

Michelle Ockers:

The Learning Uncut podcast is now five and a half years old and we've published around 210 episodes and I've lost track of how many L&D professionals we've spoken with in this time, literally hundreds. If you go to the podcast landing page on [thelearninguncut.global website](https://thelearninguncut.global), you have access to an incredible library of case studies and examples of high quality work being done by L&D professionals across a range of countries, in combination, the years of collective experience represented in this library run into the thousands. It's time to do more to draw upon all of this and pull out good practice in a format that people in L&D roles can use to take action and increase their impact. One way I've identified to do this is create a new type of podcast episode, which I'm calling a Learning Uncut Playbook. I'll aim to put out three or four of these playbook episodes in the coming year. This first playbook is titled Your First 90 Days as an L&D Leader. It's aimed particularly at people changing organizations and moving into a role as an L&D leader. However, the guidance it contains could readily be adapted to people moving into an L&D leader role in their existing organization. I'd really appreciate feedback on this episode as the format is new. So please DM me on LinkedIn if you'd like to share what you liked, what could be improved, and your ideas on themes for future episodes. As part of my conversation about specific initiatives in the regular podcast case study episodes, I noticed that a number of L&D leaders talked about key things they did to set themselves up for success when they first started in their organization. I've extracted consistent themes which we'll explore one by one using excerpts from past podcast episodes after I introduce these guests. To set the scene, I've invited Nigel Payne to join me to discuss understanding and navigating what I called organizational politics in my conversation with him. L&D leaders who build influence and credibility in their organizations invariably handle organizational politics well. Fail to understand it and build the right relationships and you will struggle to make a meaningful impact in your organization. In my past work alongside Nigel, I've seen him coach both individual L&D leaders and other senior members of their teams on how to get this right. I've always found his guidance smart and useful, and I'm pleased that he joined me to share his thoughts on what organisational politics is, why it matters, and to get a handle on how to navigate it successfully.

Nigel Paine:

The way I look at it is that any organization is like a moving stream. Sometimes it's moving incredibly fast. Sometimes it's moving in ebs and there are fast bits and slow bits, but it's nevertheless moving. And you have got to step from the shore into that stream. And how you insert yourself in the organization is incredibly important. And how you appear to others is incredibly important. And how you work out the key players, what you can do and what you can't do in the organization is extremely important. And a lot of people learn this the hard way. They learn it by being burnt very early on. They learn it by not getting what they want and they don't understand why. And they learn it by being ignored, frankly, because they haven't made their presence felt. So when you enter an organization, you only have a limited time to establish yourself as a player in the organization.

Michelle Ockers:

So, how do you read that? You talk about it being kind of like a stream with ebs and flows and you need to leave the shore and figure out how to navigate this. How do you read it to start out with? And really what we're reading is, you know, how decisions get made, how things get done, how influence works in the organization. That's really the kind of thing we're trying to read. Or would you position it differently in terms of what we're trying to figure out?

Nigel Paine:

No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't position it differently. But there's only one way to do it. And that's my favourite, which is fieldwork. You've got to do your fieldwork. And you've got to get out there. A lot of L&D people kind of hide in the L&D group for six months, trying to work it all out from this little bubble somewhere. And by the time they pop out, no one notices them. They're already finished in terms of having power and influence, you've got to do your fieldwork. And the way that I did it, for example, was I made a 20-minute appointment with every senior manager in the place. Some were really easy. They were really keen to talk to me. Others, it was like pulling teeth. They were too busy. Oh, I can't do it this Thursday. Oh, maybe next week or maybe next month. But if you persist, you can get in for 10, 15, 20 minutes to every leader. And I had three questions which I asked them, which is, what are the issues that I could help you with? Not here I am, look at me. What are the issues I can help you with? What are your burning problems? What keeps you awake at night? What are the people issues that you think I should be addressing or looking at? And thirdly, how urgent is this? Is this primary urgency? Is it something that we can look at over the next six or eight months? And from those conversations, you get a sense of not just what the issues are, that's one thing, but the real thing you get a sense of is, Who can you work with? Who is going to be malleable, is going to listen? And who is completely not going to listen and is completely not workable with? And you can then begin to steer your path. So you know who you can work with. You know where you might want to start. You know who your friends are or potential friends are in the business and work from there. And from that position, you can begin to understand the politics. And if you can make some real links outside your bubble into the business, you've got a pathway to say, why is so and so not listening to me? Why don't I get traction here? Do you think this is the place to push? And people who already respect you and think they could work with you, will give you that kind of insight. So you build up your picture of the politics and the culture of the organisation from outside your bit, and that is the only way to do it. So you've got to kind of work out, it's like you enter a dark room and little shafts of light come in and enough shafts of light come in you begin to see the whole picture you see the three dimensions and you can move forward but my reckoning is that you have about 90 days, three months, to make that kind of impact, build those initial relationships so that people say, we can work with this person, we can take them seriously. So going away and hiding for 90 days is a complete disaster. Making big statements about, well, oh, yes, I think we can do a whole leadership. You don't even know whether that is required, what the politics around that are. Don't make big statements. Spend your time out there listening, asking questions, making your presence felt. That is the best way into organizational politics, to be a player, to be someone where the organization says,

