

Learning Uncut Episode 64
Katrina Moss – Adopting Growth Mindset in an Organisation
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Growth mindset is a term that will be familiar to most learning professionals as well as many leaders. The idea was developed by Stanford University psychologist Dr Carol Dweck based on her research into achievement and success. The term often arises when we speak about enabling self-directed learning and building learning culture. As a learning professional you may have even used it explicitly in some of your work. However, few organisations have embraced it as fully as Shopify, an online platform that supports merchants to sell products and services.

Katrina Moss, the Learning Acceleration Lead at Shopify, is our guest in this episode. We discuss how she came across the concept of growth mindset when she joined Shopify five years ago and was asked to read Dweck's book on Mindset. She gained insight into her personal experience with learning and recognised expressions of it in practices across the organisation. We have an interesting discussion about how organisational values are identified and defined at Shopify in a very organic way. Katrina championed the definition of a new organisational value – Be A Constant Learner. In parallel she experimented with the use of growth mindset in the onboarding program, followed by leadership development.

Katrina has continued to advocate for growth mindset and worked with a range of stakeholders to embed it, particularly in talent management process. One standout element of this story is that over time this has truly become embedded so that it hasn't faded or collapsed while Katrina has been on maternity leave in the past year. Sadly, I've seen this happen in other organisations where the learning and development leader has championed a shift in mindset about learning and self-directed learning practices, but it hasn't been baked into how things get done and when this person moves on the progress is lost. If you are interested in both strengthening your own growth mindset and also in making enduring changes to learning culture in your organisation, tune in for Katrina's tips.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to Learning Uncut, Katrina.

Katrina Moss:

Thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

I'm very excited to have you here. We met in Sydney at a workshop that you were doing around learning culture, I believe, last Easter.

Katrina Moss:

That's right. I was on my first trip to Australia and there with Arun Pradhan and Glenn Carter doing a session on disrupting learning. So it was great. We spoke specifically on a few topics, but I hit on growth mindset being a big part of what I wanted to share.

Michelle Ockers:

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Which is why we're here today. I remember at the time thinking this would be a great story to bring to Learning Uncut. So thank you for your generosity in making time to speak with us from Canada. Tell us a little bit about where you live, where you are, Katrina.

Katrina Moss:

I live just outside of Ottawa, which is Canada's capital city. And I live in a really rural area. It's right on the water, which I just love. I moved out here a few years ago to be in this type of environment day in and day out. So we've got water on one side, forest on the other and absolutely love it.

Michelle Ockers:

Fantastic. And you work for Shopify. Can you introduce us to Shopify, who they are and what they do for their customers?

Katrina Moss:

Absolutely. Shopify is a platform that supports merchants. And so really that's entrepreneurs who are interested in selling products, and now branching into services through many different channels. So it originally was through an online store platform, but we've evolved so much. And so now we provide merchants the opportunity to sell in brick-and-mortar, online through channels like social media platforms, ultimately allowing them to achieve a level of success by running their own businesses. And so Shopify is a software company that is expanded into so many other avenues to support merchants.

Michelle Ockers:

How old is Shopify, Katrina?

Katrina Moss:

Geez. I actually, I don't think I know exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

Roughly, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years?

Katrina Moss:

Yeah. Not 15, I think we're between 10 and 15.

Michelle Ockers:

So still relatively young, but not well past start-up mode, I would imagine.

Katrina Moss:

Yeah, although we still like to behave that way. So there's a cool balance with the way that we exist now, which is between coming to some maturity with how we do our work practices, but also keeping that nature of experimentation and move quickly as a big part of our culture.

Michelle Ockers:

Tell us a little bit about the people who work in the organization. What sort of roles? Where are they? How many of them are there?

Katrina Moss:

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Oh my gosh. So I've been off for a little over a year on mat leave and I bet you that even the closest numbers I have are going to be outdated because we still grow so quickly. But we are distributed across at least 20, maybe even 27 countries. And into the... I think the last time I checked we were into 4,000, potentially closer to five at this point. So geography we're just burst across all of those countries. The types of core roles that you would see would be our research and development functions or our R&D team, engineers, designers, product managers, who are the core of building the product that our merchants get to experience.

Katrina Moss:

And then our support function is a massive part of what we offer, which are the folks who support merchants on any type of platform that they need. So that's calls, emails, chats, and so on. And then we have a lot of the other functions that you'd see another larger scale organisations, finance, marketing, talent of course, which is the group that I'm a part of. And also a large sales organization that we refer to as Plus.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. Which brings us to your role. You've been at Shopify I think for five years and you've got a really interesting role title on your LinkedIn profile, learning acceleration lead, which is an unusual role title in the learning and development game. Can you tell us a little bit about your role and also about what motivates you as a learning professional?

