

Learning Uncut Episode 27
Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers
Hosted by Laura Overton



Hosted by Laura Overton, Michelle Ockers & Shannon Tipton

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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

Laura Overton:

I'd love to welcome you all to this edition of the Emergent Series Two Learning Uncut podcast. My name's Laura Overton. I'm the co-founder of Emerging Stronger, and people know me really as an industry analyst, mainly because I'm just dead curious about what's going on in the industry and how we can really support learning and development professionals. So today I am so excited to introduce all of you, and in fact, to introduce our two contributors today to each other. I have worked with Michelle Ockers as a co-founder with me on Emerging Stronger, through this podcast series, Learning Uncut, and through her work as a learning strategist and L&D capability expert. So welcome, Michelle, to your own podcast. Brilliant to have you on the other side to be able to grill you for a change. Thank you for that.

Michelle Ockers:

Pleasure to be here, Laura.

Laura Overton:

Great. And also, Michelle, I wanted you to meet Andrea Day, because I've worked with Andrea here in the UK through all of her different kind of roles as really a director in many different roles of learning, with a very strong background on technology enabled learning and really solving problems with learning innovation. Andrea is the CEO of BAD. I love calling you BAD because it's just so brilliant, but I know it's Best At Digital. You have been such a bad influence on my life for so long that getting the two of you together is just brilliant

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

news to me. So welcome to you as well.

Andrea Day:

Thanks, Laura. Nice to meet you, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

And you too, Andrea. I think sometimes bad is good too, right?

Laura Overton:

So good. So good.

Andrea Day:

Absolutely.

Laura Overton:

And that's what we need, a little bit of this BAD influence today, because this is the last in this podcast series where we've been exploring the core strengths that we need as learning and development professionals. So we've been looking at the opportunities learning and developments have to kind of create change and have impact, but also the strengths that we need internally to be able to do that. And ladies, we've got real and personal in this podcast series, so let me turn to you and ask you about the biggest opportunities that you see learning and development at the moment. Because we're coming out of a really difficult time and people have been under a lot of pressure. So Andrea, what do you see as being the most significant opportunities that we've got as we kind of emerge?

Andrea Day:

So I think the time of where we are now is both terrifying and exciting. So terrifying in the pace of change, what businesses are facing, what L&D are facing predominantly, but also exciting because the accelerated nature of hybrid working has forced people to really rethink their L&D strategies and quickly. So I think there's opportunity in there and there's risk in there, but I do think it's a place for L&D to really make a difference. So if I look at, where is the opportunity really? I think the biggest thing for me is really working closely with the business. If I look at most of our customers, they've all got existing portfolios to manage, they've got new learning requirements hitting them every day, because their businesses are working in different ways, with hybrid working, with new management, with customer response teams at home.

All of that's creating a demand on them to rethink existing training and portfolio, but also it's about how are they working differently as a team? Because their interventions are being designed in different ways. They're having to embrace teams and Zoom calls much more than they ever did before. Virtual classrooms have taken over from traditional bums on seats. All of that dynamic, I think the real opportunity is helping the business prioritize. There's a lot of demand, and I think the number one thing is about focus on prioritization, because you cannot do it all. Not unless people are going to double size in their L&D teams, there are going to be certain things that you're just going to have to prioritize.

Laura Overton:

Absolutely. I think that's one of the things that we've really been picking up as we've been working together as an Emerging Stronger team, but we've been focusing as well on kind of the sense that we need to take bold action. So Michelle, for you personally, what does bold

Learning Uncut Episode 27 Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

action mean in that context that Andrea's just set out?

Michelle Ockers:

I think generally, and I've had the benefit of course - I've either listened to all of the podcast episodes so far or read all the transcripts. So I've had a chance to feed off what everybody else has talked about. And each one of our guests has talked about it a little bit differently. Some have talked about having the courage of your conviction, some have talked about having a philosophy, some have talked about experimenting. I think it boils down to being able to take risks. And those risks come in all shapes and sizes and all different types of forms depending on where you are at and what lies in front of you. But being able to try something new perhaps, being able to engage someone in a different conversation, being able to challenge the status quo, being able to speak up when you know you can add value.

So it's just wherever you are at, being able to look at what lies in front of you and understanding how you can add value and being willing to take a risk. And I think partly, what that means is to Andrea's point, thinking differently. And Laura, I think that five thinking habits for a smarter, better L&D that came out of our last podcast series would be worth putting in the show notes, and looking up and looking out. And it's just really informing yourself, not just around what's going on in the business, what's going on in my industry, what could I bring to the situation in front of me to try something different, even if I haven't done it before, if I think it's going to have better impact and make a bigger difference and be of more value right here right now.

