Learning Uncut Episode 59
Denise Meyerson – Immersive Simulations for Difficult Conversations
Hosted by Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers:

It was a pleasure to have the always effervescent Denise Meyerson return to Learning Uncut for the third time. She does some really interesting work in her organisation, MCI Solutions, using very engaging approaches. I also find her openness and courage inspiring. In this episode these qualities are evident both in the innovative approach adopted to a common challenge, as well as Denise's willingness to be a guinea pig and share a video of herself playing the part of a participant using the solution.

It can be a challenge to provide a safe realistic practice environment for some skills. Having effective difficult conversations is one of them. In this episode Denise shares the story of an innovative approach to provide a safe simulated practice environment for difficult conversations. This solution was for frontline workers in the disability services sector. A similar approach could readily be used for practice of a range of human and leadership skills in many contexts.

This is a great example of how engaging experiential learning can be supported in a virtual environment just as effectively, if not more so, than face to face. If you are interested in a smart, effective approach to design and develop impactful learning solutions for the virtual environment be sure to take a look at the ReThink Learning program on my website – or use the link in the show notes for information on ReThink Learning. Enjoy this conversation with Denise.

Michelle Ockers:

Denise, welcome back to Learning Uncut. It's a pleasure to have you back for, I think, the third time?

Denise Meyerson:

Absolutely. If my math stands me in good stead, I think it is.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. Denise, for anyone who hasn't caught either of your previous episodes, which we will link to in the show notes, can you please introduce us to your organization and what you do and who you do it for?

Denise Meyerson:

Lovely. We are MCI Solutions, been going for 17 years. If you can imagine having seen the ups and downs of the learning industry over that time. We offer a full array of different types of learning modalities, we offer face to face, virtual, digital, and now very excitingly, which I think is part of our topic today, is a little bit of virtual reality. All with the aim of ensuring that people gain the skills they need. And wow, Michelle, aren't skills on top of the agenda right now? Goodness, if training doesn't come to the fore now, when will it ever?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, they certainly are a spotlight priority right now, Denise. And yes, we are going to talk about a virtual reality application today, which is fantastic because I think this might be the first VR case study or story on the podcast.

Denise Meyerson:

Oh, wow.

Michelle Ockers:

I have had a few listener requests, so I'm really delighted that we can have this conversation today.

Denise Meyerson:

Excellent. Looking forward to it.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, me too. So, let's talk about, in this case, it was a client of yours. Can you give us some background to the sector that the client worked in and some context around the business need that presented to you?

Denise Meyerson:

Absolutely. And for people who are Australian and listen to your podcast, I'm sure they'll be very aware of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS, which I think is quite unique to Australia and just an amazing scheme that they have put in for people with disability, if you consider that over 4.3 million Australians have some form of disability. So, when our client approached us, they had won a tender, and as you can imagine, not an easy tender to win. And they were going to be responsible for the roll out in Western Australia of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. As part of that, they had a group of 160 or 165, what they call Local Area Coordinators. So, these are the guys who have to sit with the carer or the parent of the person with a disability or the person themselves, and put together a plan for them. They become kind of the main point of contact when it comes to dealing with the scheme. So, you can also imagine recruiting 165 people in one go, preparing them, onboarding them, inducting them, getting them ready was an enormous business challenge.

Michelle Ockers :

And of course, for listeners outside of Australia who may not be familiar with the geography, Western Australia is a vast area. And a lot of the populations that would need to be serviced would be outside of city areas, as well.

Denise Meyerson:

Hundred percent. In towns with names that you probably haven't heard of, or I certainly haven't.

Michelle Ockers:

So, that's part of the challenge here, as well, and I think is relevant to the particular solution that was selected. So, tell me a little bit more about this particular service provider in regard to organizational culture or what was already happening with learning in the organization. Anything that might be relevant as background information around the kind of scene setting for the solution.