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oh, I'm glad we got Michelle. She's great. I think we can work with her. Then you're on the way. Not, who the hell's Michelle? Oh, I didn't have time to talk to her. And if no one is willing to talk to you, you've just got to kind of step into doors. You've got to force your way on. Because if you don't talk to anyone in three months, no one's going to talk to you in three years. So you've got a job to do to make your presence felt and make people recognize that you've got a contribution to make. But yes, as you say, Michelle, you go with those who you think you could work together with in the early in the early stages and get some results. Don't go with the most resistant, the most aggressive, the most negative person and think, I've got a mission to win over this person. You can do that way down the track. So it's really important that you can ruin your career in a company in 20 days. And that is not a happy position to be in. You can win your position in the company in 20 days. And that is something to be really celebrated. So yeah, take note of all the advice that you're giving, Michelle, take note of that. And just, it's like a campaign, sort of like a military campaign. Your presence in the audience, it doesn't just happen. You've got to make it happen. You've got to march to this point and that point and take action here and do that and take stock on a regular basis. What is going on? What am I learning? What am I hearing? How do I clarify those contradictions and inconsistencies? So yeah, take it like a military campaign. Get in there and do a great job as a result.

Michelle Ockers:

What about if you're coming across pockets of resistance or key people that you sense are going to make a difference to how others see you? Like these people carry influence in the organization and you sense that they're not on board. What advice do you have there?

Nigel Paine:

The first thing is I would not confront those people. I think it's silly to insist on talking to them, insist on regular meetings. I think you've got to mark them. And then you start to talk to the people you have made some headway with. And you say, you know, let me show is really difficult. What do you think? How do I get through to that person? And other people will tell you, they'll say, oh, that's because of this and this and this. If you went there, I think you'd find that she would respond in a really great way.

Michelle Ockers:

So there's history, like what works for this person? Who do they perhaps listen to? Who are they influenced by? What might they be impressed by? So you do need to be astute and look out, you know, look out and be thinking and building using the relationships you have built to understand the history there and what works and what doesn't work.

Nigel Paine:

And don't just do it on your own. Use, lever all the influence and all the people that you can. And you'll make friends very quickly. And those are the friends that can help you. And don't do it on your own. Don't sit there in despair thinking, what do I have to do now? The answer is possibly nothing. But other people will give you the best advice. And listen to them. They know, they've worked with that person for

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years, possibly, and they will tell you how to get through, how to break through, or where to completely steer clear, because it's not going to work. All of that advice, so just be humble, listen, ask questions, ask for advice, build your early allegiances, get some wins, and then the politics of the organization starts to work for you and not against you.

Michelle Ockers:

Something about mindset too, right? taking it as a setback if you strike those pockets where I'm not sure how that person is going to play. And it's not personal. And it's not something where you should feel like I'm not going to succeed because I don't have this person on board or that person on board and not being defeated by it. There's a level of persistence and, you know, moving into those pockets where there is an opportunity to work and to build your impact.