Laura Overton:

That's brilliant. And there's a lot of nodding going on amongst the three of us at the moment. We have tried to look in the interviews, haven't we, about it being a very personal thing. Because I think as an industry, we're super good at understanding what the different models are and what we ought to be doing, but what are the core strengths that we need for ourselves in order to make tough decisions? So we have gone a little bit personal on this podcast series. And so Andrea, I'm going to put the spotlight on you for a moment and ask you, you've done so many different things in the times that I've seen you, really tough decisions that you've had to make as a business leader, has there been a situation where you've had to go through, maybe some tough decisions, and actually drawn some core strengths or recognized some core strengths in yourself that's made it easier? Would you tell us a story? Tell us a story.

Andrea Day:

Okay. So I'll make it personal and business at the same time. So probably the toughest journey was when we had a big restructuring, we just got bought, and we've been through a few of those as you know, Laura. And with being bought comes from restructuring. And so we had to really look at what that meant for the team. We knew there was going to be a journey they were going to go on and with any restructuring there's always pain involved in that. And at the same time, I found out that my father was going to be passing away with two weeks' notice. So I was drawn between doing the right thing by my family and being there for my father, but equally, I was a business leader and I had an immense sense of heart and brain that I had to be there for my team through this restructuring.

So I think at that time, it's really hard to know what the choices are. It's really hard to know how to do good by your team and do good by your family. And so the number one thing that I did was build a plan, because I realized that if I could have some structure around something where structure had been taken away from me, then I would be able to cope and I would be able to manage better. And I would also be able to work well with my family. So I built a plan for my care with my father and I also built a plan for the restructuring, which allowed me to be involved in it, but behind the scenes. So I worked with my team. I had trust, which I think is incredible in those situations. I had to delegate situations, which I normally

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

would've led, and then just watch behind the scenes to manage that situation through. And as a result of that, I was able to come out of it feeling okay about the choices I made. So that's probably the one that's probably the most personal and business.

Laura Overton:

Wow. And how powerful for all of us. I think it's almost like a moment there to actually really reflect on the fact that the choices we make are always about balance, aren't they? They're always. And the fact that you kind of took control in a situation where you just can have no control. That's quite lot core inner strength there to be able to do that. So thank you so much for sharing that one with us. Michelle, I know you've asked that question to so many people, but no one's asked it of you yet.

Michelle Ockers:

I just want to comment on Andrea's point about control. I think that's a really interesting thing, because to take risks means we need to accept we can't control everything. And my situation I want to talk about is a situation where I found myself out of control, and part of the response was eventually when I got through the emotional challenges of accepting the situation, was regaining some sort of control. Quite briefly, I was in an organization. I'd been in a leadership role, leading an L&D team for several years. I'd set the team up from scratch, and it had always been very impactful and valuable and valued in the organization.

Change in senior leadership, change in business strategy, restructuring and redundancies going on, people in crisis everywhere. And all of a sudden my team was being blocked out of anything important in the business. And my response was like, I tried to appeal to reason, I tried to make logical arguments. "We should be involved in this activity over here because that's our job and we've got the expertise." But people are protecting their turf, right? I looked at my network and my allies, but it appeared I was just in the wrong camp. And all of the people who would normally be my supporters and allies in my network and the organization were on the outer as well. So I was very frustrated and I went through this really big emotional response initially, this sense of injustice, this sense of grieving, and to your point, Andrea, this loss of control. What do I hear?

But then at a certain point when kind of the emotions regulated a little, I looked at it and I thought, well, I just have to face reality. If I can't influence here, what can I do to carve out a better outcome for my team members and for me? So then it was about getting myself back in a position where I was making some choices, but grounded in the reality of what I saw around me. And I think in terms of strengths, that emotional self-regulation, I learned a lot around the place of emotions and understanding that not everything that's happening around you in the business world is logical. Everyone's going through crisis, emotions, things going on. But at some point, my self worth kicked in and I thought, I am not my job. This isn't about me. Myra Roldan, one of our guests, talked about this, separating yourself from your job and not taking it personally, how important that is to build resilience.

I've got a core belief that's carried me through lots of situations that I'll always land on my feet. So when that core belief kicks in, it's like, okay, I don't know what that's going to look like. And Laura, you talked in the last episode with Dr. Celine Mullins about liminality, and that at a point in transition, sometimes you don't know what's coming next. And I think being able to hold yourself in that space and managing yourself through that space gives you strength. Yeah. So the situation didn't turn out the way I wanted it to turn out in one sense, but as doors close others open. And I went on into a very great role subsequently through the strength of my network.