Denise Meyerson:

Absolutely. It's an organization where they already do quite a lot of work helping people with disability and helping them find the relevant training, the relevant support that they need, the relevant employment for them. And they're also, in fact, a member of what's called the Valuable 500 and I haven't heard of it previously, but it's a major global campaign where members demonstrate that they see value in employing people with a disability. So, they're, in fact, the first company in Australia to become a member of this Valuable 500, which I think is a huge acknowledgement to them. But it does place a big stress on the provider now, that has to onboard so many people to cover this whole vast region. It certainly gave quite a bit of urgency and a level of importance to the project.

Michelle Ockers:

Denise, let's start with an overview of the solution, end to end at a high level for this particular business challenge.

Denise Meyerson:

Bringing together people from such a vast region in itself was a challenge and they decided that initially they would bring everyone in to create the vibe, to get the social networks happening, to ensure that people form some sort of relationship and a support relationship so that in the future, when times got a little bit more tough, they would have others that they could rely on and that they could call on. The session commenced with a very big welcome, you can imagine 165 people in the conference centre, with so much on the go, motivational speakers, we had dancers with disability, it was all happening using a whole range of different and exciting methodologies.

Denise Meyerson:

Then as you know, they've got to leave at some point and go back to their regions and then the rubber hits that unfortunate road. Because you're now going to be in the situation where you have to hold conversations and some of these conversations are pretty tough. People, before the NDIS scheme had come into Western Australia, there was another scheme there and it paid out in a different way. You can imagine being a person with a disability who used to receive a particular type of service, who used to receive money in a particular way and now this has all changed and in some cases you don't receive that money any longer.

Denise Meyerson:

The conversations were not easy and there was a very big fear that there would be a large turnover in these LAC's as they started to deal with these situations, which were extremely challenging. How do you keep the momentum going? How do you ensure that there's sufficient support for these area coordinators and how do you give them learning that is so relevant and builds their confidence so that they're able to deal with any type of situation that could come their way? That, I'm sure people can imagine is a very big challenge.

Michelle Ockers:

What was the solution? What did you do to help address that?

Denise Meyerson:

This is where the virtual reality came into the picture. After people had left the face to face session, where it is possible to, direct speaking to people is obviously going to make a really good and strong, positive atmosphere and then they leave. What we did first of all is make sure that these skills were available to them in digital format. Once they're on the plane on the way home, or just before they hold their first meeting, they're able then to look on the screen of their phone or on their laptops or their iPad and have a bit of a refresher. What do you say in a planning meeting? What's the type of things you mustn't say? Where does it go? How do you structure it? What's the format?

Denise Meyerson:

We did provide them with a set of micro skills as a way of doing these types of ongoing and development and ongoing professional refreshers, before they stepped into a meeting. Where the biggest win was and where we really saw the transformation, where we saw people just fly so much higher because of their level of confidence, is we put them into, it's not full virtual reality in that it's not full 360 degrees with these glasses and having people feel as if they're in that totally 3D dimension, but it is a way of simulating a conversation in as close a way as you can get to the real conversation itself.

Denise Meyerson:

That's where I feel they had the biggest wow moment, that's where confidence could increase and that's where we really saw who could handle these conversations and who needed a little bit of a booster, a bit of coaching and a bit further support.

Michelle Ockers:

How did these simulated conversations work? Can you talk us through a typical conversation, simulated conversation, which I gather are a practiced conversation and who was involved?

Denise Meyerson:

Okay, and that's also a great question because the conversations that are available through this particular platform are generic conversations. Giving performance feedback would be one example. Showing a bit of empathy for somebody would be another example. In this case, I don't think anywhere else in the world is there a situation where you have to have these particular types of tough, more challenging conversations.

Denise Meyerson:

The first step was to devise the script and what was interesting Michelle, is that just in devising the script and the different pathways and the different routes, which a conversation

could wind through, that in itself created and opened, I wouldn't say a can of worms, but it did open a lot of fruitful conversations. Because people had to agree, "Well, how do you want these conversations to happen?"

Denise Meyerson:

You can't just say, "Oh, I want them to demonstrate empathy at that moment." Well, what does that mean in practice? How do you just demonstrate empathy? It really ensured that the leaders and the managers of these things had to also agree, "Well, how would we like that conversation to progress, so that it is done in a more consistent way?"