Nigel Paine:

Yeah, and the other thing is to not feel that just because this person is director of operations or product manager for this, that somehow I've got to be very humble and supplicant to them and not challenge them. You've got to work out where you can say you're wrong or let me investigate that. I don't think there's evidence for that to challenge them. But before you can do that, you've got to have at least got them to acknowledge that you are a player. So don't go in feeling, oh, I'm only a little L&D person. You've got to go in saying, I have got such a lot, I can bring this organization. Be enthusiastic about your capability and your power in the organisation. But before then, you've got to manage the politics.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Any parting tips then, Nigel, by way of wrap up for people moving into an L&D leader role, whether they've already been in a role or not before as an L&D leader, it may be for some of our listeners the first time they've done an L&D leader's role, that maybe they've been in L&D leader's roles in other organisations, but moving into a new organisation, how would you wrap up your key tips?

Nigel Paine:

I would ask one question of people after the initial conversations, and that is, in your mind, in your view, what would you judge me having been successful? What would I have had to have done for you to judge me to have been successful six months down the track or nine months down the track? That is always an interesting question. That's a great question. Very surprising answers, but it gives you a real perspective and it gives you a kind of pathway forward. So definitely ask that question.

Michelle Ockers:

And some of these questions are questions we can only ask when we're new in the role, right? The time for them escapes us.

Nigel Paine:

Yeah, there's a time to make an impact. And if you failed in all of that, you can't go back three months later and six months later and nine months later. Yeah, there's

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this great opportunity early on in those first 90 days to really set the standards, set the tune, set the expectations, and set yourself up as an individual. They're really important days. You should count them off one by one.

Michelle Ockers:

We're now going to hear from four previous podcast guests. In episode 54, Debbie Key joined us from 40 Winks, an Australian bedding retailer established in 1984, who have over 100 stores. Kristina Tsiriotakis from Deciem, a small growing global beauty product company, was our guest in episode 56. Both Kristina and Debbie moved into roles that had just been established, the first L&D role in their organization. Our other two guests moved into existing roles. In episode 95, Jane Calleja joined us from Weber APAC, who retailed barbecues through a network of Weber and third-party retail outlets. Finally, Dustin Lacasse joined us in episode 130 to share his experiences moving into San Diego Safari Park Zoo, a mission-led not-for-profit. A key starting point for each of these L&D leaders was to, as Nigel would put it, do their fieldwork to get out into the business as part of understanding it. Each of them did this in a slightly different way from Debbie's mystery shopping to Dustin literally getting his hands dirty, working alongside people and Jane meeting people using their product.

Debbie Key:

So, when I started, the first thing I did actually was I went out to stores and I visited them, but I didn't visit them as the new learning professional coming in. I actually did some mystery shopping. So, whilst they didn't know my face and they didn't know who I was or what I was doing, I just went out there as a customer and I actually experienced what customers were experiencing at that stage. And that was essential for me to actually understand that process and how our team members were coming across, how our branding was coming across, where the customer service gaps were missing, what was missing in the bed match information, et cetera.

Dustin Lacasse:

When I came in, I really had a lot of opportunity to sit back, listen. I actually did a lot of living a day in the life of different individuals in their roles, so I had a better understanding of what their challenges were that they were experiencing, where we could be great partners for those individuals for them to be successful in the work that they were actually handed and accounted for, what skills those individuals were really grasping for or having, you know, really thinking about upskilling into in order to be even more successful. I had the opportunity to work in our garage to help rebuild an engine, which I never thought I would actually ever do in my life. So I thought that was great. It offered me an opportunity to have really holistic conversations with the individuals who are working in that space. It became a non-threatening type of environment for those individuals. It becomes a lot more comfortable when you're in their environment, having those conversations versus bringing them out of their environment and putting them into a stagnant kind of situation where you're just in a room between them and you and trying to have those conversations.

Jane Calleja:

The first thing I want to do is understand the business. Because I've been in this situation where I've been brought into a business and then I'm suddenly firefighting. And I was like, that kind of puts you on the back foot. You're not really resolving the bigger picture. So I wanted to step right back. And I said to them, the first thing I want to do is understand the business. I want to get around. to meet with dealers, meet with the business team, meet with the team here, because we head office here in Adelaide, just really understand where are we at. And so I did that in my first couple of months in the business. I, apart from doing some really fun, like education around culture and product and all that kind of stuff. So that meant lots of cooking by the way, Michelle, which is not hard to take.

