

Learning Uncut Episode 26
Emerging Stronger: Taking Bold Action – Dr Celine Mullins
and Laura Overton
Hosted by Shannon Tipton



Hosted by Laura Overton, Michelle Ockers & Shannon Tipton

The Emerging Stronger Masterclass gives learning and development professionals the opportunity to come together to be empowered to take the BOLD action needed to positively impact business.

Are you an L&D professional who aspires to make or influence change in your organization? Then the Emerging Stronger Masterclass is where you need to be.

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Welcome to the Learning Uncut Emergent season 2. Join Michelle Ockers, Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton to explore core strengths that L&D professionals need to take bold action

Shannon Tipton:

Hello everyone. My name is Shannon Tipton, and I am the owner of Learning Rebels, but most importantly, the cofounder of Emerging Stronger. And we are on the Emergent podcast series, season two.

And I have with me my partner in crime, Laura Overton. And Laura is the author, facilitator, award-winning, extraordinary learning analyst, dedicated to uncovering and sharing progressive practices that add strategic value, leading a 15-year global research program that explored impactful learning strategies. And her work through Learning Changemakers and Emerging Stronger continue to support and inform the changing world of workplace learning.

And also, I have with me the esteemed Celine Mullins. And Celine is a psychologist and coach with a background in theater and filmmaking, the perfect partner for us. And she is the founder and CEO of Adaptas. And Adaptas has been leading the way in fostering self-awareness, clarity, and engagement required of people in order to build successful organizations. Welcome, Celine. It has been a journey for you.

Celine Mullins:

Thank you, Shannon. It has been journey. And the journey continues.

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Shannon Tipton:

Well. I know that we're getting you a little bit jet lagged, but that said, I know that your wit and intelligence will come through. And Laura, we're on happy hour time for you, almost, aren't we?

Laura Overton:

Almost. So maybe a little extra wit and intelligence will come in there.

Shannon Tipton:

I'm sure. Well, we always look forward to fabulous things coming from you, Laura. Absolutely. Now-

Celine Mullins:

No pressure, Laura.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah, no pressure for either of you. I did the wonderful job sitting back and listening to these two wonderful women and their brain power. And I'm looking forward to this conversation.

Now, we've invited you because our mission for Emerging Stronger is to help L&D take bold action in whatever that may be, in regards to the industry forward, moving the people within that industry forward, and how can we help progress the industry.

Shannon Tipton:

And so, I'd like to start off by asking you, Celine, when I put it into that context, what does bold action look like to you? What does it mean to really be bold?

Celine Mullins:

I guess, Shannon, for me, it's about... When I think back over the 15 years or so that I've been working in learning and development, being bold is often looking at what is going on, and thinking, "Well, this isn't necessary." Just because things have been done this way for many years, many decades, doesn't mean that this is the best way forward.

And it's then thinking, "Well, what can I do to try things out a little bit differently? What conversations can I have? What projects can I get going?" That may be risky, however, they may help us to understand a little bit more how learning is taking place, and they might help us to understand different ways of doing things.

And knowing that not everybody will love what you're doing and knowing that taking this different approach may not always give you the results that you would like, however, taking those small risks without putting anyone in danger, obviously. That's being bold for me. I think I've always been a little bit bold because... I don't know. I always had a problem with authority from a very young age.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, you're with the right group.

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Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely.

Shannon Tipton:

Well, Laura, what would be your definition, then? Let me switch over to you.

Laura Overton:

I think, for me, learning and development... To be able to take bold action means to maybe have the ability and courage to follow through on our convictions. This is the most incredible industry and profession to be part of, in terms of individuals who really want to make a difference in people's lives. And we've been trained up to make a difference in people's lives. We've been taught how to do things to make that difference through the initiatives that we put in place.

But for me, boldness is about being willing to question our past in order to define our future, and to be able to progress those goals in new places, in new spaces, in new economic environments. So boldness is about courage to follow through on the convictions. I guess that's my gut sense about this. And the thing that's driven me... It's tough to keep following through on your convictions, but I really believe we can make a difference. But sometimes, we have to do it in a different way.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And so, based on that then, what are some of the biggest opportunities then for L&D professionals when it comes to bold action, taking impact? Or like you said, Celine, taking those littler steps in order to get to that bold action. So what are the opportunities you see in front of the industry right now?

Celine Mullins:

Actually, I would pull it back, and I would say, before even taking bold action at the moment, the first step for me is to really pay attention to what research in neurobiology, neuroscience, and the research that is on the cutting edge of the neurobiology, neuroscience, and coaching and leadership is telling us about how people make change.

So from my perspective, over the last number of years, I've been attempting to pull together what the research is telling us, what it's exposing for us, and how we need to think about learning and change in a way that is actually not comfortable for a lot of us. So I'll talk about that in a moment, if you're happy for me to.

And so, from my perspective, it's pulling back and educating ourselves about what the research is telling us, because the research is telling us that a lot of how people are going through their learning experiences. So whether it's digital, whether it's face-to-face, where a lot of how it's been done is helping people to think about these things conceptually.

So it's very much about getting them to think about... And now, I'm really sorry. I'm really thinking about soft skills here. Okay? And that's where I'm coming from, is soft skills.

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However, when you're looking either way, whatever type of skills it is, helping people to learn, what we're seeing is that the learning doesn't just happen up in the brain, in the mind, yet that's where we bring people's focus in how the learning is being delivered, and what people are, and how people are being asked to work with the content that they're being provided with.

