

**Emerging Stronger Episode 24
Taking Bold Action– Myra Roldan
Hosted by Michelle Ockers**



Hosted by Laura Overton, Michelle Ockers & Shannon Tipton

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Shannon Tipton:

Hello everyone, my name is Shannon Tipton, owner of Learning Rebels and co-founder of Emerging Stronger and welcome to the Emergent Season 2 podcast where we are talking about L&D taking bold action. And I am really looking forward to our conversation today with Myra Roldan, and she is from AWS. Has been there for five years. Myra is a technologist who is driven to close the gaps of current inequities and lack of diversity that currently exist in the workforce. She is the mother of three young productive women and likes taking long walks on the beach at sunset, and she contemplates her daily existential crisis. And I love that so much, Myra, because we just had a conversation prior to starting off today about how we have a shared existential crisis.

Myra Roldan:

Yes. Thank you so much for inviting me. I didn't know if you're going to read that part or not, so I threw it in there. I was like waiting to see if you would read it, so thank you for that. That made my morning. Thank you for inviting me. This is going to be fun.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I am really looking forward to it and we invited you here because Emerging Stronger's mission is really to help L&D take bold action within their organizations, within their departments, within the L&D world around them, and really helping businesses to continue to move forward. And we realize that bold action, especially coming off of the historic times that we have right now, is going to be necessary. And so, what I'd like to do is I'd like to discuss with you about you taking bold action. And when I say taking bold action, it's those time when you put fear aside. And we had an interesting talk about fear as well, and I'm sure that you just don't wake up in the morning with your superhero cape and say, "Today!" I'm sure that there's some thought behind some of the great things that you do at AWS. And I'd love to talk about some of the things that you've done that you might consider to be bold

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within AWS or maybe even within past positions that you've had.

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. So I do not wake up with a cape on and say like, "Charge." But I can tell you my brain is always on and I'm always thinking. I wake up and my brain is like someone turned on a switch, and they start to think about the things that came about either the day before or during the week or just things that I'm pondering. And I tend to do a lot of research because I tend to be future-focused. And in order to be future-focused, you need to understand what the current situation is right now, right? You need to understand where are things going, what's the trajectory? And I think one of the things that I've noticed with L&D and the L&D space is that L&D it works in a silo and it separates itself from everything else.

And if your listeners on this podcast, if you take a step back and evaluate are you working with other teams in your organization? Are you working with customers directly? Are you doing evaluation analysis of the entire business? Do you feel like you're part of the business? I mean, obviously you're part of the business because you're in a company or wherever you sit. But do your daily activities impact the bottom line of the company, right? And so, I think that one of the things that I tend to look at is how am I impacting the organization, but also how am I representing my customers?

I work with external customers, so I work in the higher ed space and I work with governments. And I would say the bold actions that I have taken over the years, not just working at AWS, but in my other roles, has always been to challenge the status quo to help people move outside of their comfort zone, to look at things differently. And so with higher education, we know that it was greatly impacted by the pandemic. Before the pandemic, I had institutions that would tell me "We would never go online. We're never going online. We only do face to face."

Shannon Tipton:

Famous last words.

Myra Roldan:

I know. And then the pandemic hit, and I used to tell them like, "It's something that you need to consider because that's where the future is going." And then the pandemic hit, and I had institutions that said they would never go online, go online in two weeks and they did it, they did it. And it wasn't bold action, it was necessary action. So, I think my bold action has always been to help people see or at least acknowledge what's coming in the future, and what are the things that we need to consider now in order to prepare for that. And also helping them understand what that means by creating programs, and prototypes, and things like that that are tangible. I don't want to walk around like Chicken Little like, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" In my head that's what I sound like, "The sky is falling!"

Shannon Tipton:

But your outside self, your outside voice is trying to be more prepared.

Myra Roldan:

Yes.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I love what you're saying about doing your research and having those evidence-based processes in place or working towards. And I really love what you said there about is it bold