Michelle Ockers:

Getting a feel for the organization's culture is an important aspect of understanding the business, the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the behavior and interactions of the members within an organization. Sometimes you can begin your exploration with something that has been documented. Jane spoke about a book written by the Weber founder, Ross McDonald, which she found extraordinarily helpful. In Kristina's case, DECIEM was a young, small, rapidly growing organization with little documented that she could draw upon to understand their strategy or culture. Even if your organization has written values, you'd be wise to adopt Kristina's approach and observe and reflect on what you are seeing and hearing to figure out how people are actually behaving and what is driving that. Let's hear from Jane, followed by Kristina.

Jane Calleja:

You know, I've had decades of experience in the corporate world and never come across something like this before in my life, where I was presented with a little leather bound book that had had the story of Ross and what was important to the business and what he saw as being the way that we would have success going forward. And talking about the fact that he wanted to create or make Webber the greatest brand, if you like, across Australia and New Zealand. But what was fundamental in that, in that and through his stories, he talked about creating positive word of mouth experience. Like what could we do, no matter who we were in the business and where we were positioned, how do we make sure that everyone that crosses our path has a great experience? And then that of course leads to brand loyalty or what he called brand equity.

Kristina Tsiriotakis:

Well, there were a lot of things. I think the first thing was really observing and reflecting. I even kept a diary actually on what the cultural experience was. I had no documents. I couldn't read about the company strategy anywhere. I couldn't read about the values anywhere. I kept hearing you know, that's so Deciem or that's not Deciem, but I didn't know what that meant. And I was having a hard time myself because I come from a company that I'd been at for over 10 years and there was no disconnect between where I ended and the company began. I really felt like I was a part of that company. And here I was trying to figure out what is this culture? Like, how do you define it? So I kind of journaled it and I would observe, I would observe

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where I saw culture being reflected and where I would think, well, that's kind of what it feels like to be here. And those moments were things like watching the creative team collaborate on something and watching them be so democratic and inclusive and respectful of each other's artistry. And I would think, well, that's the value right there. And so you're seeing these learning moments, but they don't come in a PDF. They don't come in a presentation. And I kept thinking to myself, how do I capture that? and translate it. And I studied history in school, so I think I really started to think almost like a historian or like a cultural anthropologist.

Michelle Ockers:

When you start moving around the business, meeting people, in addition to understanding the business, you have an opportunity to start building relationships. While Nigel and I spoke specifically about establishing your relationships and credibility with leaders across the business, our guests were conscious of the value of relationships and rapport with people at all levels of the organization. We'll hear first from Debbie, followed by Dustin.

Debbie Key:

I went out with a deliberate intent to listen and listen actively, but also with empathy. You know, because when I when I train anything to do with relationships, whether it be customer service or whether it be you know, management training, whatever, I'm very big on empathy. So I need to live and breathe that as well. And just by stopping and listening to them, regardless of the information that they were giving me, which, you know, was probably the larger chunk was not relevant to what I needed to hear, but they needed to say it. So it was just about building that respect and the rapport and really the credibility. So particularly from a store owner perspective, I was challenged as to my credibility of actually having position, what made me qualified to be a learning professional, what made me qualified to actually be able to teach them anything. And that meant that I not only had to give them good solid understandings from a learning perspective, But I also had to ensure that they understood that I came from a retail background, that my family still actually owns a retail store. So it was essential, I think, in this particular role that if I had have come in without that retail background, and I've got extensive retail background from a couple of different types of industries, that wouldn't have sold them over. If I had have come in, I've also worked in manufacturing, for example, so if I had have come in with just a manufacturing background, they would have gone, you don't know what you're talking about. You've never served a customer. How do you even begin to imagine what we do? So it was about really getting that kudos behind me. And once I had that, the discussions became really easy. They sort of would just, it's not that they were confronting or anything, but they would basically just back down and go, okay, well, you're the learning professional, you do what you think's best.

Dustin Lacasse:

I think, and kind of going back to what you mentioned, when you're stuck behind a computer, when you're just at a desk all day long, people don't see, you know, they don't always see the value that you bring to an organization when they don't see you, when they don't have visibility into the day-to-day tasks that you're actually doing. So by putting yourself out there, by building those relationships, by really getting your

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name recognition out there and looked at as a strategic partner within an organization, no matter what organization you're working with, right, it just lends a lot more credibility. It helps your influence. As you of course work to gain the buy-in and commitment of these larger demographics to change particular processes that are going to be really valuable for them, it really just provides you kind of that foundation that you really need to work off of in order to ensure that not only are you successful with some of these creative ideas that you're bringing to the table and the reason why you are hired, right? But it also gives you that opportunity holistically to be more collaborative, to really interject individuals into your work and really find success through that mechanism.