Denise Meyerson:

I'd say that that took a good a couple of weeks to get that nutted out. As you can imagine, many people had differing views on that.

Michelle Ockers:

People had to get quite specific I would imagine around, well, what does empathy look like? What are the typical scenarios for these conversations?

Denise Meyerson:

Exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

What is an appropriate way to handle it? What are good responses, what are good questions? There's almost an opportunity for practice reflection and practice improvement amongst the leaders of the Local Area Coordinators that came out of it.

Denise Meyerson:

Hopefully. Because they themselves, as we refined the scenarios and the various responses, had to get into the virtual reality themselves to realize it's not so easy just sitting in a meeting and finding the right words and framing everything so appropriately and ensuring that you're leading a person with disability down the right pathway. It's not so easy sitting there. It's all fine to preach it, it's not that easy to sit in the chair and do it.

Michelle Ockers:

Talk to me about this virtual reality environment, what did it look like?

Denise Meyerson:

What it looks like is, it's fairly basic on the side of the person who is holding the conversation. On the back end it's where there's a proprietary type of information technology and the processes exist. On the side of the person holding the conversation, it's as simple as clicking on a link that you receive, putting your headset on, being briefed about the conversation and then launching into the discussion and thinking on your feet, thinking how you would respond, what the other person on the other side is saying.

Denise Meyerson:

On your screen, what you see is an avatar. You don't see a real person, they've done substantial research, and I won't go into all of the research, but there's a lot of research around the psychological safety that an avatar provides that a real person couldn't. What the

avatar is doing as well is that behind the avatar, in some studio, is an actor who has been trained in thinking on their feet, improvisation, giving responses on the go, but at the same time following the script.

Denise Meyerson:

Michelle, that actor is wired up, and don't ask me exactly the magic that happens behind it, but they are wired up through the use of artificial intelligence so that the avatar mirrors what they're doing, their body language. They're even able to change tone, they're able to change the way in which the avatar comes across on the screen and they're able to even bring another avatar in and adapt their voice so that it becomes a very realistic conversation.

Denise Meyerson:

When you're in it you have, people say, "Oh, these avatars are so good, they're so well programmed." They're not really, there is an actor on the other side, which is why I call it virtual reality life. Because it's not fully programmed and not fully coded for a full-on virtual reality, as I'm sure some people will have done a full virtual reality, like with a hose putting out a fire, that would be a more fully coded virtual reality version.

Michelle Ockers:

We do actually have a video that you've provided Denise, showing one of these simulated conversations, where you very bravely were the person who was having the conversation with the avatar. If people would like to see what this looks like and get a sense of that, they can find that in the show notes. Because I think that really brings it to life.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

In that video there were actually two different avatars, so at the start there was an avatar who briefed you as the participant on the scenario and then came back in at the end and did a debriefing.

Denise Meyerson:

To help debrief.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah, so is it a different person who plays that, almost like the coach role, versus the person who is playing the actor who's behind the avatar?

Denise Meyerson:

It just depends on how things are set up and sometimes it is indeed the same person. Just, if people do watch that clip and they're very welcome to give me feedback, but the saddest part of it all Michelle, is that I have trained courses on giving feedback, I've trained courses on having tough conversations, I've designed courses, but when you are in front of that screen and those words have to emerge from your mouth, correctly framed, beautifully positioned, just in the flow of things, it's so hard, there is definitely quite a sweat factor there as well.

Denise Meyerson:

In terms of just, well, if this was the actual situation, I would have floundered, it would have been just a really bad outcome. By doing these types of simulations, it's giving you the

confidence that "Aha, I know they've never mentioned that. I know if I go down that road it's just going to end in a blind alley." Because from the time I opened my mouth, the avatar, from the first sentence that I said, folded their arms and turned their head away.