Laura Overton:

And I think one of the things that really reflects in both of your stories is the fact that these tough times also then help strengths to grow, help you to recognize, help you to reflect, help

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

you to realize actually what's taken you through once a situation can be applied in another. So I think when you combine that with some of the other stories that we've heard on this podcast so far, strengths like courage, curiosity, resilience, vulnerability, agility, working with other people. Andrea listening to you as well, you're talking about being able to delegate, being able to trust, which is really the foundations of working in community, which has kind of come up from a number of the other areas as well.

I think we're good, but we're not good at talking about this. And obviously we've got a podcast on this and a whole Emerging Stronger masterclass. Actually what we're really interested in is what we need to do to actually improve the choices that we make. It's not just talking about having the skill, is it? You can't really have a skill in some of these areas, but these are the areas that are informing our choices, which is why, Andrea, we wanted to have this conversation with you today, because I know in the last few years you've been looking at what's behind behaviour change to make that choice to make a plan, rather than to fly in the face of it. So you spent a lot of your day working with others on how to help shift behaviour, but can you help us out maybe with some definitions here? We're talking about skill, we are talking about strengths, we talk about behaviours. Set us straight or at least put us on the same path as you for a while.

Andrea Day:

And it's not easy, right? I think, I mean, we are in industries full of words on competencies, capabilities, skills, behaviours. So I was talking to one of our behavioural consultants and trying to make it simple because it's not simple. And we're the worst industry for coming up with new names and new words for everything. And what Harriet said at the time was, think of a behaviour as something that involves a person, has an observable action, and happens at a certain time. And if those three criteria are in place, pretty much, you can probably say it's a behaviour. So we call it PAT – Person, Action, Time - which is really simple to me because I like remembering stuff. So whenever I'm looking at a problem, I will look for PAT. What's the person, what's the action that's observable, and what time do they do it?

So if I give you a really simple example of that, we were working on a cybersecurity program, and everybody wants to be cyber secure, and you'll get all sorts of objectives set up in workshops. But in order to be cyber secure, you have to know what behaviours lead you towards that. And a really simple example of pattern action is a person switches off their laptop at the end of the day. And that behaviour will reduce the risk of cyber. And so when our behavioural science consultants work with the business on this, we were not just talking about what outcomes they want to see, we drilled them on what are the behaviours that make a difference to that particular need, and I think the bit that's been most fascinating for me over the last couple years.

I mean, we've been in learning for a long time, we've done comps for a long time, and we're always about how do we make our best better? And bringing behavioural science into the mix of what we do was to make our best better. We've always historically looked at, what do people need to do as a result of learning? But they don't always. They might know what they need to do, but they don't always, because their behaviour isn't demonstrated.

And so again, talking to one of our behavioural science consultants to give some context, we talked about COVID. And Harriet would say, well, okay, if you think of COVID, we all know we need to stand a meter apart. And we've all been told to stand a meter apart, but we don't always. And so when you look at the power of behavioural science, what they will also do is look at the person and the environment. So the reason there are one meter sticky notes on the floor when we go to the shops is because of our behaviour. So we know not to, but we do. And therefore the prompts and the visual cues that are around us in the environment are there to recognize the fact that we don't always behave in the way that we think we should.

Laura Overton:

That's brilliant. The fact that you want to drill things down and make

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

them simple is so helpful for all of us really, because we do like to complicate things. I think one of the things that I've loved about doing a bit of reading into behavioural science is some of the simpler models that are out there. And I just wondered, Andrea, before kind of bringing Michelle back into the conversation, whether you might just run us through some of the other kind of frameworks or models that you find helpful from behaviour science to kind of tackle that issue that you and Harriet have been talking about.

Andrea Day:

So I think there are many. So the ones that I guess we've leaned towards are COM-B and the EAST framework. COM-B really, because it's all about understanding what levers can you pull to make sure that the interventions you put out there are going to change the right behaviours. So with COM-B, it's really about understanding, does an individual have the capability, do they have the opportunity, and do they have the motivation? And all three of those are interwoven, and if all three are in place, then you can affect the behaviour and you can influence the behaviour. So when we look at COM-B model, it's about asking the right questions to really understand, does someone have a capability? Do they know how to do what you're asking them to do? And is the opportunity there? Are they working in a climate where they're allowed to do what they need to do? Are there any blockers to that? And do they want to do it?

And all of that is really, really important when you're talking about intervention design and working out what levers you can use. And then when you look at something like this framework, and we have our own mantra, we've adjusted some of the frameworks to create something which we feel is right for digital. So we talk about, do they want to do it? Is it easy? And do I connect with others? And that plays into behavioural science, and we are looking at behavioural science principles when we are designing all of our interventions so that the practice we're putting in is based on evidence. And I think if there's one thing, if I look back over our past, it's really drawing on evidence. Starting to use data. It's using what academics are using every day in research and bringing into our everyday practice. And that's what we are now doing more and more of with our work and the stuff that we're working on.

