

**Learning Uncut Episode 122**  
**Thriving to Surviving: Insights Campaign – Michal**  
**Niezgoda & Carl Hodler**  
**Hosted by Michelle Ockers**



**Michelle Ockers:**

In this episode I'm joined by Michal Niezgoda, a Leadership Development Specialist at Amazon Data Services, and Carl Hodler from Learner Lab, as they share their experience running a leader insights campaign to support people on the theme of Thriving versus Surviving in challenging times. Michal used StoryTagger to run a storytelling challenge with leaders from multiple Amazon business units, where they recorded short video responses using structured prompts to share insights on this theme. The campaign culminated in a fireside chat, which was also recorded. We delve into how Carl and his team helped Michal to shape the campaign and go deeper on why and how to capture and share stories on video using Storytagger. Ultimately, this story is about building human connection to help people thrive. Remember to check out the show notes for links to the guide that Michal and Storytagger created, along with examples of videos and video montages recorded using Storytagger.

Welcome to Learning Uncut Michal.

**Michal Niezgoda:**

Welcome.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And Carl welcome.

**Michal Niezgoda:**

Thank you.

**Carl Hodler:**

Hi hi good to see you.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And You're both joining us from the United Kingdom, aren't you?

**Michal Niezgoda:**

That's right. A few miles apart. But yes, the same country.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Excellent. So let's start with some introductions. Let's start with you me, How... Can you tell us about your organization? Who you are, what you do, who you do it for. Maybe a little bit about your workforce.

**Michal Niezgoda:**

Of course, my name is Michal... I work at Amazon, and I've been with Amazon for 8 years, which is a long time, I suppose, with so many things happening in the tech world, I've moved around Amazon worked in many different parts of the wider business, starting from customer fulfilment then central training roles for customer fulfilment, and now I'm in the devices and

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services organization of Amazon. So that's, I think the name says it all, the organization that looks after all of our devices, it's design end to end processes. So if I would narrow it down, I'm part of Alexa within the device Organization and within that, I look after leadership development function for what's called Amazon data services.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Thank you very much. And in terms of the workforce then the leadership workforce in the devices and services area, can you give us a little bit of a feel for that, the size of that workforce, where they're located, any kind of defining characteristics that are relevant to today's conversation?

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

The workforce is global. Absolutely, I think you name the country, and I probably tell you that we have a place there, space there, office there, people working there, but in terms of the size, it's, devices and services has around 36,000 people, one of the smallest organisations... In Amazon terms, I must say, maybe it sounds a lot, but it's actually not for us, and my really local team, Amazon data services is around 4000 people spread across 11 countries, so from India to Japan to Americas, and of course, Europe, Middle East.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Alright. So you must have counterparts working in leadership development, not only around the world in your division, but in many areas of Amazon.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Absolutely, we are one big family. One big community, leadership development, learning design groups are actually many, but there are also many groups within the wider, if you will, leadership development, learning and development group, I'm part of some of those, and one of them will be Emotional Intelligence group for example.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yes, and that's a good example because we are gonna spend a lot of time talking about emotional intelligence today, which is a fabulous topic, very on point for right now in the world. Before we move on to that though, Carl, you are joining us from StoryTagger. Can you tell us a little bit about StoryTagger and what StoryTagger does? And where you fit in.

#### **Carl Hodler:**

Yeah. Sure, so the company I'm from, it's called Learning Lab, and we set up about 10 years ago to help Learning and Development teams to really share the value of learning it's kind of through a marketing lens, really helping talk busy learning teams. Promote the benefit the value of learning within their organizations, both to employees, but also to senior stakeholders and leadership as well, and one of the things that we found worked really well very early on was story-telling and putting people in front of the camera and getting them to tell their personal story, sharing the learning experiences, maybe knowledge or advocacy.

