

Learning Uncut Episode 115
Onboarding to Build Competency and Connection –
Anthea Piening
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to our first episode for 2023. We're kicking off our podcasting year with a story about changes to onboarding at Lion Australia. Anthea Piening, the Capability and Change business leader for the sales team discusses how onboarding has been redesigned from a two-day event to a blended 12-week program. A key driver is speed to competency for a more diverse range of recruits including people with lower levels of industry and sales experience – both a result of a deliberate diversity agenda as well as due to constraints of a tight talent market. The shift also reflects a move into digital learning with a mix of self-directed, leader-led and virtual activities – as well as higher value use of two days of face-to-face activities. An important insight from the program pilot was the need to support new team starters to build connection to others through onboarding activities. Listeners may like to supplement this episode by listening to episode 21 from March 2019 with Nic Barry talking about improving the onboarding experience at Domain.

Michelle Ockers:

Hello, Anthea. Happy New Year. Welcome to a brand-new podcast here and thank you for being my first guest for 2023.

Anthea Piening:

Oh, hello. And happy New Year to you as well, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you very much. So Anthea, we are going to be talking about the talent market and some of the challenges of the talent market to your business and what you've been doing in learning and development to shift some of your approaches based on the challenges that they've introduced to the business. Pretty common challenge in organisations. I think most L&D people I've spoken to over the last year have said we definitely have had to rethink our approach to some things because it's harder to get the skills we need. So thank you for giving us the opportunity to explore how you at Lion... Is it Lion or Lion Nathan?

Anthea Piening:

Lion Australia.

Michelle Ockers:

Lion Australia. Thank you. So would you like to introduce the organisation to us?

Anthea Piening:

Sure, I'd love to. So Lion, for those that don't know, is one of Australia's leading beverage companies. So people probably more relate to the iconic brands, which is Four X (XXXX) or a Tooheys, and we also have a lot of great and very exciting craft brands. So like A Little Creatures or A Byron Bay. And one of my personal favourites, which is Four Pillars Gin.

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Michelle Ockers:

Lovely.

Anthea Piening:

So that's the organisation.

Michelle Ockers:

The organisation manufactures and distributes. What would be the key things that your workforce does?

Anthea Piening:

So we do manufacture. So we've got breweries all over Australia, New Zealand. We actually have breweries in the US as well. So yeah, everything from supply chain, which is producing the brew itself right through to selling to our customers or retailers.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. So a strong sales workforce as well. And you are in the sales area of the business, is that right? Tell us a bit about your team, who they support, what they do.

Anthea Piening:

Sure. I'm a Capability and Change business leader, particularly in the Lion Australia business unit. So I've got a team of five who work in that business, and we work primarily on programs for the sales team in Australia.

Michelle Ockers:

Tell us a bit about the sales team as a workforce. What sort of people are we talking about here? Are there any key characteristics on nature of the workforce or the work they do or their environment that really influence the way you support them?

Anthea Piening:

I think a really interesting facet of our sales team is that we probably did have not a lot of diversity in terms of our sales team in the past, and when we sell beer, we haven't had the gender diversity, probably haven't had age diversity either. And like a lot of organisations, we have pretty leading policies in terms of increasing our diversity. So that has been one of the things that's actually been quite a pleasure and you'll see when we talk through the programs is the change to who that person might be in terms of we now have a much greater spread of age, culture or gender diversity. And we've previously had people who've had existing sales experience and often from the drinks industry itself, but we've really widened that significantly across the last couple of years in particular to bring in people from other industries that may or may not have sales experience or may or may not have drinks experience, which has been really fantastic to see.

Michelle Ockers:

You talked about two strands there. One is the diversity, which may well have been a deliberate business strategy to increase diversity. And then you've talked about change in the backgrounds of people coming into your sales workforce. To what extent have these been deliberate shifts that the business has pursued versus, well, things have shifted in our environment and while it may not be our preference to go this way, we've got no choice but to go this way. You know, what's driven, I guess firstly having a more diverse sales workforce and then secondly recruiting people perhaps without either sales experience or sales experience specific to the product being sold, what are the drivers there of the change in the business?