Laura Overton:

I mean, it's just so useful to have those simple frameworks, because they're kind of things that we all know about, aren't they? I was first introduced to behavioural science through the Nudge book, by Thaler and Sunstein, I can never say the name properly, and I love the latest version. They say that often when you read the books and the textbooks, they think that we all ought to be able to think like Albert Einstein, store as much in memory as Google does in the cloud and be able to exercise the willpower of Mahatma Gandhi. When actually most of us can't even do long division or remember our anniversary or say no to a cream cake. And I think that's a really important aspect. These frameworks are simple, but they're not things that we kind of put into practice.

And I think, Michelle, this PAT model about the behaviours that we're seeing is quite interesting, isn't it? In the context of the core strengths that we've been talking about, because we've been asking people to reflect on their behaviour. I mean, can you kind of help us kind of maybe interpret some of the podcast series that we've heard so far in that context of PAT, and then maybe we can brainstorm some ideas about how we can help ourselves apply some of this science to ourselves. So Michelle, can you kind of frame the problem that you see or the opportunity that you see just through the interviews that we've had so far in terms of just behavioural?

Michelle Ockers:

Maybe pulling some examples. I had a look back through the notes, my notes of what people have been talking about, and some of them are really simple and really obvious. And

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

I can look at the PAT model, which by the way, as soon as you said PAT, I went to “pattern” in my head. So that's a nice easy way for me to remember it, all these triggers. But some are a little more tricky. So I'll start with a simple one. Dinye talked about journaling for reflection. Now that is one where you're talking about setting up a habit, and she actually uses an app called 750words.com, which I don't know if these are behavioural techniques, but it gives you a target, it monitors as you're writing once a day, how many words you've got, how many words have you got left to go? It gives you a little tick off, and you put up a streak of these reflection entries every day, and it gives you badges along the way. Now to my mind, there's lots of stuff going on there to reinforce a certain sort of habit, Andrea. Are we on the money with that as an example?

Andrea Day:

Yeah. I mean, if you look at something like Peloton or Noom, I mean, the examples that we're, I guess, bringing into our business, aren't learning examples. We're looking at all of the applications that are happening outside of learning and saying, okay, how do you nudge behaviour? Because it has to be sustainable. Behaviour doesn't change overnight. And also, if you look at some of the stuff, the behavioural scientist, the guy called Sam Salzer, he's phenomenal, he's one of the UK's experts on applied behaviour science. And we've all been on various courses with him. And what they're constantly working on is, when does behaviour change? Because we're human beings, we revert to type. And so when you look at the way some of these applications are being built, they're looking at, when does your behaviour start to revert? What nudges can they use in systems to get you back on track again?

And they will talk about loop. If you're talking about behavioural design, you're in a loop. So your behaviours should be constant and should be sustainable, but there are times when the loop breaks and then you have to create a new intervention. And it's similar when you think about, I mean, if I think about learning in the way we've worked historically, and certainly for us as a business, we've designed an intervention and it's gone. It's on someone's LMS somewhere, and that's it. And now I guess our desire and our goal for the future is to be part of that loop, is to know that we understand the behaviours that we need to change, we design and test interventions to see if we can change them, we then have something that allows us to sustain that through a nudging system, and we get the data going round.

Because also when we go back to behavioural science, when you think about, and people's environments change. If a new leader comes into an organization and that culture changes, that environment's going to change. So the behavioural intervention you used before may not be as relevant now because the dynamics changed. So when we bear in mind, all the change that's going on in the business at the moment, I mean, a fascinating one for me is, there are hordes and hordes and hordes of content out there at the moment, but our world has changed phenomenally. As a business leader, now I'm dealing with hybrid management, I'm looking at my managers working with the teams that are all working remotely, they're trying to engage with their customers over Zoom calls when they're used to walking the floors.

I mean, so much of our business has changed. And so I'm constantly thinking, well, how do I equip them for that new normal, and how does our team support that? Because that's a big change for them. And that, yeah, we're a small company, you put that on a scale of a major banker or a big consulting firm, it's huge. And for me, that's where the opportunity is for L&D, is to say, okay, how do we be enablers? How do we look at our business and say, where is it feeling pain? How can I help drive the right behaviours towards the outcomes the business the needed, and do I really know those outcomes? For me, that's critical. It's not just a case of being an order taker and saying, "Okay, we need to do an intervention on this." It's like, "Why are we doing it? What is it that we are trying to change as a result of doing this.?"