And we did that for a lot of organizations, but we very quickly found that that was... It was very expensive, very time-consuming, and we really struggled with that because the benefits that both the individual storyteller and the audience got from that story-telling process, hearing of stories, the sharing of stories, the creation of stories was so powerful that we set ourselves on a bit of a mission to democratise it, and that's where StoryTagger came from, so we set up StoryTagger just over five years ago. Well, I started building it just over five years ago, and it started off life as an interactive PDF and then grew out, and today it's a user-generated content video tool that helps employees share really powerful personal learning stories and story-telling is the thing that really differentiates StoryTagger from the plethora of video apps and AI tools that are out there, it really focuses on the human experience, the story, the kind of conversations that we used to have all the time in our

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workplaces over the water cooler or in the canteen, making a cup of tea and bringing that into the digital space.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Fantastic, what a great introduction. I've had some exposure to StoryTagger. I think I might have been one of the early trial users 2019 for Learning Technologies UK conference.

#### **Carl Hodler:**

That's right yeah.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

I remember first using StoryTagger. And I know it's come a long way since then. So, in part, what we're going to talk about is how StoryTagger was used to address a specific challenge at Amazon. As well as a supplementary approach that you've taken Michal. So, let's come back to the business challenge. What were you trying to solve or what we're trying to address in this realm of emotional intelligence, that lead you to use StoryTagger, Michal? And feel free to give us as much of the back story about your interest in emotional intelligence and what had been going on in the organization that lead you to think there was an opportunity to do something with story.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Absolutely, I think, Oh, wow, this is a big story. It's one of those stories that you don't know where to start, I'll probably start then with mentioning that this probably has its origins in those communities, or maybe one big leadership development community, because that's where I've met a lot of people, that's where I've met. The emotional intelligence group, our founder, who started it all, and many, many volunteers, and I actually mean volunteers who commit their time to support their teams through challenging times, these were challenging times, the last three years were not easy for many people, and that's what really started it all.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So, when was the emotional intelligence group started then Michal?

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

The emotional intelligence group started around three years ago, so around really started getting bigger and bigger, probably I should say around the time when we went into the forbidden P word, pandemic and lockdowns, and people were sharing their struggles with each other and were struggling effectively sharing their experiences and looking for help, looking for that connection with each other and emotional intelligence, our founder, whose name is Richard Hua, started that community and created that space for people to come together and then share those struggles and help each other, and in those discussions. So I'm talking actually, Amazon globally, the things around difficulties connecting, switching off, burning out, thriving, surviving were really vivid and clear, and I saw the same things being discussed also at local level, and that's where the idea of thriving versus surviving campaigns started to become reality.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So this thriving versus surviving campaign, it's very catchy, by the way, as a campaign name, and I think we might use it as the podcast title, or weave it into the podcast title because I think many people are going to recognize it as one of the contemporary challenges and I think it's something that many are struggling with, or grappling with. They're trying to figure out how to support their people through because whilst we're no longer in periods of lockdown, there's still lots of challenges and the pace of change, and I know when we're preparing for this podcast, Michal, you talked to me about the reality of... Even things like the Ukraine, the war in Ukraine, and how that is impacting people in terms of levels of anxiety and uncertainty... There's a lot going on in the world, right? So I think no matter what

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your context is or where you are in the world, there are challenges to our sense of well-being and this idea of thriving... I knew I was going to do that.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Now we also say that you know this name, thriving versus surviving was popping up in many places... Yes, and I think I always say when we build something at Amazon, someone has already built it in terms of content, I think it's probably... That's true for many organizations, and generally speaking, when you start thinking about something, it has already been built, so now it just... So, there was bubble, it was bubbling up and I picked it up. So many people also had the same similar ideas.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

But instead of going, "Well, someone's already built it, but here's the course to help people with it." You took a very different approach. You conducted insights campaigns.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Correct.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So, tell us a bit about the approach you talk and why you took that approach.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Because as I was saying, people were looking for connection, and very often when you think about what already exists it's a little bit dry, it doesn't help you build that connection to each other, but also to the story, the content itself to the topic being discussed, and that's where I've actually met StoryTagger Carl and Cheryl through a colleague of mine who's already started doing work with Carl in customer fulfilment. So in my previous organization, and that's how I became aware of the tool and I immediately knew that there is a huge potential in it, and as we were going through lockdown, I actually spotted this, another theme, which was real in social media, which was challenge '22, and I'll explain why that matters in a second, but really the whole idea of campaign. Was important for me for that really, really big reason of building meaningful connection to the story itself.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So what did your campaign look like?