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action or is it necessary action? And sometimes the necessary action is the bold action, isn't it?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah, right. And I think it's a matter of how prepared you are, right? So necessary action can be something that's just thrown on you and you have no choice and you have to take that bold action, because otherwise you're going to get left behind or system's going to break or the business is going to go defunct. So, that necessary action is what we do to stay afloat, right? The bold action are the things that we do to scale, and expand, and to integrate into other systems and influence the business.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And now would you say then that as you just said, necessary action, we need to be able to take those steps and it's keeping the business alive, right? You use the word defunct, and perfect word for that. Now, I think a lot of L&D people don't realize that the necessary actions that they take to keep the business alive, it's that one step further into bold that keeps it growing. Would that be something that you would say would also be necessary?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. When you think about... I'm trying to think of a good example here. Right now, I work with different governments internationally to help them establish higher national qualifications, which are qualifications that are then passed down to institutions to help prepare learners for jobs, right? So, the end result is that this person will leave a program, study at an institution with some credential that will help them get a job, so it's this top-down approach. And it's interesting to me... For people who don't know, I've always dabbled in emerging technologies. And I'm always trying to figure out where's the labour market going when it comes to jobs, and how do we help people prepare for those jobs? Especially people that look like me, minorities, so people of colour, Hispanic, Latino, black, Asians. We come in all different types of colours, Samoans, Polynesians. So, how do we help people like me get jobs in the market? Also, that will sustain our... Once someone gets a good job, you're not only helping that person, you're helping their families and their communities, because then there's few representation. So, it's like a ripple effect.

So, it's interesting when we start talking about those competencies that they're like, "Well, we want to know what people need for the market right now." And it's like, "Okay. I could help you with that, we can establish this." But your people are going to be in these programs for two to three years, four years. So in four years, the landscape's going to change. So, what are the things that they need to learn... The skills, what are the skills that they need to have when they emerge from those programs in two to four years. And so, let's look at those and how do we incorporate those into a space? And so, a lot of times I just get blank looks like, "Okay, we hear you. But we want to prepare them with... There's like these 900 jobs here right now." And it's like, "Okay, I understand that. But you also need to be forward-thinking." That's very difficult for people sometimes to be very... When I tell them like, "Three to five years." What's going to happen? And I say, "Every decision you make right now impacts that three to five years."

Shannon Tipton:

Right. It's that ripple effect, isn't it?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah, yeah. And in your personal life, you will make decisions that we probably don't see the effects of till today, whether it's eating healthy, exercising, I don't know, hairstyles that you

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had in those pictures emerge. There's just different things that we'd look back and we're like, "Oh, if I only knew." Right? And so, I think taking that bold action also is thinking about the now, but thinking about how will it impact the future, and being armed with good data and taking the time to educate yourself.

So, bold action also has to be inward focus. So you have to focus on yourself and figure out where do you expect to be in three to five years, right? And what is it that you need to do in order to push yourself and your career forward to afloat in this sea of change. And through all the research I do in helping governments and stuff, it's forced me to look inward a lot also. And so, I mentioned to you I don't tend to suffer from imposter syndrome, because I don't know, I think I'm built a little bit different, but I do have these existential crisis on a regular basis where I start to think about how insignificant we are in this whole universe of things, and what is it that I want to leave behind? And so it's like, what's my legacy? And so, when you think about bold action, your bold action is your legacy.

Shannon Tipton:

I love that so much.

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. It's what you leave behind. It's your footprint.

Shannon Tipton:

Right, right. And especially with the people within businesses, because we can think about our legacy and the bold action that we take in order to help a business grow, but when we help a business grow, we're also helping the people within that business, grow.

Myra Roldan:

Yes, yes. And so, bold action looks differently to everyone. And for me, bold action is actually influencing the education space, the education system that's preparing our future workers, right? That's my way of looking future-forward. And so, taking bold action is really challenging the education system and challenging the philosophical view on education and trying to move that more towards a competency-based view. Especially in higher education which just tends to be really philosophical.

I mean most of us went to college, and if you ever taken a college class, I have taken college classes where I'm like, "I know this stuff just because I have a brain that carries useless knowledge." But that's what it is, it's useless knowledge. You know what I mean? My whole thing is we need to change the education space in order to help people be prepared for competitive jobs, right? And I don't care if you're going to a community college or you're going to a tier one school, you should have the same access to education and the prepared for similar opportunities, right? You're not going to land the same jobs because a two-year university versus a four-year university have very different focuses. I would say my bold action has been to institute education reform, and not only with words and say like "The education system's broken, we need to reform it." I am taking action and helping to reform that.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah. What are we doing about this, right? Now, I love the path that you're taking. And I'm certainly sure that within that path you've experienced some bumps along the way. Now then what were some times where you tried to take the bold action that you knew needed to be taken, but then were met with roadblocks, bumps, barriers? And I'm sure our listeners have

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experienced this as well. They're listening to this and going well, "That's all well and good. Bold action, yada, yada, yada. But I have these barriers around me. How am I to break through those barriers?"