Anthea Piening:

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I think it's fair to say it's probably been a mix of both things. So absolutely driven by our belief and our desire to, in terms of the value of increasing the diversity of our workforce. But as you say, like a lot of organisations, we've been impacted by both these macro level shifts in what's been happening in the talent market. So yeah, it's absolutely fair to say post COVID war on talent organisations no longer get to pick and choose who they want to take out of what industry and what experience they get. So we've had both, we've had our own policies driving what we think is what we want to do in terms of the workforce, but absolutely the available talent in the market as we know in Australia, has changed significantly. So, I don't know, I don't know whether to say you can't get as fussy, but it is really that. But I think we also fundamentally believe that even though that has happened, some of those things have happened to us, there is so much value in what different people bring into the organisation and the team.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? There's a saying, I may get this wrong, around creativity and constraints and the constraints lead to more creativity and perhaps shake us out of our existing ways of doing things and lead to more discovery and opportunity. So it may be the situation here. The other thing I'm seeing a lot in businesses at the moment, and it's driven partly by shifts in the talent market, is a lot of organisations are going back and re-examining their Employee Value Proposition and thinking development and development opportunities are a strong attractor and retainer of workforce. Has there been any shifts in the Lion Employee Value Proposition over the past couple of years?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah, and it's probably really timely even you saying that where the Talent Acquisition team spoke to me this week and said we were interviewing the sales exec roles and they are people obviously ask us during these conversations more so than ever "what development opportunities are there for me?" And they were able to speak about the program that we're going to talk about today, and the person was like, "Oh, that sounds great." So when you're thinking from an Employee Value Proposition, if during those career conversations you're having or the ad, even the job ads that you're releasing, if you talk to the development opportunities for people in those are, that value proposition to them is really critical. We've seen that as you said in the industry, we've seen that in all the reports and the insights to say it's so important to people now, and they're looking for that in terms of that employer value proposition. So everything that we can do from a learning and development perspective to provide that information as we're support promoting our organisation really helps.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So, what has all of this meant for learning and development? These shifts in the type of people you're attracting, the increased importance of development as part of the Employee Value Proposition, what has all this meant for your team, Anthea?

Anthea Piening:

Lots more work. [laughter] Yeah, I guess there's the factor of it being more important and people coming into the organisation and looking for that. I think it kind of shifts a little bit as well. We work a lot, my teamwork a lot to provide a win-win for the organisation and a win-win for the person. So we might be creating programs that develop skill that increases the commercial performance of our sales team. But also we're very cognisant of the fact that for the people in our teams, it's important to them in terms of their own learning and their own careers what they learn while they're in our organisation and the things that our team create for them and how that builds and grows their skill.

So, yeah, I shouldn't say it creates more work, it kind of creates more workforce, but I feel, as I'm sure a lot of other people have felt, this shift in the importance

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of learning and development in the organisation based on these factors that are happening externally and what people are looking for when they come into the organisation as well. Less of a just push things down to people and more of an individualization to what people might need for their careers or more of a pull from them to go, these are the things that I want and these are the things that I need in terms of what I'm looking for with my development.

Michelle Ockers:

The LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report from last year, the 2022 report talked about almost like this double-edged sword isn't quite the right word, but this double-edged opportunity and challenge where what you're describing really brings to life. What their research found is that L&D has become a more critical and strategic function in the business. But there is more pressure and greater demands on L&D then to help the business not only address significant strategic needs and performance needs, but also to meet the expectations and needs of individuals in the organisation. So I think, are you feeling an increase in demand, an increasing business perception of the value you add as well as a sense of... Is it a sense of pressure or more opportunity in these shifts that you are feeling and your team is facing?

Anthea Piening:

I think it's both, it's pressure and it's opportunity. I think I watched the Brene Brown recording of Atlas of the Heart the other day where she said there's the fine line between stress and excitement. So it is both. I think potentially in the past, L&D leaders might have been looking for a seat at the table trying to sell in or drive the importance of what they were doing. Whereas I feel there's a real pull now in terms of that elevation or pressure or excitement to go, this is really important, this is really critical. We need this, we need X, we need Y, we need Z. And it's more actually prioritising the requests that come into us as opposed to us going to the business and saying, "Hey, we think you should do this." It's more going what is actually possible with the resources that we have. It's a good thing to have, a good problem to have.

Michelle Ockers:

It's an awesome problem to have. And as you say that, that you know, the balance between stress and excitement and do you see it as a pressure and demand, or do you see it as opportunity? And how do you lean into that? You touched briefly on resources. Has the size of budget for your L&D team changed in the past two years?

Anthea Piening:

No. I wouldn't say that we've changed that. I think probably the pressure to do more with less, and I hear other colleagues in other organisations saying the same thing. So it's not so much I would say that that's increased, it's just there's more spotlight or more thought to go, how can you use this as efficiently and effectively as possible to get the best result that we can.

Michelle Ockers:

So Anthea, what does this mean in terms of learning approaches and the kind of learning approaches that your team supports now?