Katrina Moss:

Absolutely. Well, the cool thing I think about Shopify too, is we are able to identify what we think is the best way to describe ourselves, especially in the early days when I joined. So learning acceleration was what we called our team. As we were building out what our offer would be to Shopify is really that's what we were there to do, was to support learning and accelerate that experience, knowing that how that happens will vary across role and scope and geography, but we wanted to be accelerators of that. That was what we named our team. And my role really has evolved significantly. But what it started off to be was leading the team that was building learning programs at scale for Shopify. So that looked like onboarding when you joined Shopify and you needed to get a sense of what it looked like to be successful, have sense of belonging, understanding ultimately how to navigate such a complex environment. That's what our program supported you in order to do.

Katrina Moss:

And then our leadership development program is another significant part of an offering that we have for Shopify folk. And that is recognizing that we have expectations for leaders and what great looks like. And we support them through our program to help them get to that greatness. A lot of the time we bring on people who have not led before. So supporting them and being successful needs to be a big lift. And that's a big part of what we do. And then we have a lot of other cool ways of supporting the business, like facilitating offsites. So when teams need to get together and regroup on how to be successful as a team, things like that will support those types of conversations in more of an ad hoc way.

Michelle Ockers:

Wow. That's such a nice broad range of offerings as well. And so for you, what part of your work do you most enjoy? What really lights you up as a learning professional?

Katrina Moss:

That's a great question. And I should say we have a massive part of our learning strategy that's our technology as well. And we think of that as our learning platform, which is actually now run by a team that has a really deep technical expertise, which has worked out great

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because they've been able to understand how to cure properly the types of learning systems, how they're going to fit together like a beautiful puzzle that they are. And really reducing any redundancies that we might have for the types of learning tech that we bring on board. For me, I love the connection element of learning. So being able to support people in going from that discovery phase of how they want to improve, to being able to make those improvements. And I like being with people as they go through that journey.

Katrina Moss:

So that tends to lend itself to a lot of facilitation. That's a big part of what I love to do. And I love to help people to discover new things through facilitation. So I'm not so much a fan of the really deep scripted work of facilitation when it needs to be really tight on something specific, I like letting the group navigate where the conversation goes with having some goals in mind. That's what I tend to love to do. And then I've really enjoyed the experience of helping build our growth mindset practices and belief systems in the organization.

Michelle Ockers:

Which is a nice lead-in to today's core topic, which is all about growth mindset based on the work of Dr. Carol Dweck, whose book first came out in 2006. It's an idea that may not initially have attracted a lot of attention, but now most of the people listening to this podcast will have some concept of growth mindset or at least have come across the language of growth mindset. So it's gotten a lot of attention more recently. How do you explain growth mindset? What does it mean to you?

Katrina Moss:

Okay. So to me, it's the belief and focus that you can continually improve. And I think there's some key ingredients that you need to practice in order for that to be the case, which we can talk about shortly. But ultimately I think if you have the belief that you can continually grow and improve and you're focused on your improvement more of the time, then you are practicing a growth mindset.

Michelle Ockers:

And do you think growth mindset is a constant, or do you think depending on the task at hand or other variables that sometimes we're in growth mindset, sometimes we're in fixed mindset?

Katrina Moss:

Absolutely. I like to think of it as the way that a fan oscillates, where you move between the two. I think it really depends on whether or not in the situation you're in you're expected to be in mastery and you actually are masterful at that thing. When that's the case I think you're able to actually move into more fixed state where you know exactly what good looks like and you're able to execute that. And I don't think that's a negative thing, which sometimes it gets that connotation. But I do think that growth is when you are in that expansive, curious, striving state of mind. And the whole intent is to improve, not to look good or focus on the outcome specifically.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a lovely feeling when you're truly there and you are very open to improving and curious. How did you come across it and why do you think it's important? What drew you to it?

Katrina Moss:



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Yeah. I'm so passionate about it because it describes my entire experience going from someone who was more in fixed most of the time. And that was actually because I was afraid to try things. So I stayed in my safe zone with a lot of experiences. So when I was growing up, Michelle, I grew up with dyslexia. And I didn't know that I had that until I had some testing done when I was nine years old. And so when I had that testing done, it made a lot of sense for some of the challenges that I was having in a more traditional school environment, but it also reinforced some self-limiting beliefs in me that made it so that I really shied away from anything that ultimately challenged me in those ways. So I ended up choosing a career path that I thought would be safer for my natural talents, which is my ability to be very social, to be very creative.