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. I can tell you I face challenges every day. If it were a cakewalk, everyone would do it. If it was easy, right? Everyone would do it. So, I would say that everything's challenging. I can tell you that I present ideas on a regular basis that just can't get... We're not ready for that or we're going in a different direction and that's fine but doesn't mean that your ideas aren't valuable still and that you're wrong. You just need to be willing to pivot, because sometimes there's a greater strategy and a greater vision. And you need to align to that and you need to be able to pivot and not sulk about like, "Well, they didn't like my idea. And I can't take bold action because it's not my idea."

Bold action isn't about only your ideas. Bold action is about what is the vision? What's the greater vision? And bold action is helping to make that vision reality and to take those steps. So, bold action isn't always about your own ideas and your own passions. Although those are great. I am 100% about taking bold actions on your own ideas, but sometimes it's about pushing someone else's agenda, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Good point, good point. So then if you're presenting these ideas every day, let's just say every day, and every day you're getting somebody who comes back and says, "Nope, that's not what we're about. That's not the direction we want to head into." How do you keep yourself from falling down an emotional black hole of saying, "Oh my gosh, I'm so discouraged."? How do you prevent that?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. I think everyone's personality is different. And so, I can give you some tips and techniques that work for me, and I would say like, you can try it and may... I'm not going to say this is a silver bullet for everyone. But for me it's like I don't get emotionally attached to my work, so my work is not me personally. And so, I tend to separate myself the emotion of my work. I really make a conscious effort to not fall in love with my own work, right?

Shannon Tipton:

Right. I love that because it's easier to break up, isn't it?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. It gives you space. It's just work. And I always tell people like, "Listen, we're not solving cancer here. People aren't going to die if we don't do something specific. And if we don't take an action within 24 hours, the world's not going to end." It's work, right? So, once you can separate yourself and say like, "I'm coming in here. I'm passionate about my work. I love what I do. But my work is not me." And so, the whole point of presenting ideas is to get buy-in. It's not to create this masterpiece and then be like, "Here, I solved everyone's problems." And then they're like, "Yeah. No, that's not what we need." Because that's deflating.

But presenting your ideas and saying have we considered X, Y, Z? And this is why I think it would work. And if they say no or we're really looking down to go a different direction, then you can ask questions like, okay, can you share a little bit more about that? Can you tell me more about what the vision is? And is it a matter of can I make some changes to this idea that would... Can we use pieces of this idea of this idea to get towards that vision? So, it's about being focused on a goal and not being focused on yourself and

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your creations. You don't want to beat Dr Frankenstein and be like, "It's alive."

Shannon Tipton:

It goes out and attacks the villagers, "Oh no, that was a bad idea." That's great. I'm interested, how did you come about that philosophy?

Myra Roldan:

I would say very early on in my childhood, I've always experimented. I always got in trouble. I always broke things. I was raised by my grandparents and my mom in Puerto Rico, and I was lucky enough to have a grandfather who was the authoritarian person not yell at me and be like, "Don't do that ever again." But he would tell me, "Don't touch my stuff. This is my stuff. You can't touch this stuff." And like, "Just don't touch this over here. Please do this." And they just gave me freedom. It was more about at an early age having the freedom to experiment and encouraged to experiment. And my mom is my biggest cheerleader. I could tell my mom like, mom, I want to try whatever it was. And my mom, as long as it wasn't something that would hurt me or kill me, she was on board.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. That's interesting. Because one of the emerging stronger lenses... We operate off of four lenses, and one of the lenses is about experimentation and the importance of experimentation. And not just on a whole grand scale, but little experiments that help move you closer to an outcome, a goal, a solution and taking that path, and that's what I'm hearing.

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. And something that I've learned over the years is that I know that everyone has different upbringing, right? I was just raised by very free-thinking people where I know a lot of people have... Not a lot, some people may have grown in more regimented and routine environments and maybe not encouraged to experiment, or maybe just wasn't something that you know was discussed. And I would say if it's not part of your DNA, if you find it difficult because it's scary, experimenting is scary. I would say like you said, do small experiments and don't call them experiments. So for rule number one, don't call it an experiment.

Call it a prototype or call it a test, so you can test an idea. And then when you're going to test the idea, have some metrics and a plan for how you'll back out of the idea if it doesn't work, right? Testing an idea and having that plan for measuring what does success look like if it works? What is the data I can collect from it? And then, what's the plan to back it out without impacting people negatively? Because that's the other thing. Without having a negative impact on people who I'm testing with, so I can like say, "Oh, that little feature that I put in there didn't work. I'm going to remove it." But it doesn't mean that it renders everything else that I built unusable, right?

