

Learning Uncut Episode 140
Safety Leadership: Leader-led Learning – Anthony Mitchell
and Heidi Lance
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

I have two wonderful guests from New Zealand today. I've got Heidi Lance and Anthony Mitchell. Hello, Heidi. How are you?

Heidi Lance:

I'm great. Thank you. Very well.

Michelle Ockers:

And Anthony, welcome.

Anthony Mitchell:

G'day, good to be here with you.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, I'm pleased to be here with you too. This is actually the first episode I'm recording this year, although it won't be the first one to be published. So it's nice to be back in the saddle sharing great stories. And Heidi, I want to start with a really big thank you to you for reaching out to me with this case study about a safety leadership program, which your organization Real Learning undertook with Fletcher Building. And you won the New Zealand Association for Talent and Development Best Leadership Program Award in 2022. So thank you and congratulations, Heidi.

Heidi Lance:

Thank you very much. Yeah, we were very excited to win the award.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And a great, great example, listeners, as you're listening to this, if it sparks any thoughts around, well, we've done this thing in our organisation that other people might benefit from hearing about and you want to share, please reach out to me in the way that Heidi did. And of course, the congratulations is to both organisations. So congratulations to you too, Anthony.

Anthony Mitchell:

Cheers. Thank you. It's been a brilliant journey. I look forward to discussing it.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's really interesting that the award was in the category of leadership, not in the category of kind of safety or compliance or anything like that. And I know that the reason for that is going to become very clear as we start discussing it. Heidi, do you want to introduce us to Real Learning and your role in Real Learning?

Heidi Lance:

Hi, I'm Heidi and I'm the director of Real Learning. We specialise in the learning side of culture change. So we work closely with organizations that want to make a real shift in their culture, and we design the learning that supports their journey. So whether it's an organization that wants, you know, more inclusivity and belonging to be part of who they are, or they want to put the customer at the heart of everything they do, or, you know, they want to create a culture where everyone knows that they'll go home safely every day, then we can help them move through their transformation journey through the learning that we provide.

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Michelle Ockers:

Thanks, Heidi. I really like that context around culture change. And of course, Anthony, this whole program is really about culture change and behavioral change at the end of the day. And so let's hear a little bit more about you and your role. You're with Fletcher Distribution, which is part of Fletcher Building. You're the head of Environment, Health and Safety. And I think you've been working in EHS since about 2011. Is that right?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, I've been around and EHS has always been part of my role. I've had a lot of operational jobs, but certainly my time at Fletcher Building has been in environment, health and safety. Fletcher Distribution, the division of Fletcher Building that I look after, is 150, 160 locations throughout New Zealand, about three and a half thousand employees. And we have a real diverse mix geographically across the spectrum of people we employ, and that makes up part of the 14,500 people of Fletcher Building throughout New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific. Fletcher Building is one of the most significant employers in New Zealand and has a range of divisions that involve manufacturing building products, infrastructure and construction projects, building homes and then of course the distribution and retail division that I'm part of.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. And the safety leadership program that we're talking about today, was that rolled out across the whole of Fletcher building or just Fletcher distribution? What's the scope of what we're talking about here organizationally?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yep, it was rolled out across the entire organisation. The goal set at the beginning of the programme was that every leader go through that programme, which is a pretty big goal for an organisation. You've got 14,500 people. Of that, it's probably 3,500-4,000 leaders. And not just leaders in the classical sense of people with direct reports, but people who are leaders because of their manner or the culture that they bring to the business, people who are respected by their peers, who might not have a classic leadership title. All these people needed to be included to help shift the culture.

Michelle Ockers:

And when you're talking about changing culture, finding those people who maybe aren't in formal positions of leadership, but have an influence through their network, through the informal channels in the organization, the way they do, that's really important, right? How did you find all these people? How did you figure out who needed to be part of this?

Anthony Mitchell:

Well, the great thing about these people is you don't have to look too hard to find them. It's probably the biggest learning I took away is everyone knows who the auntie and uncles of the site are, broadly speaking, who are the people that everyone gravitates to, the ones who help support people for a variety of reasons. You just have to ask one or two people and those names come to the surface really quickly. And most of us would have worked with people like that and you sort of can get a really good feel for who it is. They'll remind you of someone you really trust and someone who you open up to really quickly and they just have a sort of a warmth and a quality about them. So you don't have to look too far, which is a good thing.