So people end up thinking... And what the research is showing us is that, actually, we've got to be thinking about the whole body. So out to the tips of the fingers, the tips of the toes, in order to create change that is long term and sustainable, we have to find ways to engage our learners full body and help them to embody the change that they want to make. Okay?

So it doesn't matter what type of program somebody is attending, what type of digital learning somebody is following. In order for people to make change, we've got... Because so much money is spent in learning and development, and a lot of the time, it is being delivered and it's not necessarily been taken on-board because the whole body of the learner is not being engaged enough.

And from my perspective as well, having seen over the last 15 years, often, what I experienced, people... When they come to me for workshops, or programs, or one-to-one, and they will tell me, halfway through our process, that they had never realized how much was blocking them from making, from really ingesting the learning, from taking that learning on-board, from embedding that learning and being able to apply it.

And a lot of the time, they needed to understand what was blocking them, what the obstacles were. And so, from my perspective, for anyone who's working in learning, it's about educating yourself now about what the research is showing us, about how we can involve the body more in the learning, and also then helping people to explore the obstacles upfront as well as obviously their why.

Why do I actually want to take this learning on-board? How is it going to be useful to me? Why is it worth me putting in the energy and time? So the why, the obstacles, and helping them to engage the whole body is what's going to help create that real change that is sustainable for the long term. So it's education.

Shannon Tipton:

It's education, really. And it's education. I love what you're saying here about having that education to understand where your barriers are and where your blockers are. And I believe that that is a big opportunity for the industry to be able to see those barriers and blockers as they're coming towards us and then be prepared to handle them. And Laura, what is your take on the opportunities in front of us?

Laura Overton:

It's really interesting listening to you, Celine. It really ties in. Because what you're saying is that, genuinely, in order for us to be able to facilitate change and to be real changemakers, we need to understand that change process and we have to contribute to that.

And for me, I think the thing that struck me recently is about our opportunity to help people get equipped and ready for the future, not just people, but teams and organizations. And helping the organization to become future-fit, I think, is something that is really critical, where we can play a critical role in that process.

And so, some of the skills that we need in the future. We just don't know what they're going to be. We have no concept of what the new roles are going to be.

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So the soft skills are the enabling skills, the skills that we build in people today to help them be agile and adaptable, and to be able to harness that knowledge that you've been sharing with, Celine, and to support people in the now in order to help them to adapt for the future.

I think, for me, that's one of the biggest opportunities that we, as learning and development professionals, have today. We've concentrated a lot on performance, performance in the job role learning in the flow of work. Absolutely right. Particularly, when you know what your job is.

But when you don't know what your job's going to be, or when we're working with people who want to progress their careers, or want to work in organizations, or are leaving organizations because they aren't able to be stretched anymore, that's when we should be able to come into our own.

So for me, Shannon, literally, it's all about our role in helping individuals, teams, organizations become equipped and ready. I think that's an incredible opportunity, and really leverages what Celine's been talking about. We got to be able to be equipped ourselves in order to do that.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Celine Mullins:

It's us understanding, learning. And then, it's helping others to understand how to learn, so that, then it doesn't matter what happens next for them, because we live in such a time of change, such a time of uncertainty. And when we think about how the body is involved in learning and change, so many people have experienced on so much uncertainty at such a high level over the past, especially coming up to two years.

So our nervous systems are on the alert. Our sympathetic nervous system is activated and has been activated. And unless we all, as people who are helping others to learn, and our learners, have ways of activating their parasympathetic nervous system.

So techniques such as breathing, meditation, we can talk about all those things later. What I'm really learning, from research that is coming out over the last few years, is that, if we can understand how the nervous system plays a part in our learning, then we can manage our nervous system more effectively. So it's helping people to learn how to learn and it's helping people to manage their own nervous system, so that they can take in the learning and embed it.

Shannon Tipton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I have no words for that. That was just such a powerful statement about taking on learning in the whole body, as you mentioned earlier, that it's not just what's happening in our heads. It's happening around us and in us, and it's manifesting itself in a variety of different ways.

Now, do you see a difference in this state and time in history right now? And how learning is progressing versus previous years? So right now, this is a tough time in history. So have there been equal tough times in history? Or is it just that this particular time has shown a very bright spotlight on where we are at?

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Laura Overton:

I think there's been pretty tough times in history. I know that my own research project was kicked off as a result of a tough time for learning and development. It was just after 9/11 when everyone was grounded. Everyone had to go digital, even though they didn't want to. All the mistakes that were made as a result of that really kick-started my own well...

But what this has done is it's impacted every aspect of society, what we've been through in the last 20 months. So therefore, I don't necessarily feel it's tougher for us as learning and development professionals, because in one sense, it's more equal. We're all in an equal environment. And therefore, the opportunity to support each other, to help each other get through tough times, is... We have got more opportunity to do that.

And I think that's one of the reasons why we wanted to look at our own core strengths, so that we're going to be equipped to be able to play that role. So I think there's been some pretty tough times. And we haven't necessarily learned from them. We're just really hoping that we are going to be learning from this one.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And that's the key, isn't it? To learn from those tough times. What do you think, Celine?