And if you don't know, for me, the bold way, we're going back to your point earlier, is to pause. So many customers get given last minute requests to do a course on this, but when

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

you really go, you don't know why. And I think if there was one bold move it's to say, "Stop. Why are we doing this? Do we know that behaviours we need to change that are going to affect the outcome? And do you really want to see the change?" I was talking to a behavioural science specialist a couple of weeks back. Because my biggest question for me to Sam and him was, "L&D are always up against it from a time perspective. How do we get the time?" Because to do this well, you have to have time.

And the question that he posed to me, and he said, "If it was me talking to your customers, the one question I'd say to them is, do you really want to see the change?" And I think that's really, really important, because if people really want to see the change, they have to give L&D the time it needs to understand what the change looks like.

Michelle Ockers:

And can we dig into that a little bit? That's an interesting one, because it's easy to talk about repetitive behaviours, something where there's a repetitive trigger, something I'm going to do every day, and I can set up some nudges. And this is about sort of supporting ourselves almost rather than just supporting others. But then there's other situations, and this one you've given here, I think is a good one, Andrea. And it did come up in some of the conversations where there's a behavioural trigger which is episodic, if you like. It's not repetitive. So in this situation, someone's come up and they're asking for you to do something, deliver a course is an example that's often used, but they're asking for a solution, and they're asking you just to do it rather than to pause, think.

One of our guests, Damien Woods, talked about being able to challenge the question, whether what people are asking for is the right thing. So in this case, it's a different example of a behaviour that you could almost rehearse, if you like, and set yourself up, if this happens, then I will do that. Can you talk about what we can glean based on your understanding of behavioural science in those situations, where you could reasonably anticipate, I've got this strength, the strength I want to exhibit is being able to pause and challenge, or there's a behaviour there almost associated with that. How can I support myself as an L&D professional and set myself to be able to do that? Because that takes a little courage to push back. How do I do that using insights from behavioural science?

Andrea Day:

Yeah, it does take courage. And we talked about bravery actually, when we were talking to the team yesterday before I came on the call, it does take a certain degree of bravery. And also, there's a cultural dynamic to that. If you're in a climate where speaking up is not necessarily celebrated, there is a whole environmental factor around that. So I think it's about people understanding, what's within my gift to change? What am I prepared to do for myself? And then how do I influence the things that I can't change on my own? And that's about stakeholder management. That's if you want me to challenge the business, I'll develop the skills to be able to ask why, I will go and find out evidence that I think is useful to validate my challenge, but at the end of the day, the environment around you has to support you doing that.

So I think it's, what can I do for myself that's within my gift? And the second thing is, what can I do to influence the change in the environment around me to help support the change I'm trying to make? And I think evidence is really, really important. And I use a really simple example actually. So one of the things that we always face is too much content. Yeah, it's a constant challenge when you're working with such specialists who want everything in a program or in intervention. And there's a really simple principle in behavioural science around cut-out, and the simpler you make it, the easier it is to digest, the more likely the behaviour is to change.

And there is a whole raft of research that backs off to that. And so if I was an L&D practitioner and I'm up against a subject matter specialist, rather than me saying there's too much content, I would revert to, "Based on this principle, I would

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

advise that we're not going to drive the right behaviour if we don't acknowledge it. Here's the evidence to support what I'm saying." So it's about developing your consulting skills and your coaching skills, but it's also leveraging what's out in the environment. There's so much research that can be leveraged to support you as an L&D specialist in having some of those tough conversations.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's more required than just skill, though, right? Around the kind of whether they're supported in different ways. Some of them have talked about having the conviction of your belief, some of them have talked about being prepared to challenge, some of them have talked about, it's being able to separate yourself from the work and see that if your ideas are being rejected, it's not about you being rejected. So how can we prepare ourselves, even if we've got the skill, if the environment's not favourable or we perceive it's not favourable, what can we do to give ourselves the best shot of having the courage in the moment of taking that little bit of a risk in the moment?

Andrea Day:

So this is a story. I don't know if it's right, Michelle, so I'll put it out there. So yeah, I used to be an exec in a technology company. I was the only female. And we had our regular exec meetings and I feared them. I'm not going to say I loved them, I feared them. They were very challenging, very frank, and to a degree, my own kind of sense of imposter syndrome to, oh yeah, I'm a graphics design person, I'm not an MBA student, made me enter those meetings fearing them. And as a result, I didn't get enough value out of them. And I wasn't being effective as a leader in my own mind. So I had to have a word with myself about how do I change my behaviour? That was in my control to change. And so I reframed the meeting and I made it about learning.