Michelle Ockers:

Once you've developed an understanding of the business and started establishing key relationships, you can turn your mind and energy to start shaping a learning strategy. I would caution not rushing this. This may mean you do some initial work to set a direction in the latter stages of your first 90 days and then engage more fully using a human-centered design approach to co-design a learning strategy over a longer period of time. See the show notes for a Learning Uncut e-book called Building Agility, which introduces how to build a compelling high-impact learning strategy based on our work supporting L&D leaders and their teams to do just this. Let's hear how Kristina's early insights shaped her approach. You'll recall that she was in a brand new role in a growing company and was particularly concerned to find an approach that fitted the Deciem culture.

Kristina Tsiriatakis:

I remember on my first day, if I had a dollar for every time somebody had come up to me and said, so what's L&D? What's L&D? What do you, is it training? There, you know, there was this confusion and a little bit of fear. There was anticipatory anxiety that we were coming in, but also is this really corporate? Are we going to be told what to do? Where do I fit in? Is this a dialogue and a conversation? And of course, our people were open and curious, but naturally with any change, there was apprehension too, because it was a shift. And was it a sign that the company was losing its magic, you know, and its autonomy. So out of all of that started to emerge some really clear themes. And I think things like word clouds can be really helpful when you start to kind of play with what are the themes that are arising? And there were themes of self-direction, of autonomy, of inclusivity, of co-construction or co-creation, of people-centric, like these were, you know, of a family-oriented feeling, and these were all of the words that really started to form and shape the approach that I wanted to take to learning, which was something that was completely choice-based, you know, had enough structure to guide people, but the autonomy that held true to the culture of Deciem that was completely collaborative and co-created, that wasn't about hierarchy, but where everybody could be both a learner and a teacher, that was just in time so that people could learn as needed, you know, in the flow of work. And that really put learning about the individual, learning about the organization, and the interplay of those two things at the heart of our content. Because all the other stuff kind of exists, you know. It's not difficult to curate off-the-shelf content. It's difficult to seamlessly integrate into a new organization or one that you've been a part of and to really feel that you're truly a part of it and to have this

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living relationship with it. And that's what I wanted us to achieve because the core purpose of Deciem was to be a family. So how do we do that? And how do we do it globally? And there's so many kind of disparate things and so many gaps that need to be bridged. And then, you know, alongside that all the typical stuff, you're reading all the great articles and research about what's going on in the learning industry, you know, flexibility is important, you know, digital first is important. The rise of a comms culture, collaboration, 360 feedback, all of these things are so evident. And then the question is, how do you bring them into your organization in a way that doesn't feel imposed, that actually fits in the right timing for where your company is at? Because if not, it's an imposition, and that's never going to be organic, and it's never going to gel.

Michelle Ockers:

For Dustin at San Diego Zoo, the most significant aspect shaping his strategy was that the organization is a not-for-profit. He referred many times to the mission of the organization and also to the resource constraints he faced, which demanded creativity as well as providing broader scope in his role. He decided to focus on performance management as a key initiative.

Dustin Lacasse:

So, of course, some of those challenges, and are very, not really unique, right, not only to the San Diego Zoo, but from a larger standpoint for nonprofits, what you're normally going to find working in a nonprofit is, of course, technology is not always going to be, you know, up to date in certain cases, or you're not going to have the resources, right, to acquire the most amazing pieces of technology, since most of the funding is going back into your mission. Of course, what you're also going to find through this purpose or this process is some of the other bigger challenges like lack of data, high turnover, limited resources. One of the things I mentioned earlier about nonprofits in a lot of cases is that it's a lot more challenging to keep talent because, of course, a nonprofit cannot always pay and provide the benefits that a for-profit organization can have. But what we can do within a nonprofit is to recognize who those strong individuals are and invest within those individuals. So that way they feel valued as a part of the organization and they recognize that there is another level for them within the organization that they can achieve, right, that they can really aspire to be within. And I think that's where succession and performance really kind of go hand in hand. It allows for a development type of model or tool that can really be used when successfully to work with team members to really get them to that next level to continue their advancement and that you know that that skill set in order for them to really continue to work in an area where they feel there's a lot of passion around.