Denise Meyerson:

Well, it might not be as dramatic as that in an actual conversation, but I sure got the message that I was not approaching it very well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, look, role plays are pretty common, particularly for soft skills, we use role plays a lot to help people to practice, but often we're setting up the role play so another participant on the program is playing the second party. Of course, there's a level of artificiality around that and that person perhaps isn't working from a script or hasn't practiced that part of the role play to the same degree as the actor.

Michelle Ockers:

Now, of course, there's still some artificiality in this situation because it's not the real person sitting in front of you, but nonetheless, because the conversations have been, all the scenario has been scripted, the actors are familiar with it, I imagine that the level of closeness of the simulation or of the scenario in the way it plays out, to what would actually happen in the workplace, is going to be higher than if you just had another participant in a face to face session or a face to face role play playing that role, Denise.

Denise Meyerson:

Totally, and just the level of immersion in it is far higher. Because we've all done those role plays where, if you're lucky you get a good person who can act really well. If you're unlucky then, ha, ha, ha, you have a laugh about it or over-exaggerate it, and nobody remembers it. Whereas something like this is totally measurable and what's more ... Did I say memorable or measurable? Because I need to say both.

Denise Meyerson:

At the end, there is in fact some sort of measurement, because there is a report that comes out, so you have your briefing, you are debriefed and what did you do well? Where could you have gone better? The actor gives you some feedback as well. You get a video, so you can self-assess and have a look and see where you can improve, and there's a report that emerges. Because the report, which is another part of the artificial intelligence, has picked up how many times you've used the appropriate wording, have you used the type of phrasing and framing that is expected of you?

Denise Meyerson:

If it isn't, that's when you would go for further coaching and support. The targeting of that coaching and support is really for the people who didn't do that well. Whereas the others that have done it and ticked, not really ticked the box, but at least met the basic requirements of that conversation, can be stretched into a more difficult conversation where there's a different set of parameters that they're expected to achieve.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, so the quality of the feedback available is actually improved and you can move people either on to the next level that they're ready for, or work with them on strengthening at the level that they're at, in terms of the difficulty of the conversations.

Denise Meyerson:

Totally.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, that's really useful.

Denise Meyerson:

For example-

Michelle Ockers:

How quickly is that data available to support the coaching?

Denise Meyerson:

The next day, the next two days, you've got your report and you've got your recording almost immediately. There's a lot of extra work that can go on after that, because people always like looking at themselves and seeing how they did. It's not as though it's going out on to YouTube, so they're happy to look at it in that type of context. They're generally quite amazed at, "Oh, I should have said it like that." "If only I've framed it in a different way." "If only I pitched it slightly differently there it would have been a better outcome." The learning is immediate through, it's intense simulation.

Michelle Ockers:

Look, our memories of what we've said or how we've said things can be quite flawed as well, if we're wanting to reflect on a conversation, so it's quite valuable I would imagine to have the video.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, indeed, there's the ones who are the more severe critics of themselves and then the others who seem to think, "Oh my gosh." They picture themselves in the mirror and they think, "Wow, that was fantastic." When it's not quite that way.

Michelle Ockers:

Where did you find the actors from? Tell us a little bit about them.

Denise Meyerson:

For the moment, because we haven't used it extensively in Australia, it's new technology, it's a step further than the usual library of e-learns or the face to face and virtual classes, we haven't trained actors yet. We've had to rely on actors that are US-based. Hopefully, and we have already bookings with other clients who have other types of difficult conversations, where they do need a substantial amount of practice, that we'll eventually be able to train up some of the Australian actors and have the equipment here as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, and what about the coaches, tell more about the role of the coach? What's the coach doing and bringing?

Denise Meyerson:

Well, see, I find this really interesting Michelle, because, I really thought that the coach would have a stronger role in all of this, but the most powerful thing was just looking at yourself and debriefing and thinking, "Oh." That self-assessment became for me personally,

far more valuable than anything that the coach was bringing to the party. Although yeah, the coach was saying, "Well, where do you think you could have done this?" "Don't you think you would have been better off doing this?" The normal types of coaching questions.