Anthea Piening:

I think probably what's happened is quite a significant change in most organisations, but in particular with COVID, the move to digital, we swung from doing, I'm going to call it old school face-to-face bums on seats to completely switching to virtual online. And in terms of that change of approach now, we are landing on this spot, which is about hybrid. So we do have those changes to the team. We've got great learning experience designer who specialises in digital. So we are mixing the kind of old elements and

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experience with this new way of doing things digitally and finding this place with what's the best thing for the current context where we've got people who are working hybrid flex remote as well as what's the best way we could be doing, having these learning experiences or approaches for the end user as well.

So that's been I think incredibly exciting for me having been doing this for years to be in this place where I kind of got to the digital future, and you can forget that three years ago bringing a whole heap of people into a virtual online session didn't exist. So we've gone so drastically from one to the other and then now to this point of hybrid. So when you look at the programs that we're creating towards the back end of 2022 and looking forward to 2023, they're just genuinely hybrid programs where we go, what is the right approach to this? Should it be face-to-face? Should it be virtual? Should it be self-directed learning? Do we run... We stood up a new digital learning platform last year, which is absolutely brilliant.

So much more in line with the experience that people have as tech consumers as opposed to what they were used to dealing with in the past. So I think they've got, our end user have gotten increasingly demanding as tech's gotten better, but we've also got increasingly demanding as L&D professionals to go, we don't want to put that in front of our people, or we do want to put this thing 'cause it's great in front of our people. So that for me is the most significant change.

Michelle Ockers:

Shall we bring some of this to life by digging into an example? I think we talked about the onboarding program as an example where you've made some significant changes, although if you want to pick a different program, use it as the example. Which program do you want to focus in on to take a bit of a deeper dive into?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah, the sales onboarding program was a fantastic one to have a look at for that.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. So, can you talk us through, what's the experience for a new starter in your sales onboarding now? What does that look like?

Anthea Piening:

In terms of the change?

Michelle Ockers:

No, well in terms of, so if you've got a new starter, what can they expect? And when someone asks that question, your sales executives or someone being recruited for a while ask that question, "What can I expect in terms of development?" How do you answer that? What can they expect in terms of development? And what does that learning experience look like for them as they start and get into the organisation?

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Anthea Piening:

So, what that looks like today, I'm incredibly proud of as well with the changes that we've made is even obviously even before they start we have this amazing welcome pack that we send to them. It's full of our products. It connects them to the organisation with a QR code, they receive messages from their leader, they can get information and our talent acquisition team talk to them about what their learning will be like when they start at Lion, which is really significant shift as well. I don't think we would've two years ago been talking to people about how they would learn and what they would do. We have a branded program for our sales new starters. It's called License to Sell. It's a 12-week structured program that they'll go through. We use the new digital learning platform that we have, which is called Raise the Bar, obviously bit of a bit of a pun on elevating new skill as well, as well as being a drinks organisation.

So Raise the Bar, it's run off that. So they are signed up immediately. That is automated and it has a mix of things for them that might be self-directed or activities they might do with their leader, virtual sessions that they will come into with the capability and change team. And the kind of jewel on the crown of the program is a two-day onboarding experience, which occurs for them face-to-face. We run it out of Sydney. We have a lot of our sales team that are located all across Australia. So they work remotely by themselves. They sell in their own territories. So they fly, all fly into Sydney and go through this amazing two-day experience. They have everything from senior leaders facilitating sessions with them as well as dinners with senior leaders. And so yeah, that's basically the program that they'll go through now when they come and join the organisation.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And when you think about what was running through your heads when you designed that program, what were some of the key considerations or drivers of the program design?

Anthea Piening:

I think one of the increasing pressures is things faster, faster. So we're really conscious both from an organisational perspective, speed to competency for someone that's operating in a sales territory, who is starting to see customers week two, they're probably in front of our customers selling our products to them. Really, really important. It can't be, you can't wait. You don't want people waiting 6, 9, 12 months to understand different things. And we know in all new starters, in all different industries, often you'll get to 12 months and you're like, "Oh gosh, I wish I just knew that at the start." So part of the design was how can we give them the most important things that they need in the first 12 weeks so that they can do their jobs to the best of their ability or and in line with our expectations?

So that was the primary driver of this program. Yep. And then I think I spoke to the aspect of how do we make this work in a hybrid, flexible working scenario or for people that are remotely with the tools and technology that we have and the learnings that we have in terms of connection for people? So we did pilot this program and started and we work quite agile in terms of minimum lovable product. Let's just get it out there and test and learn with our teams. And the content we had was fantastic. We've always had really great content or resources, and the feedback came back to us this stuff, and we were running it off our digital learning platform, this stuff is fantastic. I just feel really alone.