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Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it is. They rise to the surface pretty quickly. Do you in terms of Fletcher building, I mean, to me, it sounds like you're in the construction sector or the construction industry. Would that be accurate, Anthony?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yep. That's the majority of our exposure is to that market.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. And it's clearly a high-risk safety environment. We have done some previous episodes on Learning Uncut about the construction sector. And you were seeking to tackle safety head on with this program, take a different approach. Can you take us back to the start of 2020 and the situation that made it really clear to you and to the organisation that a shift was needed in how you approached safety?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yes, so 2020 is when everything had sort of bubbled to the surface around, we needed to make a fundamental shift in our organisation. And what had caused that actually started in November 26 in 2018. Levin, sort of north of Wellington in New Zealand, lower North Island. Unfortunately, we had a fatality with someone working on our site. They were up on an elevator work platform, sort of five and a half, six metres in the air, and a gantry crane struck them inside a manufacturing facility and they fell to their death, essentially. And, you know, at the time when something like this happens, there's just so many emotions, so many things going through your head. And to contextualize it, Fletcher Building has over 30 different brands and businesses a part of it. So it's very easy for the organization to sit there and go, you know, we're not a manufacturing site, you know, we're more of a trade retailer. So we felt like maybe that was unique to them and it was easy to rationalise. And then January the following year in 2019, we had another fatality at another manufacturing site. Same business was involved and we sort of had that same level of comfort again. Well, something must be happening in this business because they've had two fatalities and we'll support them, do what we can to learn and wrap our arms around them. And then if that wasn't hard enough to be processing and dealing with, in the February of 2019, we had a triple fatality. Three of our colleagues were killed working on the roadside. It's hard to express how much loss is involved. And as an organization, you're sitting there over a few months going, we've killed five of our workmates. And normally when I say that out loud, you know, you get goosebumps, you feel a bit teary-eyed, and a lot of people say to me, well, you didn't kill them, you know, what happened? But the simple reality is, if you believe in this stuff authentically, you have to take responsibility for it. Five people working for us, five colleagues, five brothers, uncles, dads, you name it, didn't return home to their loved ones after a day at work. And so, But at the end of that, we knew we needed to partner with someone to help us see what we didn't know. You know, it's always, as a big organization, you sort of get a little bit comfortable and then you go, well, what don't we know? and we partnered with DuPont Sustainable Solutions. They came in and really brought all of this to a head where we realized something was wrong. They did what they call a safety perception survey. So for the people who work closely with safety who are listening, this isn't an audit. It's not a, did you wear your seatbelt? Yes, no. Is everyone in high viz? Yes, no. It's very much about the feelings and the mindset of the workforce. What perceptions do they have about what their leaders are doing, what their colleagues are doing, what they're doing, and it effectively brings you out a score which is plotted against a cultural framework known as the DuPont Bradley Curve. What we found, and what was quite remarkable, is after all that data was collected, and it was a mixture of the survey, on-site assessments, having people go out and work with teams, listening groups, you name it, it took about six months for the organization to do it. What we found is, broadly speaking, the entire organization lined up to

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the same point. Now, quite proudly, we are businesses, and quite commonly what you'll hear is, oh, well, this is different because of, and we're unique because of, and then you get down to a site geographical level. There's all these reasons that people think we're nuanced, and there are a lot of nuances in our business. But from a safety perception survey, we were all saying the same thing, and what really scared me about that is, so what's the difference between the perception in our business across our 150, 60 sites versus the businesses had that fatalities? And really, the only word that came up was luck, and as a leadership team, that's scary.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Anthony, thank you so much for sharing that and for having the courage to kind of come out publicly and share that, you know, what led to the realization you needed to do something different. There's a couple of really good questions that you mentioned that you asked yourselves and that question around what don't we know. Where are our blind spots? What's hidden from us? What can't we see? I think that's such a valuable question for us to be asking and thinking systemically about things. And the other point you raised is it's really easy in a big organization with many different parts of the business to say we're different rather than saying in what ways are we alike. and what could we tackle together, what binds us together, particularly from a cultural perspective. So I think there's a couple of really good takeaways there. And for listeners, I'll track down some links to things like that DuPont safety perception survey, see what I can find that we can add to the show notes. So Anthony, out of all of this, you decided as an organization to run a safety culture program. Can you describe briefly the shifting culture that the program aimed to create?

Anthony Mitchell:

So broadly speaking, we had a brand for safety, it was called Protect, and everything was marked Protect, and we tried to link it all together. But I use the word brand intentionally because it wasn't a value to the organization. It was very much a thing we needed to do, not part of who we are and what we want to be. And that's probably the summary of what we wanted to change. In fact, I sort of sum it up in saying we wanted to go from I follow the rules because I have to, to I follow the rules because I want to. Very simplistic way of looking at it, but a massive piece of work to get the mindsets of people to shift to that latter camp. I wear my seatbelt not because Anthony's going to come out and tell me off and put me in a process for not following the rules. I wear it because I want to get home tonight, I've got a young fella at home, I've got my partner, we're going on holiday, whatever the why is to them, that's the shift that we needed to make. So safety would become a value to the organization, a personal value to people and just part of the way we operate.

Michelle Ockers:

OK, so what in terms of what you saw in the safety perception survey, obviously there would have been a lot of things came out of that. But if you and I don't know if you have run that survey again since you did this body of work, you have I'm getting nods here, listeners. So it might be interesting just to talk briefly about what were some of the key things that came out of that perception survey, some of the perceptions you've wanted to shift, and in what ways have they shifted in the probably two and a half-ish years since you started the program?

Anthony Mitchell:

Probably the biggest piece that underpins our safety culture, and for those who work in safety, the following phrase I'm going to use is normally quite polarizing to people in the safety industry. And that was the belief that all injuries could be prevented, or the belief that all injuries are preventable. And the reason that's become so polarizing is what you tend to find is a lot of people saying, oh, well, if you if you try to drive for a culture of zero, you get a lot of underreporting. People hide from their managers because they're worried about the

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number and all of that. But what we learned from the Safety Perception Survey in particular is if you don't have a belief that the injuries can be prevented, then put simply, you're just not going to prevent them. In fact, what we found is that, you know, such a small part of our organization, I think it was sub 20% believed injuries could be prevented. So if you have an injury on site, no one really thinks that that wasn't avoidable. They'll just turn around and go, well, that's just part of the work we do. That's acceptable. And what I challenge people with that concept is to think about what is an acceptable injury? If you have to go tell a family or, you know, if you've got kids and someone has to come tell you that your kid was injured, what's the acceptable level where you go, no, that's fine. Is it an amputation or is that that's too rough? OK, or maybe it's stitches. No, that's too rough. Or, you know, where is the line? So perhaps what the biggest thing we found was no one in the organisation really believed injuries could be prevented. When we re-ran the survey after carrying out our transformation plan or starting to roll it through, and of course the Safety Leadership Programme was probably the biggest thing to underpin that, it moved materially. In fact, in leadership, it went up over 80% in my division of leaders believing injuries could be prevented and 70% for the frontline. So suddenly what you have is a whole lot of people out there looking for ways to keep themselves and others safe. And that is sort of preeminently what you want to do in safety. You want people looking, going, what can I do tomorrow that I'm doing today that's slightly safer?