Denise Meyerson:

Because after, and just that self-reflection, self-assessment, watching me, me over and over again, I just was like, "I'll never have a conversation in that poor away with anyone ever again."

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah, so the coach is sitting there live, right, they're watching the whole thing?

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

They're on the site as well, watching.

Denise Meyerson:

They're watching, they're in it all the way. The beauty of having the video is that you can then take it to the managers, the learning and development professionals and they can help you unpack it even further if you want to.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, so the coach is someone who's just coaching for a session rather than an ongoing thing.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, no they come and go. Yeah, exactly, exactly, although you could take then the recording, if you do have an ongoing coach and then replay and just seeing at the exact point in the recording, well, "Would that have been the exact time that you should have rather taken the high road and you shouldn't have gotten into the details so quickly," something like that.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, so obviously these sessions are being recorded and that's part of the power of it, that they're available for reflection.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

You have chosen with this demonstration session to share it on the internet obviously, but what if any measures did you need to take to address any privacy issues related to the recording?

Denise Meyerson:

Well, look, I mean, for me, I didn't mind, so I gave up my privacy but I don't recommend that everyone just posts me up on the social media. Because believe me, people don't hold back with their feedback. They're not shy to.

Michelle Ockers:

Obviously as a tutor in the program you want to be comfortable that …

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, you would keep it to yourself, yeah. You wouldn't necessarily have to do it in a room full of people. We are experimenting with running it with three people in the conversation, so that if one person stumbles the next person can pick it up and try to take over or do some observation. That is a possibility, if people aren't that concerned about their privacy. I'd love to see it one day integrated into a training program, why not?

Michelle Ockers:

That if you were actually doing a face or face to face program, you could incorporate this as an activity, like technology in the classroom almost.

Denise Meyerson:

100%.

Michelle Ockers:

Denise, you mentioned before that the actors are from the US, is this particular technology from the US as well? Is the technology provider in the USA?

Denise Meyerson:

Yes, yes, I'd love it to come into Australia as well.

Michelle Ockers:

We'll put a link to the platform that you use, in the show notes, if people want to take a look at it and obviously a link to your company's website, if they're curious to follow-up.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, and there'll be all the research there, about why they use avatars. More explanation about the artificial intelligence and how that works, so there will be a lot more detail there.

Michelle Ockers:

All of that will be on the technology platform or the providers platform?

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Great, for people who want to follow it up, are curious, that's a great place to go.

Denise Meyerson:

Absolutely, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

Tell me, how did the participants respond to the simulated conversations and the way they were run?

Denise Meyerson:

Well, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the biggest, I'd say the word that was repeated the most often is, "I now feel confident." That level of confidence, to be able to go into these tough situations, I think is the game changer. Because, if know the theory and you know the research and you know what you should be saying, but to have the confidence to say it is really what is going to make the difference?

Denise Meyerson:

I would say, well over 90% of people just said, "Thank you, thank you, when's the next one?" Unfortunately it's not the cheapest.

Michelle Ockers:

Now, how many, well, we'll get into cost in a moment. How many sessions did most participants have to get to the point where they were confident?

Denise Meyerson:

Within your half hour little time slot, you can do it twice. You can do the same conversation twice and try and improve, try and, once you've had a bit of feedback from the coach, you can go through it again, you can try and say it differently and you can try get towards a better outcome. Most people tried it twice.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, do you think if cost wasn't a factor that there would be benefit to doing it over an extended period of time, having the opportunity come back and-

Denise Meyerson:

Oh, yes, can you imagine, just in any type of situation, I'm thinking call centres, when even right now there's so much tension in the country and then there's a lot of aggression from customers. If you'd just been able to practice this so many times and getting performance feedback is becoming an issue, it's performance feedback time of the year, people don't know what to say, how to say, when to say. You imagine if you had a few rounds of practice of that.

Denise Meyerson:

I believe that the whole team climate could change just from having conversations that are just better framed and lead out in a positive way, instead of having some level of conflict or even to the point of hostility.

Michelle Ockers:

There's a lot of potential for misunderstanding if the conversations aren't handled well.