So then we realized we had to go back and build more connection into the program because people need that level of community to learn as well. It's classic peer to peer learning or the psych safety to ask questions of people or the connections with people. So you'll see there's some things that I talk to even in that program, like the welcome pack, which are not traditionally done and sit with L&D, but when we looked at the overall program, we were like, what's the most effective way to get these people to learn and to be skilled? And that connection piece just came in really strongly. I don't know whether

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it's a post COVID thing or it's just a normal human behaviour. For it's the classic, connect and correct, although we don't like to correct people - it's how do you connect with them first so that they can learn? So that was another thing that really drove that. But yeah, back to the original point, which is really about speed to competency.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. The connection piece though is an important piece, to being effective in an organisation, right? We know our relationships, particularly when we're working in more distributed ways. And you've talked about some people working remotely and if you've got a sales workforce, are they on the road? Are they out physically away from an office? When I say home base, I meant in terms of a corporate office. So this connection piece is really important both in terms of sense of engagement with the organisation, but also that informal learning piece and who do you go to ask questions, knowledge sharing and so on? So I think it is a really critical part of onboarding programs, and a well-designed onboarding program does build that connection. You mentioned psychological safety there as well and the ability to say, "I need help with something", or to air something that maybe didn't go so well and get some support. You did talk about leader activities with leaders as part of the program. Can you just give us an example of what that might look like, an example of one of the interactions or one of the points at which there's some leader involvement in the onboarding?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah, absolutely. So when we break down the things that they need to be able to do or need to be able to know, and then we line that up with different senior leaders in the organisation, a critical part of the way the onboarding program works is that the facilitation of those sessions comes from the senior leaders within those areas. So we have a field sales directors involved. Our national field director is involved, our sales director, and we're kind of been really lucky in that our managing director is a huge supporter and driver of this program. So he came and facilitated in a bar, which is fantastic. We were in a customer venue. His session was incredibly impactful, I think, both from a connection perspective but also from a learning perspective as well. Yeah, so it really is across the board quite a lot of different senior leaders involved and covering off different components of the program itself.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. That's helpful, thank you. And when you talk about the word hybrid, when you use the word hybrid, it's used in different ways still, I think, are you meaning sort of this blended, a blended learning program, or are you meaning hybrid in that there's some facilitation where you've got some people in the room and some people joining the session remotely?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah. So I'm probably using hybrid in terms of hybrid ways of working. But you're absolutely right. The programs itself are the blended programs between self-directed virtual videos that you play back or online modules. There's such a mix or blend now in the program of all of these different things. In some ways it's hard to keep track of what's happening there in the program. But yeah, it's pretty much, that's what I'm referring to when I'm kind of talking to that.

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Michelle Ockers:

How do you decide which learning approach to use for what content?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah, I think we start...

Michelle Ockers:

Or what skills... Let me reframe that.

Anthea Piening:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

For what skills rather than just... 'Cause learning happens through experience as much as it does through content, but how do you decide when to use each of these different learning approaches?

Anthea Piening:

We really start with the end in mind. So we have a renewed and very structured sales skills framework. So you'd look at the job profile or success profile for a sales executive. It would outline what those skills are, prioritise those skills. We would start with the skills framework and go, these are the skills that a new, that any of our sales execs or a new sales exec would need. And you can't do everything and you obviously can't. And that was one of the really interesting challenges about a two-day experience, is that people in the past were used to, oh, you do everything in the two days, and because we've stretched this out to a 12-week blended program, you don't do everything in the two days in the face-to-face. So we start with that. We look at the overall program and we go, "What are the objectives of this overall program?

What skills are we focusing on?" Not all skills are created equal. And also we know that there are different needs for different people or someone who's come in with sales experience versus someone who hasn't, someone who's come in with drinks industry experience versus haven't. So they as an individual will have different priorities over skills as well. So there's a sort of general overall, how do we bring everyone up and refresh? But then I think there's also this individualised aspect to how do I get competent at my role? So what that then means is we go, these are the priorities, these are the objectives, and then we overlay that with the methodology or the learning approach to that. And I guess we go, what can you only... So when we look at the two-day experience, we go, we absolutely run everything through the shredder to go, what is it that you can only do face-to-face?