Michelle Ockers:

That makes so much sense, right? Because we know from cognitive science that our beliefs impact our thoughts and actions. So it all starts with belief. Yeah.

Anthony Mitchell:

Yep, and look, I'll potentially, you know, I may have called for a moment, I've got to put my hand up here, but, you know, I remember getting up at a conference and turning around this earlier in my career going, you know, we don't want dumb people in our business. We don't want idiots working for us. They're a danger to us. Let's get rid of them. And the best thing about that approach is you've got three and a half thousand people that you can cycle through blaming before you actually have to deal with any systemic issues that is underpinning a belief that injuries couldn't be prevented and that people were in fact the problem in our organisation. The key question we ask ourselves now after any incident is how could we have prevented that from occurring? Not the person involved, how did we as an organisation let this one slip past the goalie, what do we need to do differently? And to tie it back to the Safety Leadership Programme, that's what this programme's all about, is getting leaders to open their minds to the fact that as a job, as a role, as a custodian of the company, that is the job.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. And Heidi, thank you for waiting so patiently while I got Anthony to take us through all of that context, which I think is really important to understand the why. And it's great to see the shift that's occurred. Let's turn now to dive deeper into the Safety Leadership Program. And Heidi, if you can kick us off by talking to us about what point was real learning engaged? Like, at what point, how far through the shaping of the program was it, like, right from the idea of, well, let's do a cultural change program? You know, when were you engaged and what was the brief and key requirements that you were given?

Heidi Lance:

Yeah, so we were engaged right at the beginning at that point where they did say, right, we need a cultural transformation program around our safety and health and well-being. And we got asked to, we'd done some work with Fletcher Building in the past, mainly in the sales space. So they approached us and said, hey, we'd like you to put in a proposal for the piece

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of work. We did. And it was really, at that point, it was just going to be a series of e-learning modules with some face-to-face.

Michelle Ockers:

The good old e-learning modules. We always start there, don't we?

Heidi Lance:

Absolutely. So then we realised that that was not going to cut it. And one of the first meetings I had when I first went into Fletcher Building was with the Chief Safety Officer. And I said to her, you know, what do you want out of this programme? She said, well, we need everyone to believe that all injuries can be prevented. And I looked at her and I thought, well, I don't believe that. So how the heck am I going to design a program or are we going to design a program? When how do you actually believe this? You know, back to Anthony's point that, you know, people just do dumb stuff sometimes. And she said to me that there was two things that we really needed to focus on. And one was the why and why being safe is important. And we needed to really connect to people's personal why's. And the other thing was storytelling, is to use storytelling as a real vehicle to help engage people, their hearts and their minds through the program. So that was really our starting point. That was really where we started and thought, right, how do we develop this program from here? But that was the beginning.

Michelle Ockers:

It's interesting, that brief is simultaneously both really clear, like in terms of the outcome, we need everyone to believe that all injuries can be prevented and very broad in terms of, well, how do you go about doing that, right? So Anthony, are there any other kind of design considerations that you would add, particularly in relation to organisational context and workforce characteristics that kind of needed to be taken into account when shaping the approach to the Safety Leadership Programme?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, this is potentially where the brief became a little bit harder for Heidi. You know, we have leaders that are in offices, we have leaders that are on construction sites, we have leaders that work remotely, we've got people spread, like I said, throughout South Pacific, remote workers, you name it, we've got it. In an ideal world, everyone would have a nice site with a large meeting room where you could undertake training and everything would line up perfectly. But it's really hard for a road crew who are out doing repairs and maintenance to think about how you would get the organization to deliver this to that. So the first thing was the design needed to be something that was malleable enough to be delivered in multiple ways. Very early on, I'll probably talk to this later, we decided that e-learning modules were probably not the way to go. The other part was it needed to be line led, and that became very, very critical to the success of the programme. And what we mean by that was this wasn't going to be health and safety or L&OD or people in performance rolling out a transformation programme. This was going to be our line leaders taking ownership, responsibility, accountability, you name it. for the organizational change, supported by trusted partners from Health and Safety, L&OD, People and Performance, you name it. And that was a big mindset shift for the organization, because typically in a lot of programs we run, you know, if it's a safety program, safety lead it. You know, if it's a people program, people lead it. Whereas this was the line, the operational line are going to be leading this. So the design had to be sort of simplistic enough that they could pick it up in a remote place in Fiji or in the office in Penrose across a broad range of operational leaders with broad sets of capability from managing two to three people to teams of 150 and everything in between. And that makes it for a really interesting design challenge. Well, I thought that at the time anyway.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, it does. Heidi, so you're sitting there with this design brief and some of these challenges. How did you go about shaping up the design?