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Right, and I think this is one of those stories, again, stories, we have lots of stories to tell that we didn't know at the beginning what it's going to look like, so it was a little bit of an organic growth and I think... I haven't mentioned it previously, but fantastic work that StoryTagger Carl and Cheryl did in shaping this up with me, so we've had quite a few brainstorming sessions, of course, we were very clear, I was very clear that it's going to be thriving versus surviving. But then when we started shaping it up, that the detail became clearer, of course, so the first thing of course, started with getting stories, and that's a challenge, that's a challenge because as I said, people are anxious, people are busy, and of course, current announcements about lay-offs are also impacting us, right, so people have to do more, more work. There is more strain on them, so asking people to share their stories is not easy, so that's where it was very important for me to reach out to people who had a pretty strong relationship with me, who I knew that they will be able to share their stories. And that's where this idea of, like I said, just a few seconds ago of challenge '22 came to be, because it wasn't just about sharing a story, but it was also about making the whole process fun.

It's actually part of our Amazon model, I just, I had this this collection, have fun. Maybe it's not as obvious to many, but it is also part of the model, it was very important that we create something that can sustain itself, and what I mean by that is, when we reach out to people,

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and I reach out to quite a few people at the same time, presenting them with the concept and of course, inviting them to share their story on the tool, and the tool is very helpful because it creates the structure. You can probably imagine, you probably have done this in the past, you've reached out to someone and say, "Hey, can you share a story with me on when you struggled?" And people are overwhelmed. What StoryTagger does really well is creating that really step-by-step process of this is what we need from you right now, and this is the prompt, this is what you could say next, this is what you think you need to think about next, need is a strong word but you know what I mean? But you can think about next and so on, so that there is this really hand holding along the process, which makes it much easier and the final step of that process that we came up with was asking people who share stories to nominate someone else, so then it's not only about us, it's not only about me, I need to let the story go.

So as I said at the beginning, I had this relationship with people whom I have asked for stories, but once people started nominating their colleagues, their stakeholders, the story started living on its own, and I think that was also very powerful.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, yeah. So, Carl, what I'm really interested in is Michal said he started working with you to shape this campaign in terms of how StoryTagger is used is it typically approached as an opportunity to run a campaign, and it's a tool that enables a campaign... I know you kind of typically designing campaigns or are there other use cases? Let's start there for a start.

#### **Carl Hodler:**

It's used wherever teams need to pull stories out from the workplace, one learning manager I was speaking to a couple of weeks ago, likened it to being more mindful and strategic about pulling out some of the 20 from 7 to 2010, taking some of those conversations that are naturally happening out in the field, but pulling them into the digital space, and I think Michal's point about connection. Every learning manager I speak to at the moment seems to be thinking about helping people create connection, and it's definitely something that's come out of the pandemic, but also learning managers who are supporting global teams, distributed teams, people working in a flexible environment, so using learning experience as a way of bringing people together. It does feel really important for everybody right now.

So as to how it's used, it's really taking, like I said, those water cooler moments, those conversations, those sort of moments that just happen naturally in the workplace when we all work together and bringing them into the digital space, so it can support people in onboarding experiences, introducing people connecting people to line managers, senior leaders, people are going to be working with, connecting people with people who maybe join the organization three, six, 12 months previously, who can share tips and advice, talk about progression opportunities, learning opportunities, bringing it into leadership programs, like Michal has done, but talking about learning transfer impact reflective practice, right through to more transactional things about helping people report on maybe an incident or an accident that's happened in the workplace, and getting lots of different perspectives from that very quickly, and then being able to bring that into a learning experience, so it's kind of all that human stuff that just always happened organically, but now work has become more digital, more dispersed, it's really important to start being more deliberate, more strategic about drawing those stories out so they can benefit far more people than those who are working in the same physical space.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

I love that idea that it's all about being more human and creating connection. And like, it's, it's, it's just such a versatile, enabling tool, right, for all sorts of purposes. So, let's come up to, back to this idea of shaping the campaign. And if you recall when you started working

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with Michal, and he said you were helping him to shape the campaign. How did you work together? And what did it look like to try to shape the campaign?