Because otherwise you just end up with these two days with just a whole heap of things shoved in there and cognitively people get to the end of it and they're incredibly exhausted and they possibly haven't really learned anything. So we go, what is most critical and most important to do face-to-face? An example of that would be sales role plays. So you can do them virtual, we do them virtual, but there's just this magic of being in the room together, being in a fishbowl together, seeing the body, same body language that you are going to see from a customer when you are face-to-face. So we will do that. Also I think a lot of, if you look at the objectives and some of the skills are more optional than others, so more about this self-directed learning path, we then tend to make them more self-directed and create small modules or we have a lot of practice activity.

So we'll go, okay, you know, I really want to work on handling objections. I can go in to Raise the Bar, grab the practical activity for that, and then I can work with a peer or I can work with my leader on that practical activity. I can load what I've done back up into the system. If they want a little badge or an assessment to say, "Yes, I've passed

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handling objections," they can, but that is a determinant factor as well to go if it's really a priority skill. And we absolutely want to make sure that every new starter has that, we'll either run that face-to-face or run it in a virtual session or we'll make it a mandatory module on the system.

Michelle Ockers:

So, where do you strike that balance between mandatory and optional? You talked about, well, if you want more, if you want to practice a skill, there's more here. How do you determine what is sort of, I don't know if the word core is the right word, but essential that everyone must do versus you've got an option?

Anthea Piening:

Really probably the overlay for that is the commercial strategy in a way, it's probably a combination of the skills, the skills level that we have in the teams. We do skills assessments with our teams, so we really know where our teams are at. We can now extrapolate that out for where our new starter is at. So we know generally where the gaps are, but we then overlay what are the commercial objectives of our team? So for example, with Hunting for Growth was critical to delivering our strategy, we would up weight the skills that are required in order for them to be able to get to that level of commercial performance. And there's nothing like prioritisation to going, you know, you've got eight hours a day in two days to really battle it out about what's most important to go on that learning agenda. So I find there's a bit of that with the face-to-face stuff. And even the same with the virtual sessions. Nobody has unending time to learn with us. So if you go, "Okay, we're going to get one session a month for 60 minutes, what is most important? Where is the biggest gap? And where is the potential to see the biggest change in the commercial performance?" So that's our kind of overlay that we use for it.

Michelle Ockers: Yep, yep. Individualisation, so you talked about some of the workforce, who some of the new starters have sales experience, some don't. Even some of the sales workforce have industry experience, some don't. And then you talked a little bit about accommodating those differences and a level of individualisation. How do you create that individualisation?

Anthea Piening:

I think, and if I'm really honest, and I talked about how we create minimum lovable product and then we build the programs up, there's still things to learn from and change in the program. And that scenario that we would want to continue to develop in, how do we create personas without being overwhelmed by 75 different types of people's who need X, Y, or Z? But we need to continue to work on that persona and personalisation for that learning. So at this stage, particularly for sales onboarding, it really is around this, this is the core part of the program and these are the optional parts of the program. In order to get the 12-week license to sell, there are certain things, certain quote, mandatory, we hate the word mandatory, but there are certain things that you'll need to do in order to get to the end of the 12-week program and actually have this, we call it the License to Sell.

So it's really more around that at this stage. And it's been a bit more ad hoc. So we've had leaders come in and do this as well. And originally we thought, "Oh, you know, does an experienced regional sales manager want to come into this program?" But they've been really positive about it. And I think that's, they then see what their teams are learning. They see what these potential things about what Lion might do, which is different to maybe what they've done somewhere else. And they make connections with other leaders as well, and they then learn from each other at their level. So I think, yeah, it's still a work in progress, but it hasn't created... I find that when it's not personalised enough, it creates tension and then you get people coming back to you and saying, "Hey, why am I doing this?"

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I already know how to do this." And we haven't really had that tension at this stage with the, what I say, mandatory elements and maybe what you get to live in a little bit of la la land, and when you've got new starters, because they're all so keen and excited versus your existing workforce or teams. But so far I think we've found enough of a balance between what is this, what is core or essential versus what helps you build your own pathway. And we do have a lot of other learning and capability programs outside of sales onboarding. So it's not like they're just stuck in this program and they can't do anything else. Yeah, if they wanted to learn more about sales negotiation, they can go off and find our other programs on sales negotiation, there's nothing kind of stopping anyone.

Or they'll come to the team and say, "Hey, I loved that, I want a bit more of this," or "I don't really understand what's going on here with the drinks industry." And we'll go, "Hey, we've got this resource, or what if you go back to your leader and talk to them about this?" Or we might talk to them ourselves as well, depending on what it is. The connections that they create in the program helps them to understand where to go, like where to go on the system to find learning or what person to go to find either an expert or that person knows where the things are that you might need to do that. So that's, yeah, I guess that's probably where people, or how people are going and finding the other things that they might want or need in their own individual learning journey.