Heidi Lance:

So we had a working group. So we had a working group that had, because you're dealing with seven different divisions. So it had to work in Australia, but it also had to work across, you know, construction, manufacturing and so on. They all have quite different needs. And so we had a working group with the L&OD teams, business partners came in and each week we would meet and we just started right at the beginning. You know, what are the learning outcomes that we want to achieve here? What does it look like? What do we want people to see here and feel differently and so on? And then each week we just bit off another piece of the program as we worked through and it probably took about three months to really start to understand what that roadmap looked like. I think a key piece there was that everyone, as I said, had different needs. Everyone wanted something different from it and so navigating those throughout the discovery was difficult in the early design. and then they had to take it back to their stakeholders and get sign-off from them as well. Their stakeholders were the EHS people, as well as their senior leaders. So it just meant time, it took a lot of time, but it also meant that by the time we came to the roadmap that we agreed with, or that we agreed on, it was sound, it had been tested many, many times.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, sometimes you have to go slow to go fast, right? Getting that stakeholder buy-in in an organization with so many different divisions, really important and interesting to hear how you went about that. So, Heidi, what were some of the key things that you thought about as part of the design, some of the things that were really important that influenced the design?

Heidi Lance:

We really needed to think about the why. The why was hugely important, and we needed people to really connect to that throughout the whole program. We also, storytelling was really important to it, and we needed to make sure that that was throughout all aspects of the program as well, and at all levels of the business. We also needed to make sure that people understood the current state. We had to create that burning platform. And I mean, we were lucky, well, lucky isn't the thing to say, but we had the fatalities of something that we could create the burning platform from. But we really needed people to understand how people were feeling about safety. And the fact that people in the business were not feeling comfortable, people were feeling like they were at risk. So we needed people to really be able to look at the mirror and see what and how people were feeling. We also needed them to understand what was the future state. What do we need people to feel? What do we need to see? Well, what do we as a business want to see here and feel differently in one year's time and three years time? So we got them to envision that future state and also to understand what's my role as a leader in that and in creating that future state. So all of that created a really strong platform for the learning that's set underneath it in terms of the tools and the rituals and practices and so on that they needed to do as part of their role as a safety leader.

Michelle Ockers:

And that's really useful. And I do want to dig a bit into storytelling shortly. I just want to make sure we've got kind of the framework we understand. And I don't mind which of you answers this question. You know, as a leader participating in this program, what's my experience of it? What do I go through? What does the program look like for me?

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Heidi Lance:

So first of all, you'll receive a welcome module. So the welcome module outlines, hey, welcome to the programme. That's all being customised by each of the divisions or each of the businesses. They also have within that a safety reflection tool. So the safety reflection tool is aligned to the learning objectives or the learning outcomes and really looks at how well do I demonstrate these behaviours right now as a leader.

Michelle Ockers:

So Heidi just mentioned, you know, having tools that help support the leaders to do some reflection. And one of the things they're reflecting on is behaviors that are aligned to the learning outcomes. We haven't actually talked about the learning outcomes. What are examples of some of the behaviors that you wanted your leaders to adopt?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, so really what we wanted them to be able to think about is, are they never walking past things that are unsafe? Are they speaking up? Are they going to take, more importantly, are they going to take action about things that are unsafe? Or are they just quite comfortable turning around and going, someone should probably fix that and hopefully it will get fixed. We wanted them to be able to connect with their people, and Heidi's mentioned this and it's so important, through being vulnerable and really opening, to open the door on that, it's storytelling. It's being able to tell their why, tell their story. Incredibly, every time I've been involved in running a safety leadership program, and I've done over 35 of them, everyone has a story. everyone's got something to share. I haven't come across a single person yet who's gone, actually my life's been really perfect and there's absolutely nothing that's ever gone wrong. So the behaviours we wanted them to sort of reflect on is, you know, Are they out there in front of their people? Do they have a sense of vulnerability? Are they willing to learn and hear new ideas and hear feedback from their people? Or are they the person with all the answers? Are they the person who's so quick to get to the solution that perhaps maybe they don't provide the environment for other people to workshop and bring up solutions? And I'm not talking massive problems like, you know, we need to relocate our entire business to somewhere else. I'm talking about the little things like, or maybe the stock shouldn't be put over here, or maybe we could put a couple of switches in here to make our life easier. So those are the sort of behaviors that we were chasing down.

Michelle Ockers:

Great, thank you. So Heidi, that little detour, let's come back to my experience as a participant in the program. So you said they receive a module, is that like an email with some of these tools and so on, or how was that given to them?

Heidi Lance:

Yeah, it's just a RISE module that they'd receive that has the welcome, and then it's got the safety reflection tool, but it also had, you know, what they needed to do to prepare for the program. So they would come ready to go. It also actually had a story in it, so it already got them thinking about storytelling. They would come to the first day. The first thing that would happen is that a senior leader would be in the room and would share their safety share. And I remember probably one of the most powerful ones I heard was one of the CEs of the businesses who lost or had the fatalities or lost some people, having to go and speak to their family and having, you know, a teenage son saying to them, you know, what happened to my dad? Why did you let him die? And to see a CE show that level of vulnerability in front of people in the business was incredibly humbling. And I think it set the scene for the program. And that's what all of the programs are like. They then sit around and talk about their why and why safety is important to them. Why do they want to go home? Why is it important that they stay safe? And then we get into the program and really, as you say, as I said before,

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really get them to think about what's the burning platform? Where are we at right now? Where do we want to be? What does that mean for me as a leader? They take some time writing their own safety leadership vision. And I heard one of the CEs once say to me, you know, I've done this before, a leadership vision, but I've never ever done a safety leadership vision. So really connecting to myself as a safety leader was really important. Once they've got that, they know where we are, where we're going and what sort of leader I need to be, then they start to think about what are some of the tools that I need to pull into my toolkit to help me lead this out with my business. And, you know, a lot of practice. Very, very practical and very scenario-based. So at the end of the two-day program, they come out very much equipped with their safety action plan, but also after that it's cohort coaching as well as leader-led coaching. So the program in itself takes anything between three to six months. It's not just a, you know, workshop off we go. There's a lot of coaching that happens. And that was also what happened right at the top. So I lead with the CE and the Chief Safety Officer, the program with the ELT, and it floated all the way through the business.