#### **Carl Hodler:**

So it's the thing that we found most interesting about StoryTagger and moving from the consulting space where we used to take care of everything, but we're now enabling learning teams to do more of this than themselves is that when we were designing the platform, there's a few steps that we had to go through to make the whole process much easier for people. So that is helping teams think about how they can take someone on a storytelling journey. So, we're asking really great questions that create a narrative arc that will really compel and bring the viewer in. Because we weren't helping teams make user generated content for the sake of user generated content, it had to have a real purpose and a value to it. So that meant the viewer had to be really taken on a journey with the story.

So, it needed really great storytelling to be baked into the process. So, one of the first things that we do is, support teams on understanding how to craft those stories in StoryTagger. Now, it's not a big jump because designers, instructional designers really great, that asking great questions, getting people to share knowledge, information experiences are day-to-day really. But braiding that into a scaffold, if you like, rather than a mandated structure. Because the objective is for the story that gets shared at the end, it needs to feel like someone's just picked up their camera and they're just talking really naturally. So that's where that human, that sense of human connection comes from. It doesn't feel stage managed or scripted. It really just needs to feel like someone talking from the heart about something that they are passionate about.

So, the putting the questions together is a big part of that and in understanding how to reach out to people and engage them. And I love how Michal brought the storytelling challenge into this because one of the interesting things that we always found was even when we were going out with a video crew, people would be really resilient or resistant to sharing their story. And the experience I remember most, and I've told this story so many times, I apologize if having anyone's heard it before, but there was this lady working in a supermarket, and we, we knew that she'd been doing some really great stuff around customer service. And we went and asked her and said, we'd love to hear your story about how you've been supporting customers. And she's like, oh, no, not me.

I just turn up to work every day. I'm nothing special. Go and speak to Chris over there. He's really funny. He'll be great. And we're like, no, no, we're not looking for funny Chris. We're looking for, really amazing stories about how you support customers. Anyway, we coached her through that process and got her to share her story. And it was incredible. It was so powerful. And that's when I started to get an inkling that some of the hardest stories to capture or curate were probably the best ones. And if you look at Simon Sinek adoption curve, you've probably talked about this on your podcast before Michelle, but you've got the five stages of the adoption process. So, you've got your innovators and early adopters who are the people you know, who are queuing outside the Apple store to buy phones and stuff like that. They'll always do something new all the time. They're just up for it. And all the time I've worked with learning and development teams, they've always had their 10% of people who reach out to become advocates or tried new things.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Well, I have a name for that 10%, I call them learner-tics.

#### **Carl Hodler:**

Learnatrics. Amazing. So that is about sort of 10% of, those early adopters. But then you've got the early majority and in the late majority, which is your 80% of your audience. And they really need to see the value or the other people having done something before they do it.

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That's 80% of the population. So, what Michal did, which was incredibly smart, was to take those early adopters or the innovators, and then get them to seed the storytelling process into that early majority, and potentially, some of the later majority as well. And that's the trick of social sharing, building up momentum behind a kind of user generated campaign is to, is to seed that confidence, that value, that purpose, that story around what you're trying to achieve. So, it rolls through your whole 80% and that's when the magic comes out, because you'll get great stories from the that early phase. But the magic is in that 80%. So that's one of the things I really loved about Michal's campaign.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

I wish I'd been that smart. I did run a campaign called 'My L&D Why' using StoryTagger at one point, but I didn't think to actually get everyone to kind of tag or nominate the next person to tell their story. And it's hard work getting the story. So, kudos to you Michal for figuring that out. So maybe if we can come back to you, Michal, we've talked about creating an arc with a series of questions to the stories. They're quite short, the videos and you put hard time limits on people to answer each question. But of course, people can rerecord each segment as they go along. So, it's part of the user experience. But I think that's one of the great things about using an app like StoryTagger, is that it puts some hard limits around how long people can talk for. So, they have to be clear and succinct and answer the question. So, can you talk to us about, how did you break down that set of questions? What were people being asked to, to respond to on the app?