Michelle Ockers:

So lots of other opportunities to supplement the onboarding program is what I'm hearing there?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah. And the platform that sales onboarding is delivered in Raise the Bar has lots of other capability programs in it. We don't want them to be overwhelmed. So we do create the homepages for new starters is different to our existing teams so that they don't come in and go, "I don't know where to start. There's 350 things here." It steps them through their new starter program license to sell, but they can see where there's the other things that they can kind of explore and journey off on to find as well.

Michelle Ockers:

I do want to talk about your platform a little bit more in a moment, but before we leave kind of the whole user experience or learner experience and methods of learning and so on, I wanted to ask about the role of the individual's leader in their onboarding. What are your expectations? And how do you equip the leader to be part of the onboarding experience?

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Anthea Piening:

Yeah, absolutely. And we've got fabulous leaders in the organisation with great experience. I think contextually it's saying, so the previous, previous to having this program, it was solely on the leader to onboard new team members. And I guess what that creates with, however many people across Australia was quite an inconsistency in terms of what they focused on or how they focused on it, or kind of how much time they have. So we recognise that contextually, although leaders have a very strong and primary role in coaching and developing their people, it's a challenge in terms of the pressures that they're under in their jobs as well. So we kind of see that as our role is to support them and make it as easy as possible. It's not to replace them.

But there is a little bit more structure and guidance for the leaders in this. So we start from the leaders are stakeholders for us, so obviously we do a lot of stakeholdering with them so that they understand the program so that they understand what their people will be learning and when, primarily that's so that they allow those people the time that it takes to do that learning and support them so that they don't think, "Oh, what are they doing? What are they doing over there?" It's like, well, they're doing their License to Sell, that's going to make them even better at selling and even better in their role for you.

So there's a bit of that, just the leader's role is to allow the time to support them. But we do have individual coaching guides for leaders as well, so they can ask questions, the question prompt is as they go through, the other one that's pretty significant is the practice activities in there. So a lot of the practice activities you'll find, it's the new starter going to the leader and saying, "Hey, I need to do this role play on Hunting for New Growth." So yeah, that kind of brings the leader in to go, "Oh okay, cool, if this is my role in this, I need to observe you and give you feedback," or that's kind of the interaction that we've created for the leaders, that's a bit more structured, but also providing the leaders with this higher level of support, because the leaders themselves that don't have to go in and necessarily run these two-day programs, but they kind of get this person that comes out glowing post the two-day program. So yeah, it's a bit of a change in what their role might be. And then of course, on an ongoing perspective, the leaders do a lot of sales coaching as well. So, that consistency of what they've learned in this sort of centralised on-boarding program, rolling right out to kind of get in field like they're literally driving around selling to customers and their leaders will go out with them on the road and provide that coaching and development.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And it's a real mark of maturity, the way you've involved and equipped leaders to be part of the development program and giving them the resources they need to do that. So I really like that aspect of the approach that you've described there. Let's come back to platform for a moment. You've talked about the platform being Raise the Bar. There's an underlying platform, so people would go to go and look for the Raise the Bar learning platform. They're not going to find it, are they?

Anthea Piening:

No.

Michelle Ockers:

What would they look for if they were interested to take the platform you're using?

Anthea Piening:

So the tech platform is called Zonos, that Raise the Bar. We cover with our Raise the Bar branding. It's really interesting one 'cause it's primarily used in sales and in sales organisations; however, it does have a really amazing learning platform in there, which is the Zonos side of things.

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Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And in terms of your team skillset to utilize the platform in terms of implementation, getting it up and running, what was that experience like?

Anthea Piening:

I think the standing up of the Raise the Bar tech platform is a fantastic example of when you are a leader and you should just empower your teams and step back. [chuckle] Sorry, I laugh 'cause I had so very little to do with it, and my team were like... They were working on the project to implement the platform for other aspects without ever selling, and then they kind of stumbled upon the fact that it had this really amazing learning side to it. And we knew that the learning and development team used it, so we took a look at it and then the team said, "We just want to explore it," and I thought, "Nothing would come of it." I'm like, "Off you go. Have fun," buffeting around in the tech space with this, not really thinking that much would come of it, but very quickly they found how amazing it was. The team have had exposure to significant amounts of different LMS platforms.

As I said, we've got a really experienced designer in our team, and they just came back with the recommendation and said, "We think it's fantastic, we think it's perfect for what we need." And in terms of my role as a leader, bringing that to the organisation, when you go to implement, there's lots of changes being implemented all the time, there's always nervousness around implementing new tech solutions. So I absolutely love change and people's behaviour.