Celine Mullins:

Yeah. I agree with Laura, that there have been much tougher times in the past. And when I say much tougher, I mean, because there's just been so many different things that have happened even in our lifetimes. And I think, as learning and development professionals, as Laura says, we have such an amazing, unbelievable opportunity right now.

For me, that's the difference. The difference is that because we're all on a level playing field, and because of the changes in how we've had to work and how we've had to learn, there is this huge opportunity to do things differently, to do things better, to try things out. Definitely, for the past two years, there has been a great opportunity to try things out, but you really have to think differently in order to try things out because a lot of people feel restricted by how things have been.

It is an opportunity. And also, I've noticed that our clients across such a range of different sectors now, really... Some of them who are on the fence about, does learning add anything? Now, have really recognized and realized how important learning is.

So there's CEOs, other decision-makers that I've worked with in the past, who were just doing things to tick boxes. And there were people who are decision-makers across organizations, who were doing things to tick boxes in the learning space.

However, now, what they've realized is that, by helping people to learn and grow, we can help retain our staff. We can help people be more productive, be more motivated, be more engaged. So there's a beautiful opportunity here. And I think, over the last 15 years of being in this area of working with organizations, now is such an exciting time.

And so, there's that opportunity because people recognize the power of learning, and also because of the different types of tech we have available to us. We work a lot with virtual reality to create embodied learning. And also, as I say, because of what the research is showing us about how change actually takes place.

Because of where science is at, with regard to being able to measure the impact of learning, that is... There are just so many opportunities. It's such an exciting time to be part of learning. And I mean, I can see it happening. I can see, all around me, people who were interested in learning, but maybe were working in other roles and other organizations, and

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now are finally stepping up and going, "I want to be part of this. This is exciting."

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And I think there's a very nuanced difference between tough times that might have happened around 9/11 or 2008 financial crisis versus today. Right. Which is, as you said, there's this uncertainty. You got the great resignation happening, the great reset, right?

And so, people don't know what their jobs are going to be in the future. And it is an exciting time for L&D right now to be a part of the shift and change of what is happening around us. So Laura, what is your take on these, on tough times now versus tough times in the past? What is your take?

Laura Overton:

I'm just thinking about it personally. Because just after I've heard two situations, both after 9/11, and also recently, personally, where, as a result of a range of different factors, I've shifted my role. And it's not that the situation was difficult, but that I made some choices to change my role.

And actually, personally, the tough times were very different in one sense, because... They were the same in a sense that I had to let go of something. And when you let go of something, for a while, you're in free fall. So whether you're an instructional designer letting go, moving into something else... The classroom trainer letting go, moving into something else... I was in my role letting go, moving into something I didn't know yet.

And more recently, when I left my research project, letting go of my data. So it's this liminal space can be quite a tough time because it's a time where you're faced with uncertainty. So for me, personally, I had two of those situations.

What was different this time was I had learned through the experience of the fact that, when you let go of something, sometimes, it releases something new for you. So I was coming into this tough time, knowing that it might be frightening potentially losing your identity. I'm being really personal here.

But this sense of losing your identity. My work was known through my research and my data. And I was in this space more recently. And I had to recognize my experience before is that it released more creativity in me, but also learning how to decouple my skills, learning how to...

I heard recently, at a conference I was at last week, that skills are like a bunch of flowers. And sometimes, you pull them together in an arrangement for a particular role, and then suddenly, you have to pull the flowers apart and rearrange them for a new role. And that releases a new amount of creativity. And I think we've got more opportunity to deconstruct our skills, to identify our strengths in this environment.

Now, whether that's too personal for me, Shannon, or not, I don't know, because maybe you need to have gone through it once. You need to have let go of something, realize it can release you, in order to, the next time you face it, be able to move on in that space.

But I think, for me, personally, the tough times, I've always been driven by a single purpose, just a belief that learning and development can make a difference to the bottom line of business and a determination to discover how. And I've built up skills over my career, but they've had to be deconstructed and repurposed in order to realize that vision for me.

So it's not that one time was tougher than the other, but I just feel as though I'm personally... And I'm making that really personal. So I probably haven't answered your question, but for me, that is we grow through our tough times. They don't diminish us. They release us. And that's been my personal experience. And they're a little tactics that I've learned along the way in order to be able to give myself space to realize that.

And I think the other thing that's been brilliant is working with other people who share your common goal. They travel with you along the way. And then, that

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helps you also shine a light on what you're good at and what you can bring into your next role. And I think, for me, it's that experience of multiple tough times allow us to grow and develop as individuals and as professionals in this space.

Shannon Tipton:

I agree. And no, I don't think that that is too personal of an example. I think that there are many L&D people in this space today that can relate to that push and pull of what happens within our jobs, within our job roles, how we support the work. It is a matter of understanding first that what we do is not necessarily about us, right?

It's about driving business. And therefore, not only driving business, but driving the people within that business. And it's the things that change around us change the way that we have perspective on how we accomplish that.

So I think that your personal examples there are greatly helpful because I'm sure that there are L&D people who are sitting in that seat right now, right? And so, now, the bigger question then becomes how can L&D take those experiences and create strength from it, right?

Celine Mullins:

Well-

Shannon Tipton:

How can they position themselves for greater things and to be stronger than they were before?

Celine Mullins:

Just adding to... When Laura was talking about that, I was thinking, it's like you're free falling. When you decide to make a change, and it doesn't matter, and Laura, what you were saying there, I think, resonates for every single one of us.

