the key word. So avoiding that people feel like they're, they're islands.

people feel like they're lonely or that they're isolated because that doesn't help, right? You are working with people and, and, and frankly, in construction, we're building, you know, meaningful things, right? That matter. So the more that, that, that connection can be made. And sometimes, sometimes it's, it doesn't need to be a conversation, a 10 minute conversation about.

Family and, and, and, and, you know, it could be, it could be a 3 minute conversation about sports and about the weather and, and, you know, and track work down exactly and what you've done over the weekend. Because that also creates connection because now you find out that you're actually, you know, you're supporting the same team or you're, you know, you're, you have, you know, you have, uh, kids that have the same ages and you're kind of, you know, challenged with the same, you know, The same teenage behavior, that's, that's

[00:26:27] **Christi Powell:** kind of, Angela and I know all about

[00:26:29] **Sbastien de Ghellinck:** that.

And so, so I think it's, um, even those small moments where, where people can connect, gate, you know, connection over time. So it's really creating those, those, that, that I think really creates the most impact to, to answer the, you know, the question.

[00:26:48] **Christi Powell:** Thank you so much for all that you're doing. I wish we had another 20 minutes to talk to you.

And I think we need to have you and Vivian back on again or just Vivian, just so we can talk a little bit more about this. This is probably the most important topic that to Angela and I to talk about. We all felt like the women in our group, just, just going to throw this out there, all felt like we were on an island by ourselves until we met each other.

And I was that way for 26 years and it wasn't good for my mental health when I took this role for 84. I literally had to go to therapy. I needed to learn how to get

my head in the right space. It was constantly struggling with 1 thing or another, right? Because I was alone. I didn't have anybody to connect with.

So, um, thank you so much for everything that you're doing before we get off this call. I definitely want you to let our listeners know how they can get all your resources. I know you mentioned it once. If they can get ahold of you, if they can sponsor you, if they can support you in any way, please let us know, let our audience know how that they can support what you're doing.

Following on LinkedIn. Right? Yeah. And maybe even they can share what they're doing with you because that's what this is, right? And collective intelligence. So please tell our listeners how, how to

[00:28:03] **Sabastien de Ghellinck:** do that. So, so there is a couple of ways that you can do it. So, so you can obviously find me on LinkedIn. Um, and I love to have conversations.

I I'm pretty active. Yes, you do. You're great. Yeah. And so there is the website that I mentioned before, uh, which is wellbeing. construction. So that's wellbeing in one word dot. Construction so that that's where you'll find all of the resources we've, we've put online and that's, that's the result of what we did with, uh, with Princeton and, uh, we actually also started and that's that's more of a skill signal.

So skill signal dot com. And again, we, we, uh, we have, uh, software and a platform that does all of your safety compliance and risk control in one place. So been growing very fast, um, and very exciting that one, that one too, at some point. So skillsignal. com. And we just launched actually a new newsletter and a news post to kind of, um, compile all of the, uh, the information that we find.

The best information, the best articles, the best podcasts, the best, the best videos that we've seen over the course of 1 month. We're a growing team and everyone is kind of watching their own things. And and so we bring that together in that that newsletter. So if you're interested to get all of the meaningful.

Industry news in one place in, in a few minutes, uh, that newsletter is, is something that, uh.

[00:29:34] **Christi Powell:** Nice. I like that. You can read it when you, when you have time. Right. You don't have to go find the website or whatever. Oh

yeah. I do love that. So we do have to wrap it up, but I do want to say thank you, first of all, for a lot of things, right?

One of the things you mentioned before we got on is that we are one of your favorite podcasts and that you listen to us on Saturday mornings when you're doing your yard work. And we really, really appreciate that. It's so awesome. I also appreciate the fact that the new Apple Macs are going to be the bomb.

com when it comes to audio and video. So we just learned that today and you don't need headphones,

[00:30:08] **Angela Gardner:** right?

[00:30:10] **Christi Powell:** Yeah. And he sounds great, but we really thank you for what you're doing for our industry and how selfless it is, what you and Vivian are doing. And if there's anything we can ever do to help you, we are 100 percent behind you and in front of you and beside you wherever we need to be to help

[00:30:26] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** your, you know, the voices that you put out there are extremely important.

What you mentioned my yard work on Saturday morning, that's actually part of my mental health routine. Nice. That's when I break down for my week. And so, so that, that actually is very important listening to, to, uh, your podcast is, is absolutely part of that routine. So

[00:30:45] **Christi Powell:** thank you. Nice. So we're lifting you up and that is like the best compliment ever that we could ever have because that's what we, why we started what we started and we want the whole world to feel lifted up.

So thank you again for being on today, Sebastian. We couldn't, we can't thank you enough and keep doing great

[00:31:02] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** things. Thank you for having me. Thank you so much. Thank you

[00:31:09] **Christi Powell:** Well, that's all for this episode Thank you so much for listening to the women talk construction podcast with your hosts christy powell and angela gardner See you next

[00:31:18] **Sébastien de Ghellinck:** time