Denise Meyerson:

It's so easy for it to happen. I saw it with myself, I just opened wrong. As I opened, I put my foot right in it. I didn't come in from an empathetic, is that the right word? Yes, well an angle of empathy. I didn't step forward and say to the person, "Let me hear your point of view first." In I went, I was a bull in a china shop.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah, so cost, you raised cost. Can you give us some sense of the costs associated with using the technology?

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, I mean it's roughly, and obviously the US dollar is fluctuating a bit, I'd say it's roughly 300 Australian dollars per person. Which isn't bad, but when you've got a lot of people it does mount up. Considering that normally you've got your training room or your virtual classroom or your e-learns that can be done over and over again, so-

Michelle Ockers:

You do have to balance that against effectiveness of solution and the level to which skills are built, right. Also, if you're looking at the business case for something like this, in this case you've got the concern around turnover and customer service and your clients being unhappy and so on.

Denise Meyerson:

Exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's all got to be balanced out, right?

Denise Meyerson:

I agree. I agree, but because it's new and it is very innovative and it is stepping into another dimension, I can't say that I've got 20 case studies to tell you. I've just got one really, really successful one and a few we'll start rolling out now, fortunately.

Michelle Ockers:

Right, so we had the 165 coordinators go through the use of the simulated conversations. How long ago was that undertaken?

Denise Meyerson:

That was last year. That was last year. Many of them, look, there are some that have dropped out, I can't pretend that there's 100% retention. I would say that over the time period, at least the retention is a lot higher than had been anticipated originally. There were people that just found the role, there are many reasons, the role not totally appropriate for them, but certainly over the past year, the retention has been a lot stronger. Which then has, as you say, the impact on less recruiting, further induction and so on. It does make an enormous difference in the end to the budget.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, yeah, so in terms of challenges then with the solution, you mentioned the scripting was a bit of a challenge, but at the same time, there was a bonus, there was an upside to that.

Denise Meyerson:

Yes, yes.

Michelle Ockers:

In terms of really getting clear on how those conversations should run. Which I imagine that level of specificity is often lacking for people in terms of the kind of guidance. What other

challenges did you have along the way? Were there technical challenges? Were there any other logistical challenges? Any other challenges that had to be addressed and how were they addressed?

Denise Meyerson:

I think once people just knew how to get on to the platform, which is just a few clicks, and have your headset ready, there really wasn't too much of an issue with this. Everyone gets a calendar invitation, you get your link and off you go. I can't say that they were any challenges from that point of view. What the reporting showed, which was quite interesting, is that the training must have been pretty effective, because the vast majority of people, say about 90% or so people could fully hold the conversation, which I think is a good validation for the amount of training and how the training had been delivered.

Denise Meyerson:

There definitely was an element there, where they could have done it a little bit better and where they needed to have those boosts and that confidence regained as well. I mean, ultimately I would have loved to see the people who had left the business, but we never did that type of analysis, whether they were in fact the people who weren't confident in those conversations, were they the ones who ultimately left, but unfortunately we never analysed that.

Michelle Ockers:

That could have been a pretty good tool for indicating that further support to provide for some people.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

It strikes me that it could be quite useful as an assessment and evaluation tool as well.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, yeah, totally. I mean, I'm just pulling up a little bit of the feedback in front of me right now. People were using words like, "It felt authentic, but I would have liked to have done this again, because it relieved me of the anxiety of getting it wrong with a real participant." That type of feeling, I think if there'd been another conversation and another conversation over time, we maybe would have seen higher retention.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so as long as the budget was there.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah, exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

More conversations over a longer period of time is something that you would do differently.

Denise Meyerson:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

What else might you do differently?

Denise Meyerson:

I don't know if I would do anything differently, other than just more, just keep it coming. Not every month, but I would say once a quarter and just keep that confidence up and just making sure that people do in fact come in, that they go to their e-learns and refresh. More situations would have emerged as compared with the initial situation that we covered.