Michelle Ockers:

So tell me a little bit more about that coaching, because, of course, as you rightly point out, it's like a two day event, no matter how powerful you go back to the workplace and it's got to survive, you know, the friction of the workplace, if you like, and the work environment and be embedded and people have to practice back in the real world and be supported. So you've done this cohort coaching. What did that look like?

Heidi Lance:

Well, actually, interestingly, we started just with leader-led coaching. So the first iteration of the program was just leader-led. And we had a rhythm that they would do one coaching session per month, about an hour per time. We gave them guidelines. They had coaching guides. They knew the questions they should ask. They knew what they needed to do in each of those sessions. But what we found was that it was a huge workload for the business. And when we worked, when we looked at our second iteration of the same program, we moved that instead to cohort coaching. And that, I mean, in itself is difficult because we're trying to work out whether or not we put people at similar levels or similar stages of the program, or whether it's okay to pull people in from different parts of where they are in terms of their safety leadership journey. We've only just started beginning and you might be able to talk to this a bit more, Anthony. We've just started the cohort coaching process. Have you guys done any of that yet?

Anthony Mitchell:

No, we haven't.

Michelle Ockers:

That's okay. So where are you sitting at the moment with your thinking about that question? And I might get Anthony to answer this one around the cohort composition and what might work best and why.

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, look, I think, like I indicated before, the challenge for the business is, you know, we've got micro plumbing, you know, smaller leadership group, sort of 60 leaders, but their average employees per site's like six or seven people. This is placemakers where some people will be leading teams of 20, 30. So you have this real interesting mix of capability and it's not always confined to a geography. So the thinking is, that will have to put a little bit of malleability. So some leaders will need still the one-on-one coaching, and that's fine. Others can form up part of a cohort. But really, the strength for us in the cohort is trying to get them as aligned to the business as possible. Originally, we were going to go cross-divisional and

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try to spread them out all over the place. But the reality is, and I love the term, the friction of the business. Once they're back into that business, they need people who understand their day-to-day a lot better. And that's not always as translatable between multiple businesses. Someone who's in a manufacturing environment might struggle to appreciate the nature of having an open-cell environment where you've got customers wandering in and out every day. So for us, it'll be very much keeping them within the businesses. That way they can support each other. And like all good coaching things, you know, about 70% of it will relate to safety and then they'll go off on all these tangents and start talking about other things in the business that they want to improve. And there's a lot of power in still letting that happen and thinking about continuous improvement in other areas.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah. And let's move to storytelling. Both of you have mentioned it, the importance of it, the power of it in this cultural change. And Heidi, you've given us a couple of examples of how it's used as part of that RISE module. There's some story, the CE coming into the first, the start of the session, the two day session and sharing a story. And I don't mind which of you picks this up. Maybe Anthony, let's go with Anthony because you've co-facilitated some of the sessions as well. Can you share some examples of where did the stories come from? Who's telling them? And maybe some more examples of some powerful stories you've heard along the way.

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, I suppose the beauty of the programme, so you start, you've already had a few safety stories being told and before people get in the room, so there's sort of just general expectation that sharing is going to be incredibly important and that's sort of set from the get-go. When it opens with a leader showing vulnerability, that sets the tone for the following two days to go, safe space, there's going to be some vulnerability, there's going to be some confronting things we might need to listen to, But equally, if you're willing to share this, this is a great forum to do it. The program also gives them a bit of a structure to follow so it doesn't just become sort of an anecdote. We want people to be able to learn something from it, take something away, because that's really what connects it to the program. And there's been some absolutely phenomenal examples. One I want to turn my attention to is one of the people in our business, ex-Royal Navy, pretty stoic sort of individual you'd describe him as, really caring, empathetic, and all the qualities that you'd want from a leader. And he got up and he said, this is the first time I've shared this story with anyone. That's a very common thing we hear in this program. And what he outlined was a situation they had when he was serving on one of the ships. There was a fire. He was part of the fire response crew. And the one thing that always sunk in with me when he's told this was, when you're on board a vessel, it's your home, your workplace, your kitchen, your bar, your friend's home. It's everything. And there's no help. You're in the middle of the ocean. So it's you and your team. Unfortunately, it's quite a tragic event where two people suffered incredibly horrific burns. Both still have long term impacts from those burns and significant disability. And this is some 30 years later. But when you sort of explain what had happened and about how maintenance records have been falsified and all this other sort of stuff, All of his team was sitting there looking at him going, we now know exactly why you pick up on what you pick up on when you walk around the business. We know where your mind is when you're thinking about, you know, the quality of controls, the making sure leaders are accountable for what we're doing, all based on this one story you've told us about an experience. And so his team was sitting there looking at him going, we just feel like we know so much more about who you are as a person, what you've been through and how that's manifesting as part of your leadership that all the little gripes they used to have when the guy's out on the floor and he's checking this and oh you know he's going to be a bit of a pain checking that they now

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understood because he was in an environment where that didn't happen. And two of his shipmates paid dearly for it.

