Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to this episode of Learning Uncut, the special disruption series. Today, we're talking using e-learning as part of your immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new or scaled up work you're having to do. My guest is Connie Malamed. Welcome Connie, and please introduce yourself.

Connie Malamed:

Hi Michelle, and thank you for inviting me to be on this important episode and important series. I publish the eLearning Coach podcast and eLearning Coach website, and I spend a lot of time helping instructional designers be better at their skills and improve their performance.

Michelle Ockers:

Thanks, Connie. And I know you have been speaking with people in your community about how to effectively use e-learning right now. What's your basic guidance as to when to use it and when not to use it?

Connie Malamed:

There's a general term in our field called page-turners, and that would be using e-learning like it's a book and just clicking next, next, next, next. And that giving e-learning a bad reputation. So if people are in a rush and if they need a rapid approach, then I would tend to use e-learning for practice exercises and for engaging activities, and to try to allow for the presentation portion perhaps to be virtual live training or perhaps using one of the rapid tools where it looks kind of like a website and people can quickly read the information and then get onto practicing.

Michelle Ockers:

So it sounds like what you're advocating right now is rather than rushing into developing whole e-learning courses, using it in a more blended way combined with live online learning sessions and potentially other approaches as well, Connie?

Connie Malamed:

Well, I think that's a great idea and it's quick. It's a quick way to get going. The thing is, is that designing and developing e-learning takes some time. It's not a good idea to just jump into a tool and just start designing. So if you don't have a few days to really do the analysis and the design and then a few more days to do the development, then I think a quick approach might be to just get right in there and use e-learning for activities. However, there are some of those rapid tools like Articulate Rise. They create things that look like products that look like a webpage. And in that case, you might be able to balance out some of the presentation or information dissemination using one of those very rapid tools.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And the rapid tools, Connie, are they true to the name? Are they easy to start using? Are there any traps or suggestions you would have for people who haven't used those before and just getting started?

Connie Malamed:

Well, I would only use a tool that has a supportive community and a lot of documentation. And I have used it and I thought it was pretty easy to get started. However, if you're completely new to it, then you might want to leave yourself a day to learn and practice.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that was a tip we had yesterday about the live online. Make sure you give yourself some time to practice and familiarize yourself with whatever tools you're using. You mentioned using e-learning or activities preparation. What kind of activities would you envisage being well suited to putting out in some sort of short piece of e-learning?

Connie Malamed:

I think the best kinds of activities are activities that involve or that reflect and replicate and simulate real world events. So in particular, for workplace training, trying to simulate what it's like to deal with an angry customer, to be a leader in tough situations, whatever it is, where you're trying to improve performance, anything that can simulate that.

Connie Malamed:

Okay. Any kinds of activities that allow people to practice the skill that will improve their performance in as realistic a way as possible would be good for an e-learning activity. So an example might be interacting with an angry customer, or an example might be being a leader in difficult times. It's pretty simple to do that by writing a short scenario and then using a multiple choice question template or a multiple response question template where there are ... several of the answers may be correct or several of the answers are correct. All of these e-learning authoring tools typically come with templates. So it's up to the faculty, the subject matter expert, the instructional designer to come up with some of those key scenarios, and then the offering tool takes care of the rest.

Michelle Ockers:

So how many scenarios would you need to develop if you're going to allow people some opportunity to practice something?

Connie Malamed:

Well, that's an interesting question. I really do think it could depend on the situation and the skill that you're trying to allow to improve. Off the top of my head, I might do perhaps three. But it really depends. If you're in a life or death healthcare situation, you're going to try to have many, many types of scenarios. And if you're in a sales situation or a customer support situation where you don't have that much variation, then you can reduce the number of scenarios.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So it depends how critical it is that people are able to automatically remember as opposed to perhaps being able to go back and refresh or take some more time with the skill.

Connie Malamed:
Yeah, that's a really good way to put it.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So if we think about blended learning programs, you've kind of got before, during some sort of supported or facilitated activity, and after. The simulations that you're talking about, scenario-based stuff, where does that fit into that flow, and what other kinds of activities might you slot in using e-learning either before, during, or after other types of activities?