Denise Meyerson:

As they progress further on their journey as Local Area Coordinators, they would have found other situations that they would say, "Oh, I wish I would have had a bit of practice on dealing with that kind of situation or variation."

Michelle Ockers:

You could have been quite responsive and created new scenarios for them to be able to practice on.

Denise Meyerson:

Yes, yes, yes, and I think that would have been, the general cry from them is "Please give us more, give us more." At some point, we're at the beginning of the budget and generally in learning and development situations is the recruitment budget and the L&D budget looked at it in conjunction with each other? I don't know if it always is.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes, there's certainly something to be said for more complete business cases when you're making decisions and the flexibility around budgets across the whole of the talent life cycle, rather than chunking it down-

Denise Meyerson:

I agree.

Michelle Ockers:

Into little components, right.

Denise Meyerson:

I agree.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah.

Denise Meyerson:

Write an article on that one. Do a podcast just on that one. I'd love to hear some statistics around that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's an interesting thought. I'll play with it Denise, I've got a few things lined up.

Denise Meyerson:

Okay.

Michelle Ockers:

Denise, if anyone listening is curious, obviously if they want to find out more about this approach, they can go to the show notes and take a look at the platform, they can get in contact with you via LinkedIn to have a conversation.

Denise Meyerson:

Fantastic.

Michelle Ockers:

If anyone is thinking about getting started, let's say they made themselves aware of what was involved with the technology involved, they had listened to the podcast and they were keen to get started, what would your key tips be to help them to get started?

Denise Meyerson:

I think it's to find a conversation that really matters. Little trivial conversations, no, this is for something that you want to be scalable. It's a conversation that will be relevant, fairly broadly across the business, not just these unique little conversations. There's no budget to do the scripting for situations that are so unique and only apply to so few people in the company. Where something like performance management, a delegation, giving feedback, topics like that are generally more prevalent across the board. Then you really are seeing impact and getting your money's worth out of it.

Denise Meyerson:

I'd say that would be the first step. The second step is to get people in a room and find some consensus about how you want these conversations to take place. Yes, we can guide you through writing up the script, but there needs to be some level of conversation. Recently we had an example of a healthcare provider and people were just taking a lot of sickies. Well, first of all to explain in America, what a sickie is, because they don't know what that is.

Denise Meyerson:

This was something that was happening regularly in the organization and so we said to the HR team, "Well, what do you want the line managers to say? What do you want these people to ... Somebody has taken a sickie on a Monday, they arrive on the Tuesday, how do you want them to hold the conversation?" Then HR go, "I don't know, well you must talk to them about this and you must allude to that." It's like, "Well, tell us exactly what you want them to say." We put them in front of the screen with the avatar, just like, "Now you talk." That's when they have the aha moment. "Ah, it's not so stressful after all."

Michelle Ockers:

Well, look, what strikes me, Denise is that even if you're just preparing to do role plays without the simulation, without the technology component and you're running programs to help people with how to have difficult conversations or conversations in different contexts, actually take the time to get really clear on what a good quality conversation looks like and what the expectations are, right.

Denise Meyerson:

Exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

Not just in a high level, here's the guidelines, actually going through what do they say in different circumstances or what's the flow of these conversations and so on.

Denise Meyerson:

Exactly. Be assertive. Well what does be assertive mean?

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, what does that look like in this situation? What are the words or the body language or whatever they're really looking for there?

Denise Meyerson:

Quite right. Don't be aggressive. What's the difference? Am I too aggressive, am I bordering to aggression? No, it's too hard?

Michelle Ockers:

Clarity, clarity is the key. Thank you so much Denise, for sharing your work and insights.

Denise Meyerson:

No, it's a pleasure-

Michelle Ockers:

It was absolutely fascinating.

Denise Meyerson:

Thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

To listeners, if you're finding Learning Uncut valuable, please take a moment to rate the podcast and leave us with a review comment. We are growing in listenership, but we really appreciate your support to make others aware of the fabulous work that our guests are sharing on the podcast and so that collectively you have more opportunity to learn from each other. Thank you.

About Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

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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