Michelle Ockers:

It's also a great opportunity for the team to reframe how they're interpreting his actions. Right. It's like all of a sudden, it's like he cares about us. He's looking out for us rather than he's on our backs all the time. That's a really significant shift. Yeah.

Heidi Lance:

Yeah. And I think you've seen that hugely throughout the business, haven't we, is that people used to think that leaders were just there to supervise them and tell them when they're doing things wrong, whereas now they actually see that leaders care and that it's because they want them to go home safe every day.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, an important shift. You spoke, I think you mentioned a structure, making sure people could take a learning away. Was that a structure that was shared for this, like how to tell a story, how to frame up your story? Heidi, I can see you nodding there. Do you want to talk about that and what that story structure looked like?

Heidi Lance:

Yes, we created a model called the OWL model and it's just a really simple three steps. O W L. So the first one is outline the scene. You know, what did I remember? What did I hear? What did I see? Really get them to paint the picture because we want them to create that picture in people's heads so they can be there when they're hearing the story. Then it's the W's, what happened? So what happened? What was the event that happened that makes this important that we're going to learn from? So, you know, tell us what happened and what the consequences were or certainly the impact of it. And then the last one is the learn from safety. So what do I learn from that and how does that apply to the situation that we're in now? You know, and really making it incredibly relevant to the context of what we're talking to the people about at the time. So that learn is really important.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. Thank you. That's a really nice structure to give people as well. And I would assume it helps people to keep it relatively tight as well in terms of getting as many stories as possible out there. Leader-led, this was clearly a shift for the business and something that has been really important to the success of the program. And I know you started up with the ELT and kind of did some cascading. Let's focus in on what this looks like for the frontline workforce. I often hear people talking about, well, I would really like leaders to be more involved in developing their people. But we need to do more than just tell them you need to develop your people, right? We need to equip them to do that. So once it gets down to the frontline workforce and their leaders leading this, the rollout of this, what does that look like? What are you expecting the leaders to do? And how are they equipped?

Heidi Lance:

So what we did was we, as we said, started from the top. We got to about frontline and we realised we needed another programme. So we adapted safety leadership to what we call Power Up Leaders. So Power Up Leaders gives the frontline leaders the tools that they need to be able to roll the Power Up programme, which is our frontline programme, out to the team. So Power Up is when we went to design the Power Up program, we knew that it had to be within their normal business rhythm of meetings. So we couldn't do anything that was different. We couldn't take the frontline off the tools for two days. So what we did was we created a series of toolboxes, toolbox talks. So these are 20 to 30 minute sessions that

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could be run by their leaders throughout a period of between nine months to a year and a half. What these did was take the core pieces of learning that we had within safety leadership and really create a personal leadership program for the frontline. So it had everything in it from, you know, what's my role in safety and why is it important to me, through to storytelling, through to how do I communicate better with my team? How do I speak up when I feel unsafe? You know, how do I put up my risk radar to make sure that I'm looking out for the stuff that might hurt me or my team? The sessions that we developed were very short, sharp, and very interactive and experiential. So, you know, the team's up and about, it's not a boring toolbox, it's up and about, they're throwing balls around, they're creating pictures, they're playing with cards, they're doing all sorts of things. And what we really noticed was a much higher level of engagement in the toolboxes because we put that real experiential piece into it.

Michelle Ockers:

So what, in terms of resources then, the frontline leaders are given some sort of run sheet, you know, anything else or is it a run sheet? What does that look like for them? What are they working from?

Heidi Lance:

So in the first iteration, it was a big box. So they got a big box of stuff because most of the sessions had different resources that they could use throughout. But what we've since led as we've gone into the next iteration and going into 2.0 is that we need to keep it as simple as possible. And this was one of the challenges from the design perspective because we needed to stop thinking about they are in a room somewhere and actually think they're in a paddock. they're in a paddock with no resources, how are we going to get the same learning outcome with nothing other than them? And so it's been really challenging, but it's made us think outside the box quite a lot. Some of the things we have them doing is instead of throwing around balls, they're throwing around gloves or hats or things like that. So now what they get is an online one page A4 double-sided sheet that gives them the run sheet of what they need to do with their team. We also give them what we call superchargers so that if you are in a room where you can use more resources, like we've created a board game, things like that that they can use if they have the opportunity to.

Michelle Ockers:

And Anthony, what's the take up been like with the frontline leaders of actually running the sessions? Are you seeing a lot of the sessions being run?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, look, so I think, first of all, the beauty about the design is because it follows through all the key learnings from the SLP. The frontline leaders are already quite comfortable with it because they've been through the course, they know what to expect, and they have a general feeling of what they want to land. So that firstly is a huge enabler to the success. In terms of take-up, we're really lucky because, you know, being trade sites we've generally got meeting rooms, we've got a lot of space, it's just more timing so we're quite lucky in that regards. But I suppose I'll give you a story to tell you how successful it was. One site ran the first module and everyone enjoyed it to such a level where they're getting so much value out of it, they then opted to shut the site for half a day. Now, you find me a business that allow you to close an operating trading site for an afternoon, be leaders who want to do it because they perceive such strong value in doing it with their frontline, that that's incredibly difficult to come across. In fact, I'd argue if that had been three years ago, someone would have ended up in disciplinary action for deciding to close an operating site. But that just shows you the strength of it. You go out to our sites now and Broadly speaking, 85% of the people you come across will be able to talk to you about PowerUp. And they've always got something