Because in some area of our lives, we all decided to do something different, whether it's with our role, whether it's with a relationship, whether it's moving house, or it could be anything. And when you were talking about it, I was thinking, it felt like you're jumping out of a plane, but you're free falling. And I've never done a parachute jump. I've always wanted to. It's just that idea of free falling.

And then, at a certain point, you've got to be able to let yourself fall, and fall, and fall. You've got to be able to feel the fear and do it anyway. You've got to be able to go through the pain and let yourself just fall with it. And when we come... To make it a little bit personal as well, back to March 20... When did COVID pandemic... 2020?

And there was several months for me of free falling. And I was so used to creating change in my life. I'm only in my mid 40s and I've already had three careers. I'm fine with change. I would see myself who is somebody who is very adaptable, and yet the business is called Adaptas, because that really resonated with me, which, for me... I remember having a conversation with a Spanish friend of mine, who said, in Spain, people say adaptar, and to mean, get on with it, right? So just get on with it. Go through it. And you'll be fine on the other side. And don't hold back.

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And the thing is that the brain and the body loves novelty. We learn through novelty. We learn through emotional experiences. So if something is... Excuse my language. Scaring the shit out of you, then that's a great thing. Because if something is scaring the shit out of you, then you're having an emotional reaction to it. And if you can accept, "Okay. This is scary. This feels rough. This feels horrible," sometimes, we've decided to make the change. And sometimes, the change has been put upon us by the situation.

If you can just make peace with... Okay. There's going to be a period of days, or weeks, or months, or maybe even years, where this is going to feel uncomfortable. However, because I'm going to be emotionally engaged by whatever's happening, then my brain and my body is going to be learning so much. And I am going to come out the other side feeling stronger, knowing myself better and understanding myself to be able to then, as Laura said, take what has happened, take the change, take the impact of that, take the learning, and apply it to then whatever comes next, and potentially apply it in a much more proactive manner rather than a reactive manner, if that makes sense.

Shannon Tipton:

That totally makes sense. That completely makes sense. So then, are you saying a core strength that an L&D person can embrace here is, not only the ability to change, but the ability to accept the change?

Celine Mullins:

Yes. Acceptance. When Laura was talking about it there. Acceptance. The free falling and the acceptance were what were really coming out for me there. And I think that the problem is, if we don't accept, then we fight against. And then, our whole body is busy fighting against. So therefore, we can't take on the learning.

So yes, you're having an emotional reaction. However, if your sympathetic nervous system is staying activated, where it's trying to protect you, and all the obstacles are coming up and you're still in protection mode, then you're blocking yourself from going through the learning process and from really coming out the other side.

So therefore, if you can move into acceptance. And acceptance doesn't come easy to many of us. It's a muscle that needs to be built. And back to what I said earlier about activating the parasympathetic nervous system, to create acceptance means proactively activating our parasympathetic nervous system several times during a day, to create that acceptance, to feel safe to move through.

Shannon Tipton:

Interesting.

Laura Overton:

That is so interesting. Because when you talk like that, Celine, it makes you think, when you hold on, you think... We've all held onto things. It makes you very rigid, doesn't it? It's brittle. You're brittle. You think you're strong, but actually you're brittle.

But what you're saying here is to build up that flex, that resilience, I guess, the ability to bend without coming out of shape is going to be so critical. And there are physical things that we can do in order to be able to embrace that. Oh my god. Shannon, she's got us wanting more.

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Celine Mullins:

You know what? I just love how Laura just can take whatever I've said and make sense of it. Like in two or three sentences, you're able to say, "Yes, this is it." It's just amazing.

And yes, certainly, again, the research has found there are techniques. And I'm very happy to share some of them with you because they're all techniques that we know and that we understand. Some of them take time and some of them don't. And to activate our parasympathetic nervous system to help us build that acceptance muscle.

So if you want me to share a few things that has been found, then I'll go for it. Okay. So I think I'm getting the nods here, everybody.

Laura Overton:

Everyone's nodding.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah, absolutely. We have to remember, we're on a podcast here. Laura and I are nodding.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah. And I'm like, "Yeah, okay."

Shannon Tipton:

Yes, tell us more. But for everyone out there, it's not just about... We hear the word change a lot and accepting of change. And then, we also hear the words flexibility and adaptability a lot. That's also something that's part of L&D vernacular, if you will.

But I think what you both are adding to this very common vernacular within L&D is the descriptors around it. It's not just about change. It's about accepting the change and adapting to the change. It's not just about strength. It's about recognizing strength versus rigidity. And it's about not being flexible. It's about being bending, bendable, to where you're not breaking or holding yourself back.

So I'm loving where this conversation is going. Because all of these attributes, when you put them together in the basket, allow us to take those smaller steps to taking the bold action that we need to take in order to impact and influence change as we move forward. So I'm loving the way that this conversation is going. And Celine, yes. So now that we've got this broader picture in front of us, now, what's the practical behind it? Help us.

Celine Mullins:

Okay. So actually, just as you were talking, there's load of different things that came to my mind, which was, absolutely, flexibility, adaptability. These words are being used all the time. What do those words mean to each of us? They're only words. So we're hearing these words being bandied about the whole time.

So what I've really come to realize in the last few years is it's about working out what's my version of this. So because we all have very different experience when, as I say, either we decide to make change or change is put upon us. We all react in different ways. And so, it's about creating our own version.