Michelle Ockers:

At Weber, Jane had picked up a desire for greater consistency in how their business team interacted with retailers in their distribution network and landed on a way of meeting this need, which would scale during a period of growth.

Jane Calleja:

The other thing that was really clear to me, and I could see that there was a need or a way for us to move forward, was like realising that we were growing, realising that we were starting to move quite fast, that there was how do we do that in a way that enables us to scale up or to make sure that whatever we're doing going forward is easily managed with a really broad, diverse group of people and situations? So that was really clear to me. So one of the things that I landed on was this idea of what we called a hub program, if you like. And so this was about developing a workshop that would be delivered in each state by our business managers with my support initially to deliver a full day program for new product experience. So that would take the retail teams. And so all their teams were invited because we'd run maybe three, four days in a region. And they would do, we would introduce them to the product, talk about what kind of customers might engage with this product. What's the F&Bs. So the features and benefits and talking to them about, you know, importantly, not just rattling off a list of features to a consumer, but engaging that in terms of that consolidated piece around matching needs. And then importantly, what was super, super important and what I'd learnt to understand in this business was creating what we call a flavour experience, but being able to create a flavour experience that helped people understand how the product worked. because from that is where you create stories to share with consumers. It helps people understand it, they can explain it, they can talk about what they cooked and how versatile the product was and how it tasted and all these amazing stories.

Michelle Ockers:

Our fourth leader, Debbie, had to challenge the brief that she had been given and tackle a traditional mindset about training in the organization. How she went about this illustrates the idea that change happens one conversation at a time.

Debbie Key:

There was a learning strategy that they had prepared for me prior to starting and the brief basically was, you know, the learning strategy wasn't, you know, us learning professionals would put a great learning strategy together, but it was, you know, over the next three years, this is what we want you to do. We want you to work on the bed match training and get that embedded into our stores and into our staff members. We want you to create safety training and get that embedded. and we also want you to pay attention to compliance training, so training around Australian consumer and compliance and all of it. And there were certainly some opinions and thoughts about the type of training and how it should be delivered. And being a demographic within the business, particularly in the store owner, store manager space of the older male demographic, their thoughts around training was, you know, really around, well, it needs to be, you should be doing it face-to-face and none of this computer stuff, you know, not terribly tech savvy. It needs to be, you know, it needs to be a length of time, you know, if you are going to have to do it on computer. Well, it needs to be a good probably hour long, but I don't want to pay for a staff member to sit and sit and watch your computer for an hour. So there was this, it should be this, but I don't want to actually support that type of thing going on. That was happening within the leadership team as well. So when I jumped into the leadership team, it was, you know, guys, we got to think much smaller content, you know, micro learning was a

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very new term for them. They didn't believe that you could get information across in short, sharp chunks. I had a couple of people slowly come on my team. Slowly but surely, we changed the thinking within the leadership team. I just kept talking out in the stores around microlearning and the fact that we wouldn't have anything longer than 15 minutes in the e-learning. We would create lots of little, short, sharp, topic-specific microlearning pieces which you know, they didn't really understand until we got them up and running in the system. I was also very big about talking to them about blended learning. So, you know, they knew that we were going to introduce this, this a learning through a learning management system, which I was at the same time as doing all of this, I was actually doing all of my due diligence about which system we should use what it needed to have what I could go without, even though I really wanted. And, you know, just pull it all together to make sure that they could get what they needed at the right time.

Michelle Ockers:

Debbie has just mentioned that she was choosing a learning management system as she shaped her approach. After careful consideration, I've decided not to include a section on learning technology in this playbook. It's such a big topic that it warrants a separate playbook. Additionally, while Debbie moved fairly quickly on learning technology, in most instances, the first 90 days is too early to be exploring technology. You want to take the time to get clear on your strategy and the learning approaches that your technology needs to enable before starting to go down the tech selection path. The last area to consider as you move into your new L&D leader role is one of mindset balanced with creating a safety net for yourself. The insights on this topic are drawn from the special emergent series on taking bold action that I co-created with Laura Overton and Shannon Tipton. In this series, we interviewed L&D leaders about the core strengths that they draw upon when the going gets tough and how they build those strengths. Starting a new role as an L&D leader can feel tough as you seek to establish yourself, build relationships and credibility and shape your strategy. In Emergent Episode 29, Laura summarised our findings on taking bold action.