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good to say about it, because as Heidi said, the effort put into the experience of it, the way they would feel, has really turned a corner for our organization. And I know if any of my colleagues listen to this, they'll be sitting there going, well, it'd be nice if we had sites like Placemakers and Micah. And it's just something that we get to utilize and benefit from. However, going all the way back to the start of the start of the reset, when we're sitting there trying to figure out what we needed to do, the concept of a frontline safety program that would be rolled out, and I can say at least 2,967 of our staff have been through more than 50% of the program. If you're going to tell me that we'd be able to achieve that in a few years, I probably would have laughed you out the room. because that's where our culture was. And the fascinating thing about the delivery of that half day at one of the sites is when they told the customers, hey, look, two months in advance, we're closing for half a day. The first question they got asked was, who died? They assumed the only reason you do that, that's a bit of a stop work, was because something so bad had happened that we needed to shut the site. And when customers have started hearing a bit about SLP, we've had a couple of customers attend our SLP, have wanted to come along and see what it was all about, because our staff are talking about it. They've seen power-up going on in the branches, you know, they're sort of standing there and looking at a staff meeting of people throwing tennis balls around going, what are you crazy cats doing? And then when they hear it's related to safety, they think it's even crazier still.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Yeah. Great for shifting perception of your customers, though, because no doubt many of them would have heard about the fatality several years ago for them to see the level of care there is a really good thing as well. You talked a little earlier about that shift in, I want to talk about results and outcomes now. You talked a little bit about that shift in belief that injuries can be prevented and some of the numbers there. What are some of the other things you've seen happen or change with safety results and or behaviors in this period?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, look, there's been quite a broad range of outcomes. Some kind of more transactional ones, like people being more open to helping develop safe operating procedures and wanting to give opinions and tell us about how work is really done. That's been invaluable for anyone who's putting together any sort of site-specific training. From an injury result, and really this all boils down to one thing, you want people to get home safe. There is a calculation called TRIFA, Total Recordable Injury Frequency Rate. Love it or hate it, it's the one we use. As an industry, talking about distribution, retail, trade environments, the industry average sort of sits, broadly speaking, between 9 to 15. For the placemakers branches, when we first started this, we're in about the 10 to 12, depending on the day and the wind on your back. The placemakers branches alone is at 2.6 now.

Michelle Ockers:

That's a fabulous improvement.

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, I genuinely can't believe it. We were struggling to crack the five, and now we're sitting below the four. As a division, when we roll up all of our sites, we're about 3.6. And to give you the real numbers, so July to December, the first half of the financial year, in 2023, we had 10 injuries, 10 recordable injuries. across our 160-odd locations. And that's still 10 too many, but when you compare it to the year previous in 2022, it was 19. And when you compare it to the year before, it was 26. And so if you're looking for a result in just pure injury prevention, that's the number you're looking at. And really encouragingly, we used to have a serious injury sort of every seven to nine weeks in the business before this started, and we haven't had one in over five years.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. What a great outcome. Yep.

Heidi Lance:

I asked about some of the results too that I've seen. Quite different, but you know, I was in doing a pilot with one of the teams and we had the Te Whare Tapawha, which is, you know, the well-being house, Mason Jury's work. And they built, we have them building these little whare, or these houses, and writing what their well-being intentions are on the house. And so this is an activity that a lot of people through Power Up have gone through. And we've since heard that these people are taking it out to their communities, taking it out to their churches, to their whānau, to share with their families, which is making a difference across the whole community, not just what's happening within the business, which is really exciting.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's nice to see that ripple effect, right? Very good. And so, Heidi, I might start with you with the next question. And you did talk earlier about going in for that initial brief and thinking, well, this is like an e-learning plus some, you know, maybe some face to face. It's like a blended learning approach with that being the blend. But you ended up with something very different. Is there anything that you or your team had to either embrace or let go of as you worked on this project?

Heidi Lance:

I think one of the biggest things was the leader-led component. You know, when you're used to developing material for someone who's a professional facilitator, who can bring it alive in the room, you can trust them to do that, you know, it's a lot easier. When you're having to develop stuff or material for people who have potentially never facilitated before, there's a lot more complexity to it. And we're used to keeping control of what we write, whereas all of a sudden we didn't. It's gone out to the whole business. And what's been, I guess, exciting, but at the time quite scary, is that people have made changes that suit their business. So they have adapted some of the activities, adapted some of the materials to work for them. And at first as a designer that's terrifying, but then on the other hand it's fantastic because it means that we're consistently getting, we're continuously improving the material and it's really landing for the audience that we are designing it for.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, it's about sharing responsibility rather than being in control, right? Yeah, just fabulous. How about yourself, Anthony? Is there anything that you or the team had to either embrace or let go of beyond the, you know, that belief that some injuries aren't preventable?