And there's some amazing people who are on the that cutting edge, as I mentioned earlier, neurobiology, neuroscience, change, coaching, leadership, everything. And there's a guy called Alan Fogel, who... If you have a reading list for the podcast, I can send on a few recommendations.

Shannon Tipton:

Absolutely.

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Celine Mullins:

He talks about different states, right? That we're in. So when something happens that we weren't expecting, we move into a dysregulated state. So everything that we talk about, the fight, flight, that everybody will be familiar with listening to this. So we move into that, what he calls, dysregulated state.

And when we are feeling fine, and we're really focused and we're concentrating, and we're working on projects, and we're bringing people together, and we're collaborating, and we're really focused. We're, what he says is, in a modulated state. And then, when we're in a place... Come back to the word acceptance. Where we really feel connected to ourselves, to other people. We are very relaxed, and open, and creative, in flow. That's what he calls restorative, the restorative state.

And what he has discovered over the years is that, if you are in the dysregulated state, you can't move from a dysregulated state straight into a restorative state. You have to move from being dysregulated. So in that fight or flight to modulated, which has been focused into the restorative state. So you can't jump. You've got to move from one to the other. We move back and forth all the time.

The only thing is that... What I've really realized in the last few years is that most of us spend the majority of our time in that modulated state because we are focused. We are concentrating. So if you think about your job role, your day-to-day, you're in a very focused, modulated state, where there's things to be done. There's meetings to be attended often. Especially over the last two years, we're going from meeting to meeting to meeting, and project to project. And we're pulling so many different things together. So a lot of us are in that modulated state. And I think that very few of us are moving into a restorative state as much as we need to.

So for example, when you go for a walk in nature, that's when you move into a restorative state. So ask yourself, "How often do I actually go out into nature?" So if you're not able to walk, how often do you just go out and look at the trees, look at the flowers? And because this is what brings you into that restorative state. And most people will say, "Actually, I have a really busy week." And some people are looking after children or caring for elderly parents, and it's meeting, meeting, meeting. And in between, they're looking after everybody else and/or maybe watching television to chill out. But watching television doesn't really put us into a restorative state.

And so, people will go through their Monday to Friday being in that modulated state, maybe moving into dysregulated state when there's too many emails coming in, and very rarely going into that restorative state. And many people only go into the restorative state maybe at the weekend, if they take some time out and go for walk in nature, or whatever.

So what the research is showing us is that... And everything that I'm going to list off here are... There's been at least three to six peer-reviewed journal articles that have been published on these items that help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which puts you into that restorative state. So we've mentioned the walk in nature. If you cannot get out for the walk in nature, as I say, just sitting and looking at the trees. If you like the sea, looking at the waves and focusing on your breath, while you look at that piece of nature, is going to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.

Research is also showing that, if you can't get outdoors, even just having a lovely picture on your wall or on your screen saver. If you love the sea or you love the beach, making sure that it's that, that really resonates with you. Or if you love trees, if you love flowers, if you love fields full of puppies or whatever, get that up there. So that it's something that you can look at, and you can focus just on that, and not be thinking about a million other things. Even just doing that for a few minutes is going to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.

Of course, then there's other things like meditation, which a lot of people will say to me, "Well, look, that takes time and I don't have time." Just coming back to focusing on your breath and paying attention to what's going on in your body, and for a few minutes, is going

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to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.

Some of the really simple things you can do, thinking about somebody who you really love and care for, or somebody that you know really loves and cares for you. Thinking about them and thinking about them in detail can activate your parasympathetic nervous system. Thinking about the future and something that feels hopeful for you, focusing on... Whether it's people or something that you're going to do, or something that makes you feel hopeful, is going to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.

Petting an animal. Shannon, earlier, you were saying... I don't know if the dog came in. But petting the animal. So it could be a monkey, whatever you have. Pet the animal. That activates their parasympathetic nervous system, which in turn, because of the contagion that goes between us as beings, it activates our parasympathetic nervous system.

So all through COVID, when I've been on virtual sessions or meetings with people, I've been saying, "No, don't lock the dog out. Don't lock the cat out. Let them come in. And just let them sit beside you or on your lap and pet them," because that activates their parasympathetic nervous system, in turn, it activates your parasympathetic nervous system.

And a few other things, very quickly. Obviously, things like Tai chi, yoga. Again, peer-reviewed articles have found that Tai chi, yoga have a huge impact on activation in your parasympathetic nervous system.

And then, another thing is focusing on your own strengths. What I have found is that a lot of people don't recognize their own strengths, can't name them, and can't say them out loud. So if you can, maybe ask some other people in your life, maybe colleagues, maybe friends, maybe families, say, ask them, "What are my top three strengths that you see?" And then, have them tell you. And then, it's so wonderful to receive that from other people. Because sometimes, we go, "Yeah, okay. I recognize that in myself." And sometimes, people will say things, and you go, "Wow. I just took that for granted," or "I didn't even recognize this is something that makes me special and unique." So focusing on our strengths and really understanding those strengths can help activate our parasympathetic nervous system.

There's loads more. And for me, it's about thinking, right? "Am I spending most of my time modulated and dysregulated? And how can I move myself into that restorative state?"