So it's just little things like something simple. I hear a lot of L&D teams who don't have a formal intake process and they're overwhelmed with stuff. So you can test with an intake process, right? Let's test this intake process for 30 days and see how it works. And at the end of 30 days, you can sit back and you evaluate it. And if it works, then you implement a greater plan or you make tweaks and you keep on testing until you get it right, and that's the

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same with everything else.

Shannon Tipton:

And so then the little tweaks, would it be safe to say then that when we talk about bold action, we don't need to talk about big, giant steps. Even bold action itself could be little baby steps. Little baby bold actions.

Myra Roldan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, I would say we can differentiate bold actions from BHAGs. You know what a BHAG is?

Shannon Tipton:

Yep, yep. Our Big Hairy Audacious Goal.

Myra Roldan:

Yep. BHAGs, they're like parkour bold action. So at the end of it, you're like parkour bold action. With bold action, bold action is about... If we define what we mean by bold, by bold we mean being strong, and being unafraid, and being open to failure, right? Being willing to say, "I'm going to try this. And if it doesn't work, my world isn't going to end. I'm not going to impact myself, but I'm also not going to ruin someone else's world." And so, bold action isn't about doing a clean sweep of something and saying, "We're going to restructure everything right now. Everything's bad."

No. It's about identifying what are the things that we can fix and that need to be fixed. And it may be something new. You may come up with a new idea that you'll implement that people aren't used to, it's not the normal. It's something that's different and something that it's not only different for the sake of being different, but it's effective, it's efficient, it simplifies things. It keeps things simple. You know that saying, KISS, keep it simple, stupid. It's simple. Bold action doesn't have to be all encompassing.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And I like that you mentioned briefly there in what you were saying about it being selfless. And I picked up on that because I feel many L&D people are so attached, and it goes back to what you also said earlier about not being one with the work. So, you're so attached to what you do and you have this bias towards what you have chosen, the path that you have chosen. And I do think what you're saying here about taking that bold action may be about taking the path that is not yours.

Myra Roldan:

Yeah, right. And so, I think it's being willing to do that. Being bold is not just about wearing pink hair or looking different than everyone else. That's bold, right? And if you use that as an analogy, that's something that's outwardly impacting you as a person, so it's how you're perceived. Bold action can be something so small that people may not realize that something's changed, but they see that something may be a little bit easier, a little bit better, a little bit different. They don't know why, it just works kind of thing. And it was something that you implemented, that's considered bold action.

Ken Blanchard, he has this whole concept about being a servant leader. And it's about being a servant leader, and servant leader doesn't mean that you're everyone's beck and call. But it's about thinking about your work from a perspective of your customers, the people you impact. And not about if I build this, I'm going to look great. I'm going to be a rockstar. You

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know what I mean? It's about separating that and thinking about where is it that you see your priorities and how you see your work.

And so, I can tell you the stance I take with my work and I've always done this is that I'm looking to improve someone else's life. And I'm looking to share my rocks, my resources, opportunities, and connections with people that I interact with. And bold action for me can sometimes just be, I'm going to introduce this person to this other person because I think they could have a good connection. I can help create an opportunity for person A. Or I'm going to introduce my company to this other company to see if there's some synergy, to see if we can think about things differently. So, bold action can just be something as simple as thinking differently about a problem.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. That just sheds a whole different light on bold action. It really does. I think we've had this perception about the word bold in of itself. That it's got to be something that is so enormous and makes this huge impact and change and this very big ripple, but that's not necessarily the case. And thank you for putting it into a context that I think people can really wrap their heads around. And to that point, I'd like to ask you where would you advise an L&D person to start? Maybe they are a little more... I consider myself a support function, and I just don't see myself doing even smaller steps. It's hard for me. Where do you think an L&D person could go just to develop some deeper skills?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. I always say that you have to start with you first, right. You know what they say, put your oxygen mask on right before you put someone else's oxygen mask on. So, you need to put your own oxygen mask on and make sure that you're in a good place before you begin to help someone else. And so I would say like, do an inventory of your skills, look at yourself and be honest just with yourself. You don't have to share it with anyone else. Be honest with yourself and see where is it that you need some development, right? Do you need to learn more business acumen and learn more about your business? Do you need to learn some business skills because you see yourself as a support system? And I only create this e-learning and this is all I do. That's not all you do, right? Looking at it from a bigger picture, how does what you do impact the greater business? And taking a step back and looking at that.

There's a great course offered by... I love the Ken Blanchard stuff. They have a self-leadership course. That's amazing because it helps you take an inward look at yourself and identify where are your areas of strength and areas of improvement. And then, helps you figure out how do you articulate that? And how do you leverage both your strengths and your areas of growth to become more well-rounded? And then, how do you use that to communicate with everyone else? Communicate your ideas, communicate things that you want to get across.