So the next time I went in, I said to all of my executive peers, "I am seeing this as a learning meeting. I am expecting you to ask questions of me, and I am going to take from those questions insights that are going to make me feel better and make me be better as a leader so that I can be better for my team." And that one shift in my mindset and my behaviour meant that next time I went to that meeting, I was excited. Questions that I thought that were really challenging, I saw as contributions for helping me grow and helping the business unit that I manage grow, and I wasn't defensive. So I think there are simple things like that about you have to put yourself into those places, because you can't avoid them, right?

If you're an L&D specialist and you need to go and engage with senior business stakeholder and it's tough, that's your role. So what can you do to reframe the situation, maybe make it fair, to something where you can grow and then through your growth, you're contributing back to the business?

Laura Overton:

I love what you're saying there, because that kind of really resonates with me. And actually, Michelle, I know we're thousands and thousands of miles separately, but your point about, how do we influence the environment that we're in? Because if that COM-B model is here, it's capability, it's opportunity, it's motivation. And the opportunity, I think a lot of people know all about these models of performance consulting and knowing that they ought to say no, knowing that they ought to pause like Damien does, but we feel as though the opportunity is not there for us. And having a word with ourselves, I love that, Andrea, but what also occurred to me is something, Michelle, I think you've done this the same as me, is the evidence that we used to build up through the longitudinal study that I was running on maturity, that was giving more and more evidence about business impact of doing things differently.

It was so powerful, years and years, hundreds of organizations who were saying, "Actually,

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

when we started to do X, Y, and Z, we saw our productivity improve by this," et cetera, et cetera. And we used to use that quite a lot with people who felt that their organization didn't understand them to say, actually, maybe some of the evidence might show. If the external evidence shows that other organizations have been able to get these gains, is it worth us shifting our conversation? Is it worth us experimenting? And so using that evidence to change the environment that we're working in, to change the opportunity that we have, to influence that opportunity. I think I've seen that happen in so many different ways, Andrea, and I think that's really massively powerful.

Because I think when we're looking at identifying our own behaviours, that's the tough one. I mean, Michelle, I know that you've been really trolling through the transcripts more than the rest of us, are there other gritty issues that maybe we can just give to Andrea to solve? Any other behavioural, looking at us as learning and development professionals and how we need to maybe adapt our own behaviour even if our environment isn't perfect?

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. So there's an interesting one about grit, in fact, speaking gritty things. Myra was talking about one of the key strengths she nominated was grit, which she could find is the ability to stick with things and move forward. And what I was curious about here, Celine, in our last episode, talked about, to sort of overlay on top of that, the fact that in many cases there's strengths, we have to explore what that strength means and looks like for us personally, because it can look different to different people. If we say grit to one person, that may look different in terms of what behaviour actually looks like. So it almost feels to me like there's this step of converting a strength to a behaviour. So how do we develop grit? Can we rehearse that? Can we put ourselves in situations that we know might be tough, and think if that situation happens, here's what I will do? Are there ways, if we dig into grit for a moment?

Andrea Day:

Yeah. So if grit's the definition, then the most important thing is to say, what's the behaviour that I would want to demonstrate in a situation? So if you take that again, because grit's more of a value or a principle than it is a behaviour.

Michelle Ockers:

That's right.

Andrea Day:

And I think that's the bit that is tough. So if then you went down a level and you unpacked it and you say, okay, where are the situations where grit is really, really important as a definition? And if that is, I need to push back. I need to have the courage to push back. Then it's about understanding at that point in time in that situation, what action am I going to take that someone else could observe me doing that is going to make a difference? So if grit is the definition of behaviour of grit, and I'm not going to say it is because I'm not a behavioural scientist, so I'm speculating a little bit, but is to ask why. Then the behaviour is, someone can watch me asking, why are we doing that? And then to back off to that, why I might then also bring my evidence. So it's kind of, the grit is the determination to get to the answer you need, and the behaviour is helping you step towards that. Does that make sense?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, I think that's a really nice model. I'm very reflective, I have a lot of reflective practices, and one of the things that I like to be able to do is to look forward with intention to a situation that I know it might be challenging or there might be a stretch, to your point earlier, Andrea, about reframing, what can I learn and how that shifts you, but then to reflect back and say

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

what actually happened. So I think if we're projecting forward, here's a situation I'm going to face, here's a behaviour that will look good or behaviour I'm trying to develop in that situation. And then being able to reflect back on what actually happened and what might I do differently, or why did that happen? I think being able to get quite clear on, what does it look like and what does it look like for me, and what would someone else watching me be able to see, helps improve your reflection, or even asking someone else to reflect with you.