So, with this one in particular, it was more of a stealth launch, I said let's just launch it by stealth, if we go to the teams and rah rah about it's going to be this enormous launch and you're going to be on this new platform, and it's really amazing, we'll get so much resistance. So effectively, we kind of slipped in on the back of another launch and used it for some L&D activities, and we used it for a coaching form, and before we knew it, everyone was using it, and then we were like, "Oh yeah, by the way, it's a different platform." And so, yeah, it was a really fascinating way we launched it.

And I think you talked about the kind of... I don't know if it's a serendipity of when things just happened, it just happened to you, we happened to be in a particular point in time where we were launching so many things that if we added another initiative to it, the organisation would have really pushed back on us, but the strengths and advantages we've seen of having rolled it out had been excellent, and there's very little upskilling required. It's so intuitive; you really just click on a link and you're there, and you wouldn't even know that you're in the platform. People would assume they're in a website or something like that. So yeah, it's kind of how that one rode out.

Michelle Ockers:

So, are people getting to it through the sales platform?

Anthea Piening:

Yeah. So, it's a mixture of both. When they're in... Yeah, exactly, it's kind of this one-stop shop.

Michelle Ockers:

So it's sort of integrated into...

Anthea Piening:

Yeah, it's integrated.

Michelle Ockers:

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Their working platform anyway, which kind of makes it a little easier for them, yeah, yeah.

Anthea Piening: Or we use... It's kind of a bit of both, so we'll go, "Here's the link to where the activities are. Let's click on the link," and they're in there, but if they're already in there doing something else, they just click on the link to go in to Raise The Bar as well.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it's a neat example of this idea that work and learning are integrated, and if we can find ways where people can discover learning in their work platforms in their workspaces, it just feels more naturally discoverable and part of how we work that the learning is there at the same time.

So let's talk about impact value. How are you determining or how are you monitoring the, I guess, the effectiveness... If we just talk about... You can talk about it either for in terms of the onboarding program, or more specifically, the effectiveness of some of the changes you've made, how do you keep an eye on what's working, what's not working? How do you know whether things are having the impact they need to have?

Anthea Piening:

Sure. There's different aspects to the evaluations that we do. We do evaluate the value from the perspective of the participants, either during the program three months later, six months later, so we know from the sales onboarding program. In terms of that success, we're averaging a 9.1 out of 10 for the program, which is probably the highest of all of our programs. So from their perspective, it's providing the value that they need in terms of upskilling connection, giving them what they need to do their roles. I'm a great fan of quant and qual measures.

And I know we all have different measures of things, sometimes it's like no news is good news, but even from a qualitative perspective as well, it's obviously evaluating based on what our senior leaders are seeing the impact is. So you can run our evaluations right from kind of participant experience right down to the end point of going what of the commercial results? Are we selling more? It gets harder the further away you get from the participant experience and go towards the commercial results because there's just so many different factors obviously that go into that, but we try to look at where we can, where that impact is.

I think I said, we luckily do skills evaluation, sales skills evaluations of our team. So we get quite a clear 360 view of the skills evaluation, so we know that the program has impact for that particular group in terms of raising their level of skill from when they start, as we go along during that program, and we evaluate both within the sales onboarding program the particular skills that we look at it from a total skills framework as well. So from our perspective, I think we were probably really shocked to have got it to that level first up when we were working on minimum lovable product. I mean, we gave it our all and put everything into it. Yeah, now we're kind of like, okay, like where do we go? How do we maintain that perception of value from... Or create that actual value, make sure that the program continues to create that value for people, but within the 12 weeks and beyond, I think would be the measure.

Michelle Ockers:

And speed to competency was one of the drivers you mentioned up front when thinking about the design of the program, how do you measure speed to competency?

Anthea Piening:

So because we've got a 12-week program and quite specific objectives, and there's more of an intensity of the capability offerings throughout that 12 weeks, you're looking for much faster, much faster shifts in the level of competency of the new

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starters, then we would be... I would say generally from year to year with our existing teams, we might be looking for much smaller shifts, but with them, say for example, if you've got a cohort coming in of new starters and some of them don't have sales experience, we might see quite low numbers at the start, in terms of the specific sales skills. We would want to see them raise significantly throughout that 12 weeks. And really it's this evaluation of if someone didn't get to that level within the 12 weeks, and then we might go in and say, "Okay, what do we need to do with this particular individual? What does a leader need to do? What are we going to do as a capability team to ensure that we can continue to build their skills so that they get to this level where they can perform really well in their role?"