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Oh my gosh. Yeah. I think this is really great. It's because actually I have this image of... Do you know Liz and Molly? Liz and Molly Images?

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

I've heard of Liz and Molly. Tell me more.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

It's, it is those graphic images that describe very difficult concepts in simple, in very simple terms.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Okay. Ah, yes. I know the ones, I'll pop a couple in the show notes so people know what we are talking about. I've seen them.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

They're absolutely amazing. We use them for great starters of conversations. Every workshop can have just one image and it generates half an hour discussion really, if you let it. But the reason why I mentioned this is because they have a, this brilliant graphic of big goal to achieve. And you've got series of steps. And then say, don't think about the end game yet. Just think about one step ahead of you. And I think that's basically what StoryTagger does in the sense of when you ask this big question, what does empathy mean to you? It's like, oh my gosh, what do I say now? It's such a big topic. I have nowhere where to start, right? You okay? Just first of all, start small, one step. Okay. When have you experienced empathy or, even smaller question?

And I think that's where it's so powerful. And how did we think about those? It's actually if I had more time, I would've written a shorter letter effectively quote. And so it was really through a lot of brainstorming and discussion with StoryTagger team to really get those questions just nailed perfectly and reduce them. 'Cause the, I think the natural instinct is, oh, we need to make this peak. We need to add a lot of parts, a lot of questions, and we probably need to extend the limit per each part to the maximum, right? Let's make it two minutes per part and let's add 10 parts in. And that didn't work. In fact, that was the first run

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that someone was trying to make on a similar campaign, also using StoryTagger in Amazon, and they didn't get a lot of stories in just because of that.

It was still too complicated. So the magic is to really make it very simple and really less is more, because that's really gets people to think. It's another quote from Albert Einstein, right? If you can't explain it in simple words, you didn't really understand it well. So I think that's where the magic happens, really. And I think one of the game changers Carl didn't say it, but for my organization specifically, was when StoryTagger became available on the web app. I know Carl said that you need to be conversational, you sort of grab your phone, sort of like a vlogger type of thing, right? Lots of YouTube clips. People just walk the streets and record their stories. It doesn't really work like that in corporate or because people are too distracted, they're not out and about, they can't focus.

They are overwhelmed with stimuli, with workload, with messages. You know, we have Chime, there's Zoom, Slack, whatever. You need time to focus on bringing the application as an web app help people just to carve out that space, right? I'm going to put it on my calendar now, half an hour. I've got just two minutes to record. Maybe it's going to take me four minutes, but I'll just give myself just a little bit more time there. And I think that's some of the key insights. And the final one, I really wanted to say also, it was mentioned a little bit, but part of our campaigns was including a diverse group of people. And when I say diverse, I don't actually mean, I don't only mean having equal balance between male and female voices, or having people from various countries. I also think about levels in Amazon ladder. So you could have a voice from a really tenured VP who has been with Amazon for nearly 20 years, who is right at the top of the organization. And the same value of that story was also given to someone who has been in organization for three years and is sort of five levels below in organizational structure. And I think that's also what makes this so powerful.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yes, and Carl, you use a word called democratizing. I think that's part of this as well as giving everybody a voice. So for listeners, there's this wonderful guide that Michal and StoryTagger have created together, which explains the structure of this program. It includes the specific questions and how long people were given to answer the questions. We'll link to that from the show notes. So if you are interested in digging deeper into some of those specifics. And don't be fooled by the apparent simplicity. It's obviously something that takes a fair bit of thinking and time to craft and testing the questions and getting right. But you will see that in the show show notes and take a closer look. So thank you to both of you for sharing that guide and making that available to people. So it's one thing to record the stories, so you capture the stories. What do you do with them Michal after you've got them?