And as I said earlier, what I really realized in the past few years was that I was spending most of my life going between modulated and dysregulated all the time, and very little time moving into restorative, because I wasn't giving myself any time out. And it might have been just a yoga class once a week. That's not enough.

If you can, a few times a day, focus on nature, focus on your breath, focus on your strengths, focus on hope, focus on somebody you love, just for a few minutes, a few times a day. You're going to give yourself a much better chance because you're activating that parasympathetic nervous system. You're helping your system feel safe. You're moving into acceptance. And then, you're feeling more open, and creative, and willing to adapt to change.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. That was very powerful. That was a whole lot of goodness happening there.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

I've got my list. And what I'm taking away from all of this... And Laura, I'll get to you. Is you're taking care of yourself.

And a previous person that I was speaking with... The way that she said this, and we've said

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this before, is that you know on the airplanes, they tell you, you got to put your oxygen mask on yourself first before you go, and you help other people.

And this whole list of things that you've listed is all about taking care of yourself first before you can help your organization, or help the people around you, or just to continue to be productive throughout your day.

So it is about taking care of self as an important core strength before you move into other sorts of actions that may or may not end up being as impactful.

Celine Mullins:

Exactly.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah. So Laura, what were your thoughts?

Laura Overton:

Well, I was just really interested about looking around for a book that I've got. Mine was on a webinar recently with a great author, [Paulo Coelho 00:44:57]. And I'll give you the book for the show notes.

Shannon Tipton:

The show notes. Okay.

Laura Overton:

But one of the things that Paulo was recommending that we do was to go out and ask people what they feel our strengths are. And just reaching out to 20 people just by SMS, just to do that.

And it's something we've been asking people in this podcast series, season two, what kind of situations have revealed their own core strengths? And we've been getting people to reflect. But we hadn't actually realized the power of that reflection in helping us all move on. The individuals, who, perhaps, have been reflecting how good that has been for them to be able to move on.

I know that, certainly, when I was going through that kind of process of really finding who you are and what your contribution's going to be, there is an element of needing to do that. And I hadn't realized until you said it, Celine, that just identifying that in yourself is a way of being able to release the next level of your professional career. So that's really eye-opening, for me, in terms of helping people.

And I'm just very conscious, Shannon, when we were running the Emerging Stronger masterclass, there was this element of... Because of the way that the class was run globally, people were encouraging each other, and building each other up, and spotting strengths in each other, which then created opportunities for people to move into their new space.

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And again, maybe it was an unknown thing that we were doing. But now, we can label it, Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah. I mean, yes.

Laura Overton:

Now, we know what we were doing and why it was working.

Celine Mullins:

You knew it instinctively.

Laura Overton:

It is.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Laura Overton:

It's an instinctive thing, but we need to be intentional. So we need to be intentional about creating those opportunities for us to be able to breathe. I think that's what...

In all sense, as you went through that list, Celine, each one of those things allows us to breathe through the tension and get through to the other side. And I think that was the thing that was the most significant thing for me. So many different examples.

I felt myself breathing through that list with you. And I don't know, but did you find that, Shannon? Was there anything in that list that really jumped out for you personally?

Shannon Tipton:

Absolutely. Just finding time to look outside the window. And it's amazing to me that, in the past, a lot of us would've said, "You're wasting time," or "You're being lazy," or what have you, by kicking back and looking out the window, or playing with the dog.

And now, really, there is purpose for that. We might not be doing it with purpose, but we find ourselves instinctively staring out the window, or looking at that favorite picture, or petting the dog. I've got both the dogs here with me. They've hung out on many a conversation now.

And I think it's amazing how we have made that shift. And I think the pandemic has had a lot to do with that, is that we've had a chance to sit back and really take some time for introspection throughout the course of a day. I think that's very important. And I think that's a good core strength.

Now, to talk about core strengths, you said something that I found was interesting, which was, first, to having an understanding of your own strengths. And I think, Laura, you're absolutely right there where we've asked people to identify certain strengths. And people do have trouble articulating what their strengths are.

I know. I do. I struggle with that, too, when people ask me what are my strengths. I always have to sit back, and think about it, and organize it. And I don't know exactly what to say. So I think it's interesting that people do that. And those strengths then become supportive, don't they?

So you've got something that's core to you that supports other strengths that you may need when trying to be successful on the job, right? And some of the core strengths that some of the other people that we have interviewed for this series... They've listed strengths, like

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courage, and curiosity, and resilience, vulnerability, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, et cetera.

So those are all strengths that will lead us to success, right? In the workplace, or in our careers, or even personally. Are there underpinning strengths that we should be thinking about?

So if we think about the strength of curiosity or creativity, right? So we think of that as a strength for what we do. Is there an underpinning? Is there a strength that underpins that? I'm curious.

Celine Mullins:

I guess there's a few things I'm thinking as you're asking that question, Shannon. And firstly, for me, it's back to, well, what I said earlier about they're only words. So what does that mean to me? So what is curiosity? What does it mean to me?

And I think, for most of us, we only get to, I guess, have our understanding of something challenged and/or widened through our conversations with other people. So what does curiosity mean to you?

I remember, a few years ago, I was working with a guy one-to-one. And there was something... There was a whole lot of changes he was looking to make in his job role, and life, and family, and everything. And I said to him, "What would happen if you could approach all of this with curiosity?"