Laura Overton:

I think that's a really significant one, because sometimes grit actually also means understanding in a particular situation when you need to maybe lose the battle in order to win the war and be able to walk away. And I think one of the things that's come up, and Andrea it's in your model of want easy and connect and the east model about easy, attractive, timely, and social - how do we get grit? Is that social element, that community element, the people that are around us in a particular scenario is actually really important. The science is showing us, isn't it? Who we're surrounded by and what they are doing, and whether it's holding them accountable like Michelle does to me every week, or whether it's a wider community that actually encourages us and brings the science to us? I think it's really important.

And it hadn't occurred to me that actually some of the stuff that we'd say, for example, doing in the Emerging Stronger masterclass, we'd realize in hindsight, it's about creating community of like-minded people to help us in that environment. And maybe that's something that we can take from behavioural science, isn't it? To help us be accountable for our behaviour and to check out our behaviour with others even outside the organization. So maybe that's a trick that we might be able to take away.

Andrea Day:

Yeah, I think the social aspect is huge, right? And I think from an L&D perspective, it's important that you understand the social dynamics of the organization, the social norms of the organization, because that will impact the success of anything you do from an intervention perspective for sure, right? So an example, we were working on a project around digital transformation. We did the traditional action mapping. We knew what the business outcomes were. We knew what people should do. But the biggest insight we got was when we put Charlotte, who's one of our behavioural scientists, in to go and talk to the business about the dynamics and culture of that organization. And we changed the design based on what we learned around social norms. And a really simple thing was people valued expertise and stories from peers. Because as part of that social norm, part of that social community, they valued that probably more than they did from the senior leader. And so rather than having the CEO talking, we had stories from other practitioners that they respected, and as a result, that changed the design and it changed the success rates. So I think it's really, really important to get into not just the behaviours, but the environment piece, because you will look at your whole programs, you'll look at your interventions differently when you layer that onto. So for me, that was a real insight was yeah, it fundamentally made us change the way we were action mapping based on that.

Laura Overton:

I think also therein lies a challenge for us as learning professionals. When we're working we want to be able to be in a situation where we can display these behaviours of courage and resilience and being able to maybe challenge the status quo in order to drive better performance and helping organizations to be more future fit. But we are not surrounded by a culture that allows us to do that. I mean, Michelle, you must have had so many different people on your podcast interviews over the years who've been in a situation where they've wanted to influence change, but the norm, as Andrea has just described, it does not support that. Is behaviour change for L&D professionals then completely out of the question if our

Learning Uncut Episode 27 Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

culture doesn't support us, or where have you seen examples where we can perhaps push through?

Michelle Ockers:

I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

Laura Overton:

So that one just came in from the outside there.

Michelle Ockers:

I guess the question is, is there ever a time when we can't create change? Now, I will give you an example. I worked with a client last year on business partnering. They asked me to run a business partnering program for their human resources business partners. They wanted them to work more strategically and less tactically. And so I had some conversations with several people in these business partnering roles. And then I went back to the Chief People Officer, and I said, "Your people are not in a situation where they can work strategically, because your structure doesn't support them, because there's so much change going on in the organization. They're just helping people who are drowning." I said, "I can run this program if you really want me to, but I don't think it will make a difference. I think they know what they need to do, and they've got the skills and knowledge to do it, but I would recommend we not proceed with the program."

So there's an example where the environment was getting in the way. It wasn't knowledge and skills. So understanding the environment, they didn't have a chance to put it into practice. So I think there are environments where I think gets back to that analysis piece that Andrea started with, right? And understanding-

Andrea Day:

Just they didn't have the opportunity.

Laura Overton:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

No, but I was able to influence things in a different way, more slowly because I couldn't make all structural changes, but at least being able to say, look - and the leader knew it was right. She was just looking for some way of saying to her people, I get it, and we're doing something to help you, but this wasn't going to help them. So that for me, I actually turned down work, right? Because I had the courage to say, "I could do this for you, but it won't help you." So let's not do that to everyone.

Laura Overton:

I think it's really brilliant to be able to say no to things and be able to spot that in that environment. And I think this behavioural science actually gives us more evidence as to when to say that. But I think also this COM-B model, where it's talking about we might be capable and strongly motivated, but the opportunity of the environment that we're in doesn't seem to be there. And yet we've also seen quite a few learning leaders create the opportunity. They've modelled small change. They've bought other people on board. They've started to stir it up a little bit, do little experiments. And in doing those experiments, they are also then shifting the physical opportunity that they have in the organization. And just shifting the needle a little in order to make it easy for others to get on board as well.