#### Michal Niezgoda:

Yes. I think this is another wonderful thing, and it's again, organic also in terms of how you can discover so many different use cases for the stories. So once the stories are generated, first of all, StoryTagger makes it very easy to edit them. I'll just skip that part. It's just of course the same resolution, the same quality, and so on. But we then take them and upload them onto our, you can say internal YouTube infrastructure. However, before they are made that way, we worked with StoryTagger to create montages because stories are recorded in parts, you tackle each question separately. So you can really focus in, zoom in on specific areas you want to take out from those stories as well. Which people are busy, right? They don't have time.

Let's say you have 10 people, each one records two minutes, then you have 20 minutes. I don't have 20 minutes. I know it may be sound ridiculous, I don't have 20 minutes to listen to a video, but many people don't, right? They only have two minutes. So how do we synthesize all of those stories into two- or three-minutes montage? And we did three montages that focused on each part of the question. I mean, of the big question as part of the campaign, right? We had three parts, so three montages for part one, part two, and part



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three. And then what we also did with that, we run a fireside chat, and we run that fireside chat with people who did not take part in the actual campaign. There was one person who did take part that was my leader.

I'm very grateful for her, to her for that. And then we invited additional leaders who did not. So the task was to watch the montages to think about the question and then to interpret what people were saying in their own words, and in how they actually approach thriving and surviving, what do they do about it in their organizations? So that was, again, trying to kind of, I would probably liken it to looking at an, I don't know, an object that you hold in your hand from various different angles of trying to go 360 degrees all around it and trying to see where it shines when I look at it from one direction, from the opposite direction and so on. And, and the content is still being reused because when you think about thriving versus surviving, emotional intelligence is the big topic, an underlying theme framework that I used to build all of my content. But also, if you think the bigger themes are also well-being, right? And so, when we share content and resources around well-being, that playlist of those stories and montages and fireside chat, it still lives there and we reshare it all those parts that make sense, again, are relevant for that specific question we're tackling.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Lovely. Carl, how else do you see the video stories being used after they're captured? Can you give us some other examples of what other organizations do with them?

#### **Carl Hodler:**

So, I think, one of the things that Michal highlighted from this particular campaign was being able to take stories, reflections, ideas that typically happen within a closed cohort and opening that out to the wider organization. So in kind of like leadership programs, in cohort-based experiences, having the ability to flip some of those experiences out of a live classroom and put them into an asynchronous space that can then be reflected on just as Michal did by the the facilitator, the coach and get people thinking about ideas based on the stories that people have already shared is an amazing use case. And a lot of kind of leadership teams use StoryTagger like that. But it can also be used to, as I mentioned before, with that health and safety example, take experiences and bring them into learning programs.

One of the really important things we found back in the learning lab days when we were going out helping teams promote the value of learning and embed learning is the importance of context, and providing context for why people need to put themselves out of their comfort zone, take on a new challenge, go through some mandated program and getting sponsors and stakeholders to talk about that. Bringing in people who've been through the program, bringing real world examples of the benefits and the value and the outcomes of learning. Shining a light on employee experience, as I've mentioned before, career opportunities and just making people feel more connected. So wherever people are going to learn connect, have so social experiences, that's where these stories can, can live. And by being more mindful about the kind of stories that you bring into those spaces enables you to just amplify the voices and experiences of people who typically are and can feel quite siloed in large organizations.

And it's just enormous value that comes out of it. And it, the post pandemic, that sense of connect, I don't think it's going to go away because I think so many organizations have really kind of fractured workforce now and hybrid working for all the benefits of it. It does create certain senses of isolation sometimes and in just helping ideas spread. And even if, just again, going back to that context piece, helping people understand why and stories are just incredible for that and the baking kind of culture around that purpose as well.