Connie Malamed:

If people really need to memorize, which it turns out in the real world, in the world of the workplace, people don't need to memorize that much. Although again, in healthcare you may need to memorize. When you're selling particular products you may need to memorize. But on the other hand, there are a lot of things that people can easily look up. But if you really need to memorize information and content, then I would encourage retrieval practice. And that would just be simply bringing the information back up mentally and having a lot of drill and practice. And that's very common in the education world because often when people are younger, they have to memorize a lot. But in the workplace you can often look things up.

Connie Malamed:

So that's one type. Just simply retrieval practice. A lot of the best research is showing that getting a little information first, then doing some practice and then spacing the practice and interweaving different kinds of practice would be best. So maybe there would be some information presentation, some immediate practice with feedback, then a space and then going into maybe some higher-order learning, some more scenario-based after that.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. Connie, I think you brought out a really good point there where you used the example of space repetition. Now is the time for us to be really vigilant about using solid evidence-informed practices and not just rush to get anything out.

Connie Malamed:

True.

Michelle Ockers:

Are there any other basic evidence- informed practices or approaches that you'd like to mention that people should be familiar with or should be considering applying at the moment?

Connie Malamed:

Sure. Spaced practice, which means someone practices something for a while, then they have an element of time, a nice space of time, and then they get to practice it again, perhaps in a new way. Retrieval practice means getting a chance to bring the information up that you have to memorize or learn over and over again, again in a spaced way. Another a research-based practice would be elaboration, which is explaining something, talking about it, bringing it into your own world. So that would be something more that you could do in a webinar that would be very webinar related or using some form of social media or forum. And another-

Michelle Ockers:

Go ahead.

Connie Malamed:

Another one that is getting a lot of kudos in the research are using work examples. And in that case, it's often done in education and in K through 12 or in schools, but not as much in the workplace. And in work examples, you show someone how to work through a problem, then you give them their own. So they have a template, they have an example, but you give them their own problems to work through and you slowly wean them off of all the guidance and the hints. So you provide a lot of guidance and hints at first, and then you slowly reduce the number of guidance and hints.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. Some good practices for people to apply. And talking of practices, what would you recommend as a minimum set of steps or key things to do to make sure that what people are putting together right now is of adequate quality? We're not talking about Rolls-Royces here. We're talking about something that's going to do the job, but something that's not going to leave us with a legacy that we have a problem with into the future. Right? So how do we get that right? What would you recommend as a bare set of steps or tips to get the quality of what people are putting together in e-learning right at the moment?

Connie Malamed:

I think it's great that you're thinking of what we do today, how is that going to affect us two or three months down the line when you're not happy with it? Well, one of the key things is to slow down for a minute. Do not jump directly into designing it with an authoring tool. Step back. Think about the audience. Think about human-centered design, which means focus on the audience and exactly what they need to learn to do their jobs if we're talking about workplace training. Then distill it down to, what performance objectives can you write? What is it that the people really need to learn? And focus on that rather than dumping in a lot of extraneous information, which will ultimately reduce what people learn.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So before we move on to tools and technology, which I would like to come back to briefly, the most critical things for people to get right. If you were to say to people, "Just these two or three things are the most important things for you to get right to be thinking of as you're working with e-learning right now," what would they be?

Connie Malamed:

Well, one really important thing is to remember that people can only process three to four bits of information at one time. So really minimize it and really distill it down to what's most important. Another thing is to use concrete examples. E-learning is a visual medium, so you have a great opportunity to use metaphors and analogies. And when you're explaining difficult concepts, information graphics, take advantage of the visual nature of the medium. And another is to just keep in mind that this is something that could end up being a legacy for quite a while. So slow down a little and make sure you're doing it at least a decent job. I know you can't do super-high quality in a rush.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah and I think the point is that it's okay to put things out that perhaps aren't the highest quality so long as we're content that they're going to do the job, do the job well right now, and we're going to be happy to live with them for some time, that people are going to be a little more forgiving in their expectations right now, potentially.