So I hadn't fully realized how they were doing that from a behavioural

Learning Uncut Episode 27

Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

science perspective until having this conversation with you, Andrea. It was about the fact that sometimes their opportunity just isn't there and being able to spot that and when to walk away. But other times, understanding when the opportunity is there as well. Michelle, did you have an aha moment there?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that goes back to that example I gave before, right? No matter how hard I pushed, how logical I was, how much I said we've got the expertise to help the organization, no one was willing to give me the opportunity to be doing anything of any value in the organization at that time. And the team actually was made redundant a few months after I left. I knew it was going to be. It was really clear that, talk about being denied opportunity to make a difference. That's the ultimate denial, right? So you do need to know, I think not to give up too early, but when to go, you know what? I could do stuff here. I can see what I can do, but I'm not being given the opportunity.

Laura Overton:

Yeah. Yeah. Andrea, you were just about to say something.

Andrea Day:

Yeah. No, I was just thinking about what you said, Laura. I think, I mean, there are always going to be situations where you are looking at, how do you make a difference? And I think for me, if one thing from this is people know how to look at the COM-B model in just it's basic form of capability, opportunity, and motivation. Then we'll ask more questions about, are we ready to do what we need to do? Do we really want to see the behaviour change? And for me, it's as much about readiness as it is about anything else. Because taking your point, Michelle, that business wasn't ready. It has a desire to do something, but it hadn't really established that it was ready for it. Because the opportunity wasn't there to leverage the benefit of what Michelle was bringing.

And so the power of that is to say to the business, well, okay, these are the levers that need to change, these are the things that we need to address as part of this COM-B analysis for you to establish an intervention that's going to work. Because the capability, Michelle's going to bring, she's helping. So you've got the motivation because the team want to be different, they want to learn, but if you're going to block the opportunity, then it's a waste of money. And I think that's the stuff that's really, really important, is so often, businesses aren't ready. And if part of asking why and getting really to the grips of the behaviours that we want to see changed, we'll educate the business and the business stakeholders.

So L&D will be an educator, which I think is fantastic, right? We raise our profile, but we also provide evidence as to why. Don't just get into a transactional relationship. It's not about blocking the business, it's about educating and saying, here's how we can take research and evidence outside of L&D, that's coming from behavioural science, that's coming from consumer applications, and use that to inform the decisions and the choices we're making.

Laura Overton:

Oh, brilliant. I could carry on this conversation with you ladies, all night for you, Michelle, all day, Andrea, but we can't. And in fact, this is the last in this particular series about helping us on core strengths. So picking up on your point, Andrea, just before we sign off, if you were mentoring a learning and development professional to help them, they're hungry to be ready, and they want to develop some of the characteristics that we've been talking about today. What would be the most important core strengths, core behaviour that you would encourage them to develop? And what would be the one thing you recommend them to do to get

Learning Uncut Episode 27 Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

started?

Andrea Day:

Gosh, that's a tough, tough. I think probably the belief piece is, you're there to make a difference. You're not an order taker, you're there to make a difference. So understanding the difference you can make and why you are making is critical. And I think that's about being able to engage with the business. I think it's about asking intelligent questions. It's about using insights about using research. It's about drawing on all things that are around you, but you might not know yourself. It's about bringing things to the table that maybe frighten me.

Behavioural science frightened me when I first started engaging this because it was new to me, but I'm learning and I'm surrounding myself with people who are experts in it. And I think that's the same thing, you don't have to have all the answers, but you do need to make a difference and think about how you can make a difference through yourself and through others.

Laura Overton:

Fantastic. Thank you so much for that. Surrounding yourself with great people, that's what I love to do through this series as well. Michelle, what about you? Based on all you've learned so far in this particular series, what would be the one thing that you would recommend on how to get started?

Michelle Ockers:

I think building on what Andrea said, it's also about believing that you can make a difference, that you have the power in order to be courageous and to take the risks and to make a stand. So for me, one of those core strengths is self-awareness and self-knowledge, and a solid reflective practice, which doesn't necessarily need to be journaling, but having other people around you that you can debrief with, and just being intentional and looking at your own actions and your own results. Anything we can apply, any model or approach, we can apply to support change for others, we can apply to support our own change as well to get a different result. So that would be mine around self-awareness.

Laura Overton:

That's amazing. It's why I love being part of this Emerging Stronger community. Andrea, you've been part of us in our last masterclass, and it's just been so brilliant. Because we've been able to surround ourselves, even as facilitators, with people who just think differently and do things differently in that community. And just this conversation today, as always, ladies, with you two, has made me think differently. Want to go back, reflect, and Andrea, make a plan. So can I just say, on behalf of all of the listeners, thank you so much. And as listeners, if you've loved this, then please share it, share the series. Let's go back, listen to some of the other stories, and we'd love to find out more about what you're doing to build your strengths, to create bold action, and make a difference in your organization. So thank

Learning Uncut Episode 27
Taking Bold Action – Andrea Day and Michelle Ockers

you.

Andrea Day:

Thank you. Thanks, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

Lovely to meet you.