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#### **Michelle Ockers:**

You talked about context and tacit knowledge there as well, and in a lot of the work I do with organizations around their learning strategies, something that comes up as a challenge constantly is knowledge sharing and knowledge management. We have an aging workforce, so we have points of dependency with certain subject matter experts who have a long tenured and hold all the organizational knowledge around things. It strikes me, this is a great time, tell us about a time when you faced a really difficult situation with a customer in this context, or tell us about a time when something went wrong and you were trying to troubleshoot... This stuff is very hard. People talk about trying to capture everything and document everything, you can't document a lot of these stuff, right, because it is so context-based, so it strikes me there's a really fantastic application in that realm around knowledge management and knowledge sharing as well.

#### **Carl Hodler:**

Yeah, we remember stories. They really stick with us. So whilst maybe more of the transactional side of learning can sit in certain places... Helping people understand why it's important that they do that. I remember a large global organization asked us to help them make the mandated content more sticky, they didn't understand why people weren't really getting value from or really taking what they've learned in those programs and putting into practice, and when we spoke to employees in the organization, they just wanted to know why I'm really happy to spend time doing this, but I just don't understand why, why you're making me do this, and I think it's stories that can bring that value to life.

And this is one of the things I always say, I feel storytelling, got a bit left behind by digital transformation. It was something that we all seem to take so much for granted in the workplace, and I'm sure we all remember our first jobs and hearing stories, and I worked in this Victorian metal pressing factory and most of the health and safety I learned there was from people on the production line telling me about accidents that people had had previously, and that oral tradition, it really struggled to find its way into our digital spaces, and I think that's one of the things that we've really tried to address and understand how to help people take those natural casual stories that we have shared for generations in the workplace and bring that into the digital space, I think it's just too risky to forget about storytelling in the workplace and just think, Oh, we've got a Wiki or we've got knowledge bases and stuff like that I think it's...

We need that oral tradition to see and connect with experts and colleagues from across our organizations and have that connection in understanding the kind of wider contacts, the why and the stories that surround why we do things and learn in workspaces.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, absolutely. And two point, but maybe stories got left behind a little bit in the move to digital, I think human connection is under threat in everything being done so digitally. So I like that thread that we've had running through the whole conversation about human connection now, Michal talking about stories, making things memorable, you obviously have a long-standing interest in emotional intelligence and drove this theme around from surviving to thriving. What are some of the most interesting or memorable insights or tips that came out of the campaign for you? What do people share that you found really resonated or interested you?

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#### **Carl Hodler:**

There were really many, many interesting threads there, what stood out for me... I think some of the key insights that stood out for me were around creating this space of trust and psychological safety, so it's how when you are in a survival mode, you just think about giving the bare minimum of course, because you're scared that doing something more will get you into trouble for one reason or another, it could be because of the culture of pressure or and whatever punishment that in fact, a comment could have been given for someone who did something over and above, but something that did not work out to actually be the thing that they were looking for. So I think these were the key things that were moving people from surviving into thriving, first of all, really thinking about the culture of trust and psychological safety, and really innovating... Not being afraid to fail. So there was this, of course, I also think theme of what actually it to fail and what it means to learn, so I think these were the key themes that stood out for me.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah, thank you. So it's obvious that you felt that the effort was worthwhile what the organization... The people in the organization got out of this campaign was worthwhile. How do you gauge that? How do you know if this was worth the effort and the impact it had.

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

Some of the measures are most explored in terms of how many times the campaign was viewed or all the content of campaign was viewed on our internal systems. So that's definitely one the simplest of measures, of course. What's more interesting is of course how people talk about the content, so that that content still lives in people's minds and when people come back to us and refer to the campaign, and when we are in a meeting, in a discussion. And when we use that phrase, because for me, it's about building common language, the same language that we use, and that's what makes that learning experience stick, because if you think about... Many of you maybe will be aware of Amazon leadership principles culture, we have 16 leadership principles at Amazon.

And the reason why are they so powerful, it's because they are constantly being referred to literally every meeting, every situation people will use, actually, even in the private lives where they probably get into a lot of trouble with their spouses partners and family members when they say, You didn't entrust with me today, and then raised eyebrows for excuse me, but that's actually what makes those stories stick, and that's where I see the impact that the story and the campaign is having on people, and of course it's just about making that stick even more by creating follow-up events and follow-up campaigns that will still continue on that thread, but from a different perspective...