Katrina Moss:

And so I went into hairstyling as the first career choice. And I really did enjoy it, but it was definitely safe. It was definitely something that I knew I could do fairly well day in and day out. And then I actually ran into a really serious challenge with my skin. I developed eczema that made it really difficult to do my job. And I went back to school. And it was that experience, going back to school, where I realized that I could be great at learning things that I didn't know how to do beforehand. And being an adult learner was one of the best experiences deep into that where every day it was expected to learn new things because I was in that type of environment. And what it taught me was that I could apply that in many different areas of my life.

Katrina Moss:

So I moved into this growth mindset more of the time without having the language for it yet. It wasn't until I joined Shopify and read the book Mindset, because it was one of the books that our leadership team recommended as just an awesome read, a really great concept. And so I did, and I thought, "Wow, that explains what happened to me. That explains that shift, where I was able to understand those messages I had growing up that reinforced more of a fixed mindset and being able to break out of that cycle through seeking out learning and challenge as an adult, and all of the amazing opportunities that's yielded since." So my exposure came at Shopify and it has been really my mission since I came across that to want to make that more accessible for people and to help them understand how they could really practice that themselves.

Michelle Ockers:

Let's stick with the personal for a moment. I'm really interested in when you talked about going into a learning environment, a formal learning environment as an adult. And that your experience was quite different to what your experience at school had been, or something was different, whether it was you, whether it was the environment. Now, not everyone who goes into an adult learning environment in courses outside of, like in the educational sector outside of organizations, will have the same experience. Was there something about the environment you were in or the institute you were studying at, or do you think it was more you were at a different stage of life? When you reflect on it what made that a period where the way you engage with learning and the way you saw yourself in regard to getting better and growth mindset even without the language - What was behind that shift? Do you have a sense of it?

Katrina Moss:

So going back to school as an adult I had such a different motivation, and having the responsibilities of a mortgage and bills and whatnot, it really made it so that I knew I wanted to put my best foot forward. So there was that reality and there was how dedicated I was to truly being a learner. I think that also has a couple of branched off thoughts. One of them was I was willing to put the effort in. So there would be instances where I wouldn't

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understand a concept that I would read. And in the past I would just dismiss that and say to myself, "I don't get it," and move on without grasping the idea. But this time I would just keep reading it or I would look something up similar until I actually understood it.

Katrina Moss:

And there was so much more effort, but it worked. I actually did find myself understanding the concepts. And then I would reinforce it because I think the other aspect was I didn't care who I was with in that learning environment. Meaning I didn't care if I looked like someone who asked all the questions or didn't understand a concept and needed clarity, that didn't matter to me. I was going back in an environment where I didn't know anyone, and I think it gave me the chance to just reinvent myself a little bit. And so that's what I did. I sat at the front of the class, made sure I understood and it really made the difference. And I took on all the opportunities, every extra assignment that was offered, every chance to fully immerse myself in the learning I took advantage of. So I think that was a really big part of it, which then snowballed into great grades, which then motivated me more and a wonderful upward spiral continued from there.

Michelle Ockers:

Lovely. So motivation, the anonymity made the environment felt safer for you. And then it just reinforced itself. I want to come back in a little while to the idea of how we and the listeners as learning professionals can cultivate learning culture in themselves. But I think some of that's going to fall out of our discussion around the work that you've done in organizations, because one of the things you've been doing is supporting people at Shopify to cultivate growth mindset. So we'll circle back to that discussion after we talk a little bit more about how you've applied at an organizational level. And you said when you joined Shopify you were given Carol Dweck's book Mindset to read. To what extent was growth mindset already being used at Shopify? And why was it being used? What had attracted the organization to it?

Katrina Moss:

The first time I came across it was in the early days when I joined. We used to have Toby, our CEO, and many of the other leadership team members do something called a fireside chat, where they would just come and have a conversation with whoever was new joining that week and share things that they thought allowed you to be successful at Shopify. And it was very anecdotal and casual but it was just a chance to feel connected to them. And because I had the privilege of leading onboarding when I first joined, I got to be a part of those conversations again and again. And you'd think, "Oh, that's boring." Not for me, I loved it. Because I'd get a little something out of each time I heard one of our leaders speak.

Katrina Moss:

And on a few occasions Toby mentioned growth mindset and how important it was at Shopify. And I thought I believed it. And I agreed, especially after I'd read the book and connected it with my lived experiences and how much it had changed my life. So I really wanted to help people at Shopify to not just understand it conceptually or theoretically, but actually to learn how to live it and how to practice it. So really it stemmed from a personal motivation or drive to take what was spoken about as important and turn it into something that was embedded into our fabric, and something that people could really have some practices to understand how to do that well.