And it was so funny. He reacted. He just was like, "Curiosity? Curious? What the hell does that mean?" He's a lovely, lovely guy. Really, we got on so well. His reaction to it was just like, "I don't have time to be curious. I have five kids, a wife, and I'm..." He was at C-suite level. He's like, "I don't have time to be curious."

And so, anyway, we explored that. And at the time I was thinking that whole thing of curiosity killed the cat, which has negative connotations. It's like, if you're curious, you're going to be knocked down, or fall off the wall, or whatever, and not survive.

So every single... It's about thinking, "What does this word mean for me?" Whether it's flexibility, adaptability, curiosity, openness, let me have conversations to try and just say what it means to me rather than just thinking about it. And then, compare it with other people. What's their version of it? And what do they do to live this? And could I do anything to... Again, sometimes, it's about taking baby steps and risks to live with more curiosity or flexibility, as I say.

And the other thing is that what I have seen over the last, again, 15 years of my career is that underpinning. So my head actually went somewhere else in instead of underpinning strengths of what's there. It was actually underpinning a lot of our experience as human beings, is our messages that we feed to ourselves, such as, "I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. I'm not as good as other people." And I have seen...

I mean, I cannot tell you because I have developed very close relationships with clients that I work with. And these are people at all levels, in all sorts of different sectors, in all sorts of different roles. And I would say, 99% of us have something there, that is, "I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. Or I'm not as good as other people. Or I'm not... I don't deserve this."

And so, from my perspective, dig into that. Recognize what the message is for you because that's your main obstacle. The obstacles are not other people. The obstacles are not all the emails you get in every day, and you think, "I don't have time to do what's good for me," or to make change, or to create a different way of doing things. The obstacle is that message that's in there. And just make peace with the fact that, look, most of us have it.

So what is for you and how can you make peace with it? And it's back to... It's not

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necessarily overcoming it. It's accepting it. This is part of being human and that's okay.

Laura Overton:

It was amazing. Because Shannon, when you were saying, these are the sorts of skills, I was writing them down, and you only said, "What's underpinning it?" I'm thinking, "That's not one of the questions we're supposed to be asking." And I thought I was going to draw in it, drawing this kind of foundation block underneath.

And the one word I ended up underneath it was providing... It was about permission, giving ourselves permission to do those things. So what stops us being creative, and flexible, is that we don't give ourselves for any...

It's exactly what you were saying, Celine, is that we need to... That strength of allowing us, giving ourselves permission, just to try to do, to spend time... Permission to do something different, permission to be a little bit bolder, seems, to me, to be that core foundational strength that we have, that we're permission granters.

Celine Mullins:

See how she rolled it up again so easily into one word, permission. Amazing.

Laura Overton:

Shannon spent too many meetings with me now, thinking to myself, "Why doesn't she take this opportunity to roll it up into one word?"

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I realize that I threw you a curve ball. But as I was thinking about the different skills that we were investigating here, there has to be something that's going to make certain skills more successful than others.

And what I wrote down is exactly... As you were talking, I wrote this down. Was understanding what a certain word means because you are right. What curiosity means to me, it may not be the same as what it means to you or to Laura.

But also, having that inner vocabulary. What you said, Laura, about permission. The permission to think well of myself, or to allow myself to make mistakes, or to not have that negative speak, that we all seem to fall back on.

And so, Laura, is there anything else that I'm missing that might have popped up in your research, in regard to skills, core strengths, that we should be paying attention to?

Laura Overton:

I think a lot of the people on the podcast have really flagged up a number of those areas. I think our ability to put our own masks on. I love that. I love that analogy, Shannon. I think it's really important.

So our own ability to be able to challenge our assumptions, the core strengths of critical thinking, being willing to let go, I think, is a really important strength, that I have seen in high-performing learning teams, and also leaders of high-performing learning teams. They are willing to go and do things in other parts of the business, where they're exposed and they're vulnerable. And they're giving themselves, again, that permission to try something new and to let go of what's defined them.

And I think one of those things that we've been collectively, and Celine, we've been talking to you about this as well, is it's this kind of thinking habits that we have, how we see ourselves, and being cognizant of how we see ourselves, and how we define our own value, how we do... Looking inwards or speaking with someone today.

And it was so amazing. It was a past person who's been on the program, but she was talking

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about the fact... We have to focus on our inner game in order to excel at outer game. And I think that's really what this whole process has been about, when we've been thinking about what's brought Michelle, and Shannon, and I together about Emerging Stronger.

And we hadn't realized that's what it was going to be about, but Celine, you've really shown us that that's absolutely what it's been about. But we haven't had the vocabulary to express that. But how powerful that is, to focus in on that inner game, how we see ourselves, how we perceive ourselves, influences our outward behavior.

And what you've given us today is these tricks for... Not just trick, but it's important, that they are tricks. They're principles. They're proven ways to be able to sharpen our inner game, and look at ourselves differently, and give ourselves permission to be the people we need to be, rather than the people we've been in the past.

Celine Mullins:

And the thing is, as well, that sometimes, we really Need courage to investigate our inner game. It doesn't necessarily come easily or naturally to everybody. So find somebody who can support you with that and help you to reflect on your inner game.

Shannon Tipton:

Let's flip it. So if L&D professionals did not pay attention to their inner voice, if they did not rethink how they talked to themselves, their inner vocabulary, what's going to happen?

Laura Overton:

In a tweet, they're going to be-

Shannon Tipton:

Laura.