Michelle Ockers:

Right, because you're monitoring skill development at different points in time during the program you're about to see how quickly the skills are developing. And you raise a good point there around what's a start point as well, what are we building from and having to take that into account. Interesting.

So, what were the key things went well that have gone well with the onboarding program, why do you think they've gone so well?

Anthea Piening:

I think we spoke a little bit about this before, but I think one of the key things that's gone really well with the onboarding program is that the connection side of it has become foundational, and I talk to the psych safety and the engagement of teams, but I think by taking this connection overlay to it, we've been able to create that, that environment for learning and create the connection so that people feel safe to ask questions or connect with other people and learn from other people, so that's one that I think it's gone really well. Another one I think that's gone really well is this blended side of the program. It is very, very different to what we've done in the past, and I think that's gone well because the team have challenged me and I have challenged the business, so our stakeholders, including myself, we all did two week-long induction programs where we went and sat in the room somewhere.

I remember once during a fabulous one in Vevey when I was at Nestle and challenging to them to go, learning can happen over time. And it can happen in different ways. So it's not 2019 anymore. So I think that has gone fantastically well because it's created a program that's a better fit for people and it spaces out the learning so much better than we would have done in the past. We do have an event in this program, but we really do have a series of learning experiences and moments that happen across 12 weeks, which is just the best way I think for people to learn and upskill themselves.

I think the other thing that's gone super well is we're not fully agile, but we do take the agile principles. When we start looking at these and we challenge ourselves and go like, "How do we just get started? Like, what's the smallest possible thing we can do next week?" And I kind of talked to the welcome pack being part of this, it wouldn't normally be in scope, but I think it's the perfect example. Our organisation, like most organisations, we're large, we're bureaucratic, we've got giant warehouses, we just struggled to get to a point where we could either decide what to do or launch something. And when I really challenged these and said, "What can we do next week?" We've got a fabulous part of our business. The Malt Shovel Garage, they deliver direct to consumers, and I kind of like send a message to someone and said, "Hey, do you reckon you could do this?" She was like, "Yeah, I reckon."

And the sell-in for that for me, which has just completely changed the way I work over the last few years, is you either call it minimum level product, you call it a prototype, you call it a draft, and then no one gets worried about it or stressed about it, or concerned about the implications, and then you just do it. So I go, "Hey, just running a trial

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or test and learn and prototype, we're going to do a welcome pack," and two weeks later those boxes were being packed and sent. And then other people are going, "How did you do that?" And I'm like, "Well, it's not perfect." It's got this labelling on it and this in it, and then you just iterate. And that might not be an example about learning, but we've applied that to the learning program as well. It's exactly the same, it's like, how can we just launch something and then just build it from there and learn from people rather than sitting in a kind of L&D ivory tower creating something that we think is right for people? And it's a classic design thinking, of course, or agile methodology, but for me that's probably being critical to the way that we work and why the program succeeded as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's such an exciting shift that I'm seeing happening away from sort of even big pilots towards the little test and learn or... And I love your phrase, and they use it several times in the podcast, people may not have picked up on it, 'minimum lovable product' rather than minimum viable product. I love it. It's a great way of thinking about what we're doing and putting out little things and working iteratively. So I think there's lots in your summary there for others who'd like to get started or do more with their onboarding in 2023. Are there any other significant tips you'd like to pass on to listeners who are thinking about making a shift where they're onboarding or uplifting their onboarding in the coming year?

Anthea Piening:

I guess in terms of tips, these little tidbits that I probably talk to along the way, I think it's just overall, that would be just stand back and start again and imagine what's possible, and then, yeah, start with small steps to do that. I hope there's bits in terms of the tips about looking at the program from a blended perspective, like any project, it's the senior-leader endorsement of it, that can be absolutely critical, so it's kind of an age-old tip, isn't it? But our Managing Directors are a huge supporter and driver of these, which makes things a little bit easier. Try not to drop his name all over the place. But yeah, I think it's that, it's just to imagine and explore and then see what you can create that's best for our learners in terms of what they need, but also matches what the organisation needs as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Anthea, what a great conversation to kick off Learning Uncut in 2023! Thank you so much for joining me. And we'll pop a link to your LinkedIn profile in the show notes along with some resources. If anyone would like get in touch with you to find out more about anything we've discussed, please go to LinkedIn. Thank you so much. What a wonderful, wonderful conversation!

Anthea Piening:

Awesome. Thank you, Michelle.

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About Learning Uncut

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

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

Learn more about us [at our website](#).

About your host, Michelle Ockers



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

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

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



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