Laura Overton:

And I think one of the things that we learned from the whole of the Emerging Stronger process is that we need a certain level of boldness. And that was really the glue for this year's study, was that smart bold, rather than the kind of like, you know, sort of like that kind of bold as brass kind of boldness, is all about be for business first. Everything we've been doing, hasn't it ladies, been involved in embedding ourselves in what the business needs right now, rather than what we think the business needs. So business first. O is for open-minded, that we come to our work and our fields with an open mind, open to community, open to data, open to being able to try something new. The L for us in Smart Bold is about leading and learning. it means that we're actually taking a little bit of a risk. Maybe we're doing an experiment. We're going to step out and we're willing to actually learn from that process and to share those ideas with ourselves if we need to adapt them and also with others if they've worked. So, leading and learning. And D for Smart Bold is deliberate. You know, the fact that we are evidence informed, that we are aware of our situation, we're risk aware and that we're making deliberate action in that space.

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And that kind of smart, bold angle is really what's the glue in this year's journey together.

Michelle Ockers:

When we asked the L&D leaders we spoke with about where they find the courage and strength to take bold action, we heard about a range of practices which form a safety net, helping you to remain resilient and take care of yourself. I'd like to hand over to Laura again, to expand on the idea of figuring out the practices that help you to be bold and weaving these into your own safety net. I've extracted this explanation not from a podcast episode, but from a video that Laura created for our Emerging Stronger Masterclass. Over to you, Laura.

Laura Overton:

You know, our feelings, that physical reaction that we have to a trigger or a stimulus, play a massive part in the actions that we take and the decisions we make in any moment in time. So it's worth considering what kind of support systems we need around us to make us feel bold and less fearful. And this is a question about support systems that we've asked many times as part of our global Emerging Stronger research. And the answers, to be honest, they typically vary. For some, it's about that passion, about the North Star that they hold, their purpose and their passion that really drives them forward and gives them boldness. For me, it was always about the evidence and the data and the science. If I knew what that said, then that gave me the courage to maybe challenge and to start new conversations. For others, it's the backing of a mentor or an expert or a coach, the support of a pair of communities that kind of drive us forward into taking bold action. And for others, yet again, it will be about having permission to try and to fail, and it's okay to experiment. Others still, it's about practice and habit and building up our confidence through our own behaviours. What's interesting is that this list will look very different for each one of us. And whilst we might initially turn to our preferred support system, it soon becomes clear that the more these interlink, the bolder we feel. So, for example, my interest in the evidence from high performing learning teams created at a very early stage for me a strong sense of purpose that learning and development professionals can drive better business value. That gives me courage in the meetings I go into. But the more I'm encouraged to act on my vision by those are more experienced me, those are giving me permission to try something new. The more support I have from my peers who pick me up again if it didn't quite work first time. the bolder and bolder I become. Now we call this interaction of support systems, the emerging stronger safety net. And you know, it's a vital component of the way that we improve our professional inner game. We need to recognize and pursue those things that make us feel bold if we're actually going to embrace smart, bold action that delivers results.

Michelle Ockers:

That's a great note to end this Learning Uncut playbook on your first 100 days in a new L&D leader role. I strongly encourage you to take a look at the additional resources curated in the show notes for more on the approaches we've discussed, even if you're not about to move into a new role as an L&D leader. Many of them are going to be relevant to working in a bolder way to build better relationships and have more impact in your business. I'd like to end by thanking several people, starting with

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the guests whose experience and insights I've drawn upon to create this episode. Thank you also to our editor, Jessica Gorka, who has had her work cut out to piece this episode together. And finally, to Sagar Nair, who has voluntarily provided a range of unexpected and delightfully helpful support behind the scenes with the podcast this year, including helping to identify the themes for this episode and selecting extracts from past episodes.



Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

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

About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at 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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