There's a book called Crucial Conversations. That's a great book. Also, I've done workshops with Crucial Conversations. I think it's impactful also. But learning how to communicate with the business is really important. And so, maybe it's about how well-suited is your oxygen mask for yourself, and how confident do you feel with your oxygen mask on? Is it fitting you well? And once you have that, then you can start to help the business put their oxygen mask on or help your team or help another team member. Or it could be something very simple, right? It doesn't mean you have to do it for the whole business. It could be with another team member, your team, or someone in a different business unit helping them put their oxygen mask on to... And it doesn't mean helping them evaluate themselves, right? That's not what

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I'm saying. What I'm saying is helping them by sharing your rocks, also your resources, your opportunities, your connections, and your knowledge, because that's how you make the most impact.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes. All the things. Yes. And I really love the analogy of helping the business put their oxygen mask on. That I think is brilliant, and it's something I feel everyone can relate to, so thank you for that. Now, are there any other really important core strengths that you would say off the top of your head that every L&D person needs to have moving forward? So if we think about L&D in a completely different light, not really completely, but let's just say let's break it off of this traditional trajectory. Then if we're going to do that, what core strengths should an L&D person have to help them take those little baby bold action steps?

Myra Roldan:

Three things.

Shannon Tipton:

Three things.

Myra Roldan:

Grit, resilience, and thick skin.

Shannon Tipton:

Nice. Especially love grit. I think grit it's so important, isn't?

Myra Roldan:

It's gritty, right? Grit is being able to have some stick-to-it-iveness and being able to move forward. And resilience, separating yourself from your work so you can bounce back very quickly and overcome obstacles that come in your place, and not run into pebble on the road and be like, "Oh my god, I can't move forward. There's this pebble on the road." But thinking outside the box and knowing maybe I can go around the pebble to keep on going forward. And then, thick skin because you need to be able to receive feedback and you need to be able to... I mean, we're really great at giving feedback. Most L&D people, we are brutal when we give feedback, right? But we are horrible at taking it.

And so, growing thick skin and understanding that when we give feedback, we should be giving feedback based on performance and based on data and not attacking an individual. And when we receive feedback, we need to understand that they may not be attacking us as a person, they may just be giving us feedback on something very specific, right? And maybe sometimes it is about our attitude and the way we interact with other people that you need to take personal, but you need to take it personal and be able to take a step back and be retrospective about it and understand how they're seeing it, because it's their perspective. There's a lot of psychology in there. It's just really interesting.

Shannon Tipton:

That's great. Well, Myra, thank you so much for joining me today and having this conversation about bold action and the path that L&D can take in order to get there from here. I really appreciate. This has been a fun conversation. I hope that you enjoyed it as

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much as I have.

Myra Roldan:

I have. Thank you so much for having than me. And I really hope that in the coming year, in 2022 that you take this chance to take a step back and evaluate where's your career? What do you want to do? What are some core skills you need to build? So then you can start taking some bold actions towards helping yourself first before you help everyone else.

Shannon Tipton:

Put on your oxygen mask, right?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Yes. And before we break off, can you tell our listeners where to find you?

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. The main place everyone could find me is on LinkedIn. You can find me under Myra Roldan. And I have a website, myraroldan.tk, for technology because I'm quirky like that. And I tend to post mini videos, bites of videos, information on workshops that I'm going to be running. It's not always updated, but my videos are updated. So, you can always reach out to me. I tend to respond to messages on LinkedIn and always happy to chat with people.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

Myra Roldan:

Yeah. Thank you for inviting me. This is fun.

Shannon Tipton:

It was fun. And I look forward to talking about this with you in the future. So, thank you for your time. And also for our listeners, we will be having all of Myra's information in the show notes. So you can go there and find out. You can also find Myra's TEDx video on YouTube as well, so please go and find that. Thank you, Myra. Thank you to our listeners for being here with us today, and we look forward to talking to you soon. This is Shannon Tipton, co-founder of Emerging Stronger and owner of Learning Rebels. Thank you very much.

About Learning Uncut

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that work with learning teams and--or business leaders to accelerate learning transformation. We specialise in supporting organisations to create or update their learning strategy, enhance their learning team's capabilities, align learning to business value, and implement modern learning approaches.

We are highly collaborative and pragmatic. We partner with organisations to align learning to their business needs, unleash continuous learning, and build capability to help them

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the founder of Learning Uncut. She is an experienced, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

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*



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