Michelle Ockers:

So apart from the leaders having a joint belief that this was important, was it being used in any deliberate way at the organization when you joined?

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Katrina Moss:

I could see it a little loosely, but I could see it connected to some of our practices like hack days, for example, where we'd take time out of our more regular work in order to experiment with things deliberately. So we take a couple of days out a quarter, was the typical cadence. And you'd get the opportunity to try something that you were curious about, try something that served our merchants, maybe practice some skills that you'd not done before. So the whole concept of hack days was very immersive in learning, and very much an opportunity to practice growth mindset. And that's one example, but there were many of those instances where how we worked together was definitely a learning culture, but I found that it wasn't as deliberate as it could be. We weren't connecting the dots that well to tell people, "Hey, this is an opportunity to really practice this mindset, or this is an opportunity to really develop your skills." It was a little bit more I guess you pieced it together if you zoomed out and thought about it, but otherwise you might just be going through the motions.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So what were your first steps then? I mean, you've got this idea that we should be using it in a more deliberate way. What did you do then once you consciously decided to start using it?

Katrina Moss:

So one of the first things was to look at culture and how we talk about culture. One of the big indicators of how to be successful at Shopify is our cultural values. And so I worked really closely with the culture team at that time and talked with them about the way we were describing being a constant learner, being immersed in this mindset. And I identified a problem, which was that we didn't have a value that spoke to that specifically. And it felt like a miss. It felt like it was important enough in the way that we operated that it should be brought forward as an important value. And it wasn't certainly just me saying that, that made it happen, but it was certainly an influential factor. And the beautiful thing about how we come up with our values is we have to see it living first. We don't see aspirational things it's that we are able to see people being successful and thriving in our environment, and then extracting the behaviours that they have that demonstrates that.

Michelle Ockers:

I like that. That's quite organic, right? It's not forcing anything but observing what's already happening and extracting and making that, like bringing that to life, making that tangible in some way.

Katrina Moss:

That's exactly it. And so when you speak it there's power there. So we were able to identify that this is a behaviour that leads to being successful. So we were able to come up with the value of be constant learner. And what I was really excited about with that value being named was not just how powerful it was to say be a constant learner, but the under text of that or the description of that value had really wonderful things like be ever curious and more interested in what you don't know than what you do. And then it also spoke to the power of being a teacher when you did reach a level of mastery. So it created this beautiful cyclical nature of, if you do know give back to others and help others acquire those same abilities. And when you don't know, stay curious and don't worry about protecting your ego type concept. So that's where I started, was with the culture values. Knowing that once it was something that we spoke about really deliberately, then it becomes even more of a norm throughout the organization.

Michelle Ockers:

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Yeah. That wasn't a part of the business, your team wasn't responsible for creating the values, you had to engage with another area, you had to partner within the business. What was the response? Or who did you have to reach out to and what was their response when you floated this idea by them?

Katrina Moss:

So I worked with our director of culture at the time and the response was right away. She intuitively understood that it made sense. And so then it was a matter of never forcing it, but actually seeing if it was true. So then they'd go through their rigor of identifying if this is a new behaviour that actually does lead to success and the processes that the culture team goes through to understand that, which is really just loads of qualitative conversations to extract that. And then sure enough, it was. And then she engaged me again in more of the language where we started to talk and refine what we were actually describing when we say be a constant learner. So it was very much an influential role that I held in that.

Michelle Ockers:

I love the rigor around that and investigating that rather than just anointing it. It's really nice. So did you start consciously deliberately doing something in any of your programs or any of the work that you were facilitating at the same time as this analysis or understanding of the idea of being a constant learner as a value was unfolding? Was there a parallel path of work where you were starting to use it to test how you could bring growth mindset to life in more specific ways?

Katrina Moss:

Yeah, absolutely. It's a great way of describing that because I think of it in three categories. I think there's the cultural and work practices... Sorry, pardon me, the culture and communication. That speaks to that bucket that I just mentioned. And also when I say communication, I mean that it's just reinforced regularly that people are using that language and it's normalized. And then there's a section of systems and work practices that I think it also reinforces growth mindset. And so there were things that we did in that space that allowed it to be more of a forefront which was really recognizing that we had some practices that some teams were doing that other teams could practice as well. So for example, the design team did something called fresh eyes, where they would bring people into the fold of their project in the early stages of its creation to gather feedback and understand whether or not they were missing something or are they on the right track.