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

It's a foundation to build upon. I read a really fabulous article last year about Amazon's leadership principles, and I was trying to get one of your colleagues to come on the podcast and talk about the principles on how they use... So I might have another attempt to that, but I'll put a link to the article that I read on LinkedIn about your leadership principles and how effectively they brought to life and you've just reinforce that. So thank you for bringing that up. So as we move towards the end of our conversation, would you like to summarize, I think you've touched on a lot of things Michal around what went well and why... If you could summarize that, the top two or three things that went well and why you think they went well against your objective of trying to help people in this really challenging times with... I was going to say it again. Surviving with thriving rather than surviving, what do you think went well and why?

#### **Michal Niezgoda:**

And I think the first thing that went really well was getting a really diverse group of people and giving them the same space and assigning the same value to the stories that they

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shared and then that's I'm really proud really that so many people were willing to share their stories and so many people from diverse backgrounds, were able to do that. And I think that the second thing that I'm really thinking about is actually how people got to know a little bit more about each other from those companies, not only about each other on that personal level, I think that's really important about how people think and actually making them see that there are many more people who go through the same questions that surviving and thriving is not just a question that someone may be at a very early days at Amazon is asking themselves, that this is a question that is being asked every single day by people across organizational levels, from VPs to directors, to senior managers to people executing mostly tactical work, everyone has the same questions, and the approach actually, surprisingly enough, the context varies, but the approach is surprisingly, maybe not surprisingly similar. And I think that's what's really powerful as well in the whole campaign.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Thank you. So, Carl, you've worked with many organizations using stories to build human connection for a range of contexts, what tips would you have for people who want to use this kind of story-sharing approach to build human connection to address challenges and opportunities in the organization?

#### **Carl Hodler:**

Awesome, yes that's a really good question, and I think that all learning teams are looking to evidence the value and the... Of those experiences against real business objectives, real business goals, it's got everything has to be really a value to the organization, customers or people who work there, and it's thinking about where there's gaps where you don't have people who potentially, as I said before, have an understanding of why something matters or you're trying to build a culture around something it's where storytelling has historically for generations been the foundation of those experiences.

And then thinking about how you can tie those into specific business goals, so if you think about story telling in an onboarding process, it's about higher engagement before day one, giving people better access to senior leaders, more diverse, employee voices, improving retention over different periods of time, so fast time to competence, so that those kind of real business metrics that storytelling create in a sense of human connection really can influence an impact and then through to looking at in cohort-based program, so high levels of confidence and trust within people, more interaction in virtual classrooms, that relating through to people performing better in their roles, so it's looking at story-telling in a more strategic and mindful manner, and that's exactly what one of our customers said about thinking about pulling these stories out, using them in different learning experiences or culture building experiences, where there is just a gap and there's nothing there and things aren't moving forward because people aren't able to contextualise or understand the value of the purpose without hearing it from someone they trust. Relate to understand and language and voice that they are used to hearing on a day-to-day basis.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Thank you so much. It's obviously something that's very versatile I love that link back to being strategic and thinking about what are the business goals business needs we're supporting. So, thank you, Carl, for joining us today. And Michal... Thank you for that brilliant example and for how richly you've shared it with us with lots of nice little references. I love the reference to the Liz and Mollie images, which I'm picturing now my head, and I'll include an example in the show notes, there's lots of really great resources for us to share as well, so thank you both so much for sharing your work and insights with us, I'm going to include a link to both of your LinkedIn profiles, plus your organizations websites, if anyone would like to get in touch with either of you to explore more about the topics discussed in today's episode, I encourage them to do that by LinkedIn. So, thank you so much to both of you. Thank you.

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**Michal Niezgoda:**

Thank you it was really great fun.

**Carl Hodler:**

Yeah, absolutely, a pleasure. Thank you so Michelle.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Lovely.

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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 experience, 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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