Connie Malamed:
Probably.

www.michelleockers.com

Michelle Ockers:

So tools and technology. You talked briefly about using some rapid tools. You mentioned Articulate Rise as one example of those. So from the developer end, are there any other tools or technology that people may need to be using as they're developing e-learning at the moment?

Connie Malamed:

There are several tools that use PowerPoint slides and allow you to import PowerPoint, and then you can make a few activities around those slides. I just think that it's important to not make page-turners or you're going to lose people in just a few slides. So whenever you have an opportunity to allow them to practice, engage and interact in a meaningful way, not just clicking on something, but responding in a way where they're learning and it's meaningful in between those slides, that's what I would recommend.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, and we're probably not talking about just picking up your current face-to-face PowerPoints and importing them and then doing stuff around them, are we, Connie? We're probably talking about using PowerPoint because it's familiar, but thinking about potentially adapting or creating something new that's going to suit this delivery method.

Connie Malamed:

I'm really glad you mentioned that, because I would not just import those slides that will probably not have much meaning to people if the facilitator isn't there speaking to them. So yes. But you can use your slides as a basis for remembering and understanding what was it that I ... What were the key points that I was trying to get across? And then modifying them, removing some, picking out the key points that will lead to people improving performance, and then stopping to think, "What would they need to practice that would help them fulfill these learning objectives?"

Michelle Ockers:

Now, Connie, some organizations do not have a learning management system. They don't have anywhere they can actually host e-learning files. What are your options if that's your situation? The cloud, right?

Connie Malamed:

Yeah. The only reason ... Well, there's several reasons why people use learning management systems, but if you do not have to track people, then you can go without. There are also situations where, I hate to mention products though, so ...

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So let's just talk generically.

Connie Malamed:

Okay. Let's just talk generically. Sure, you can just take any course that's published in HTML5, which is one of your publishing options in an authoring tool, and put it on a website with a link to it. That's what you can do. You won't be able to track it, but there's no rule that says you have to have a learning management system.

Michelle Ockers:

Excellent, thank you. And if you do need to track it for some reason, what are your options there if you don't already have a learning management system and you've been doing everything face to face?

Connie Malamed:

I've seen some options where you can have a completion emailed to you. So that's one possibility, although if you're in a very large company that would be insane. Maybe another way would be getting small groups together and just talking through what they learned so that you can kind of get a sense of things. And if someone did not go through a learning, maybe they will get it from that small-group instruction and web discussion. I think another thing is just to remember that if it's not compliance training and if there are no regulations to say that someone has to take it, then I think we just have to trust that adult learners are going to do what they need to do.

Michelle Ockers:

So start with the default assumption that people will do it and you don't need to track it and then only put yourself down the tracking path, if you don't already have an easy way to do that, if it's absolutely essential.

Connie Malamed:

That's what I think for adult learners. And I know in many cases it is essential, and I understand that.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And I think without mentioning products, there are fully-hosted cloud systems that people can go out and research without having to bring a new piece of software inside the organization as an option too, right?

Connie Malamed:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. Do you have any final words of advice for learning professionals who are having to figure out how to do this for the first time or how to scale up rapidly, Connie?

Connie Malamed:

It's really fun. It's helpful to be able to suddenly be able to think in terms of, what is the minimal amount that people need to learn? What can I throw away? What is extraneous? It's a fun exercise, and thinking in this very visual way and in terms of engaging people and creating interactive activities is an entirely new way of creative thinking and I think you'll love it.

Michelle Ockers:

Thanks, Connie. Great point to end on. And for our listeners, there is a full transcript of this episode with the show notes. If you want to go back over anything, that's a quick way to access and refresh yourself on the guidance that Connie has shared today. Thank you so much, Connie.

Connie Malamed:

Thank you, Michelle.

About Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- *Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of Learning and Development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

Michelle can be contacted at michelle@michelleockers.com.

www.michelleockers.com