Laura Overton:

I've seen it in myself. I've seen it in others. We're going to be defensive. We're going to hang onto the past. We're only going to look for evidence that proves that we were right. And we won't move on.

Shannon Tipton:

There we go, in a tweet. Celine, what do you think?

Celine Mullins:

I wholeheartedly agree. I think that it's back to understanding how learning takes place, learning how to learn. And if we, as learning professionals, are not putting the work in to understand our inner game and what supports us to learn, then how can we expect to support and help others reach the heights that they can reach?

Shannon Tipton:

Right. So if we see these traits popping up in ourselves, then we know we need to take a step back then, don't we? So if we find ourselves being defensive or protective over our spaces, then maybe it's time to take a step back and think about what is driving this

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particular behavior at this moment.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Yeah. Okay. All right. So real quick, let's tie this up. And one of the things that we've asked some of the other participants of this podcast is, if you were mentoring an L&D professional right now, what is the most important core strength you would advise them to develop, and the one thing that they would need to do in order to get started? Celine?

Celine Mullins:

I think, just based on that conversation we've been having, and it's something that's really... I'm very aware of, and the more I understand about what's happening as we change and learn in the brain and body, it is the core strength of being able to self-reflect.

And when I say self-reflect, it's to be able to ask ourselves exactly what you said there, Shannon. So say, today, or this week, "Have I noticed that I have been defensive? Have I noticed that I have become dysregulated, like emotional, angry, upset about something, or overwhelmed? And what can I do?"

And as Laura said, all the biases that we have, where we hold on, and we look for the evidence to prove what we believe to be true and ask. And just even the first step is recognizing that. Just take a moment to say, to ask ourselves, "Have I been any of these things?" Or, "Where has my head been? How have I been feeling?" And even to start recognizing that self-reflection, not just, as I said earlier, conceptually, not just in our mind, notice that in our body.

So right now, if I think about being self-defensive, I can really feel it in my shoulders, where we go into that shoulders-up protection mode. So start to recognize that in your own body and think about the feedback loop that's going from your brainstem, there's a whole load of different nerves that are going from your gut to your brain.

Help them be your friend in your self-reflection. So notice what's happening. Where are you feeling that tension, that defensiveness, that unwillingness to change in your body? Get to know it. So get to know your mind a bit better, get to know your body. So develop that strength of self-reflection from the top of your head, down all the way to your toes and to your fingers.

Shannon Tipton:

I love that. Thank you. Laura, what would you do?

Laura Overton:

I think, if I was mentoring someone, I'd suggest to them that they need to really connect to their personal why to be able to identify it because that's... Gives us our purpose. It gives us our direction.

And how I would suggest that we get there is that we really work with our trusted close friends, because they will help us, point us in the right direction, but they'll also challenge us when we're drifting from the things that are really, really essentially...

So our community, our close friends, professionally, personally, really will help us to be able to do that. So connect to the why, and then connect to the people who are going to keep you connected to your why, if that makes sense. But Shannon, what about you? What would

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your recommendation be?

Shannon Tipton:

My recommendation would be in a couple of different ways. First off is definitely the why. I would mentor someone to ask why more. I would have them develop their questioning skills, not in a bad way. Not to just go fleecing around the organization and just asking nonsense questions, but really deep questioning and deep listening to what people are saying.

But then, also, for yourself. I would mentor them to take time to continue to learn, take time to read, take time to watch, take time to listen. I don't think, as L&D professionals, we take enough self-time to really nurture our own brains and nurture our own bodies. And so, my mentoring advice would take that dual prong of how we can help the business more, but how we can also help ourselves more.

Laura Overton:

Wow.

Shannon Tipton:

So...

Laura Overton:

What a range of subjects we've covered in this conversation today.

Shannon Tipton:

I know. And it has been fabulous. It-

Celine Mullins:

This is only part one.

Shannon Tipton:

This is only part one. We need a part two and a part three. This has just been information that's been very full. I feel like my cup is full, but more importantly, not in a bad way. I feel like it's full of good stuff that I need to drink right now in order to

Celine Mullins:

To nourish yourself.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. To nourish yourself, exactly. And I want to thank you, Celine, for taking some time to talk with us today.

Celine has had a tough travel journey getting from Ireland to Los Angeles. And I really appreciate that you've taken time to have this really robust conversation with us. So thank you so much.

Celine Mullins:

Thank you. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I'm just delighted to be here. And it's just wonderful to have this conversation because I think we could talk for hours and hours, and

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days, and weeks about all of this.

Shannon Tipton:

I know we could.

Celine Mullins:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

I know we could...

Celine Mullins:

But I am looking forward to my bagel and cream cheese with my continental breakfast.

Shannon Tipton:

There we go.

Laura Overton:

We better release you.

Shannon Tipton:

And Laura, as always, thank you for your wisdom and intellect, and just your selfless giving. So we appreciate that as well.

So once again, here we are with Celine Mullins, Laura Overton, myself, Shannon Tipton, cofounders, Laura and I, and along with Michelle Ockers, of Emerging Stronger with this Emerging podcast series two.

And all of the information that we have discussed here in our conversations today will be in the show notes, along with additional resources coming from Celine, Laura, and myself.

So thank you everyone who is listening. And please let us know whether or not this episode was a benefit for you. We look forward to talking to you again soon. Bye for now.