Anthony Mitchell:

Yeah, I think for us, and this is probably my operational background coming out, I sat there and you do the math, you go, hang on, we've got X amount of litres times two a day plus flights for those who are working remotely and bringing it all together. And you start to sort of look at the financial cost of it very quickly. And Heidi mentioned before, you know, the working group, I think you guys are about three months in on the working group and then our L&OD manager had left to go on maternity leave and she'd sort of said you'll need to take over from this and my mindset at that point was no this is an L&OD activity I don't have the time resource or to be quite frank the inkling to want to be involved and now I think back to that decision going if I'd stuck to my guns on that it would have been the worst like career mistake I would have made because this has been an absolute highlight training so many leaders throughout the business in this program. So the key thing for us to embrace was actually we need to make an investment, it's a strategic investment. I think we had two under

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our belt and the feedback from the leaders, and of course you're looking at a small group and a lot of our leaders are incredibly capable people, you know, some of them are operating you know, quite significant businesses. Some of them have ownership stakes in the business. So you've got a real diverse mix of leaders and people coming out and going, this is not what I expected. I was expecting two days to sit down and learn how to assess a risk. You know, I've been in the business for 30 years, best thing you've ever done. And originally we just thought maybe they're saying that because me and the CE are co-facilitating and they just want to make sure their, you know, their bonuses are good this year or whatever. But it just kept happening and kept happening. And we've got leaders who have said, we want to go back and do it again. We've got leaders who have said, hey, this person's future talent, we want to get them. We think this is the best opportunity for development and all this other sort of carry on. And that is just phenomenal. So we embrace the fact that it was going to be a strategic investment, two days for our business. We made a couple of underlying decisions that would underpin our SLP rollout. And that it would always be off site and outside the business. We wanted people to immerse themselves in the programme and not sit there worrying about what was happening on site or getting distracted. And so even till this day, you know, when we're doing it as part of New Leader Inductions, it's still flow into somewhere either Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch for two days off site. And, you know, really the thing, the learning I took from Heidi was focusing on the experience. and that's what we'll want them to have. The content's important, but if they have a good time, good recollection, and, you know, people will sit there and go, well, it sounds like they just splash money around, but, you know, there's a dinner on the middle night. There's all of that to help build that real connectedness to what we want to achieve and say, this is so important. We get senior leaders out of the business for two days, take you off site, allow yourself to immerse yourself in it and have a bit of fun.

Michelle Ockers:

And I know our time is almost up, but I bet there's a whole stack of knock on effects well beyond safety as part of the connection that you've built between people through the safety leadership program. Let's wrap up with some tips, some tips for others who want to get started or do more with leader led learning. Heidi, what would be your key takeaway on that for people?

Heidi Lance:

I think you need to get by and right from the top. I think it is really important. It was something at first people were very resistant to and didn't want to do and couldn't understand why we were getting leaders to be facilitators. So it had to come right from the top. I think you need to equip them with the tools that they need to be successful. We started with, when we first began, we did train the trainers for them and not only the material but also some, you know, easy facilitation skills, you know, storytelling and giving instruction and so on. then we got them to co-facilitate with an experienced facilitator, so they were able to be part of it. The facilitator would bring them in when they need to, to really set that context and that storytelling. So I think, yeah, really setting them up for success and ensuring that they observe it before they go and do it.

Michelle Ockers:

Anthony, what would you add to that in terms of tips for setting people up or for success with leader-led learning?

Anthony Mitchell:

I think I wouldn't want to underestimate the importance of having it from the top. A lot of people say it's got to be led from the top. It's a phrase thrown around every day. If it's not, when your front lines start to experience this, the first leader they hit who has not got a

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strong sense of belief, value in what you're doing, it all just folds like a house of cards really, really quickly. The other piece is, you know, having an Ops background, is quite often us as leaders, we want all the information and we want to go in with a perfectly prepared presentation, perfectly prepared set of outcomes, where if we got any question in the world, we could answer it really easily. And it's about saying to the leaders that actually, you know, you don't need to have all the answers. You can go into these environments, you can co-facilitate. If someone asks you a question you don't understand, that's perfectly acceptable. And what that sort of opens the door on is leaders being a little bit more comfortable in rolling this stuff out. Like, I had leaders saying to me, but I'm not a safety professional. I don't know safety as well as you, so how could I possibly roll this out? And you're like, fun fact, this is a leadership program. You're a bloody good leader. You know how to lead a team really well. It's just that safety happens to be the title of it. That's the platform where we're learning. The beauty of the program is, and I bring it back to, it's simple enough that if you're delivering it and you fumble and you go, I've lost where we are, it is so easy to pick it up. As an example, when we were delivering it in Taupo, the power went out and we just were able to keep rocking on without any issue whatsoever, which was quite disappointing for all the leaders who thought it was a beer o'clock when the power went out at midday. It's only out for an hour, but that's this beautiful simplicity of it. It can bounce around and when you make it something that's that simple to deliver, leaders just jump in and they're like we get this this is this is easy and and you'd be surprised I think for me, how many leaders I thought would be really comfortable facilitating. I do a lot of it. I do a lot of presentations, conferences, you name it. And you forget that that's actually quite unique to your own job. And then a lot of these leaders have never had to stand up in front of their groups and talk to content that's pre-designed for them. A lot of them get up and talk about sales numbers and safety numbers and the transactional tactical stuff. But when they get to the strategic stuff, it's a bit more difficult. That would be the tip and trick, is design something that's just simple and easy to roll out.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. Thank you, Anthony and Heidi, for joining me today to share your experience with the Safety Leadership Program. I'll include a link to your LinkedIn profiles in the show notes on the Learning Uncut podcast landing page on the website. So for listeners, if you'd like to get in touch, you can find out more about the topics discussed in today's episodes through Heidi and Anthony. Thank you both so much for being my guests and sharing your story today.

Anthony Mitchell:

Pleasure. Thank you.

Heidi Lance:

Cheers. Thank you.

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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.

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at 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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