Katrina Moss:

And so our team adopted that practice for all of our projects as well, and influenced other teams that we worked with closely to do the same. And it was really recognizing that this is an awesome in the work practice of growth mindset, because you're saying, "I might be missing something. I want this to be great. It's not about me looking great, it's about the work being the best it possibly can." So that was another way of finding these instances where growth mindset was being exercised across teams and spreading that awareness and practice to other teams, including us always modelling it as best we could ourselves. And then the third bucket is our talent programs. So then of course we've got, instead of influence, we've got our actual responsibility of our own programs being the best that they can. And so we worked with a lot of different experimentation on growth mindset content that we reinforced within our existing programs. So our onboarding program, we built in a lot of really great material on, what is growth mindset? Why does it matter? How can you practice if you're slipping into fixed more of the time?

Katrina Moss:

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That type of material, which I think is really powerful because we really only had three days with new Shopify folk before they were then off on their teams, or maybe carrying on with more role specific learning. And we always kept growth mindset within those three days. And then in our leadership development program, we deeply embedded it from two lenses, one to remind leaders that they are in learning when they join our program. So to practice the mindset themselves and really recognize that can be difficult. The more you move up a leadership position, the more it seems like the world wants you to know what you're doing every moment of the day, instead of also being in learning. And so we wanted to remind folks of that. And we also wanted to remind them that they had a responsibility to create those environments with their teams. So to create the environment for growth mindset to thrive in their own teams as well.

Michelle Ockers:

So I want to come back to that discussion around how do you create the environment for growth mindset in your team, but before we move on to that, you spoke about trying different approaches with content skills. What did you learn about what does and doesn't work when it comes to trying to structure or scaffold for people in the context of programs or even just as a standalone thing working on growth mindset? What works and doesn't work in terms of how you talk about growth mindset or the content you present to people or the frameworks or tools you give them to practice?

Katrina Moss:

Yeah, it's a great question because you try a bunch of things and really you get some feedback right away because people will either really resonate with it and they'll talk about it and they'll get excited about it, or it'll fall flat or they'll have so many questions because they didn't really understand what you were trying to achieve. And so in the early days when we would bring in some growth mindset content, what I found was if it was too formal, if it was too... Even the imagery, if we'd source some video content externally and pop that into maybe a session that we were having, if it didn't match with the rest of the experience, if it didn't line up with the way that we spoke about things in the rest of the session, it would really jar people.

Katrina Moss:

It would either leave them confused or asking questions and not in a seeking to understand more in a this wasn't very good, I didn't really enjoy that type of questioning. So we had to keep pulling in different content and keep it looking for things. I remember finding an awesome video with John Legend. It was like, just because he was so relaxed and conversational and he was talking about growth mindset that worked really well for a while, because I think people felt connected to that conversational style. So you really do have to evolve it to match the type of culture that you have so it doesn't feel out of place.

Michelle Ockers:

That makes a lot of sense. That makes a lot of sense. And that I think more generally could apply for other types of content. But more specifically, when you're talking about mindset, we use a lot of external content now in learning and development, but getting that fit right can be important is what I'm hearing there.

Katrina Moss:

Absolutely. And we did some loose AB testing where we would have a couple of onboarding groups and so we'd run some content with them and different content with the other and then get some feedback to understand what was sticking and what wasn't. And I think that's exactly right, Michelle, where you don't want to reinvent the wheel if you don't have to. So

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you do end up curating some content externally and you have to just keep tweaking until it feels fairly frictionless with the rest of the content or the rest of the experience.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And do you have, have you created self-assessment tools or any kind of support resources that people can use to consciously work on improving their growth mindset or to move themselves into a growth mindset when that's a state they want to be in?

Katrina Moss:

I found, well, so speaking of external resources, there are some, a book called Change Your Questions, Change Your Life. And there is a piece of content that is from the connected website called the Inquiry Institute. And it's got great choice map, which is recognizing when you're in judge or learner, very similar to the concept of being in growth or fixed. And we found that really helpful to provide to people as a tool, because it really did speak to something you could identify with when you'd notice yourself being either judgmental of other people around you above yourself, which was slowly shutting you down and making you less receptive to learning. And then how you can switch is ultimately in the types of questions that you ask yourself, or how you talk to yourself about what's going on in your head. And I found that to be one of the most powerful tools is reframing or recognizing when that feeling is coming on that you're closing off, and then asking yourself some different questions in order to open back up again.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. We'll find the links to those resources you've just mentioned and pop them in the show notes for people to explore. Let's talk about this idea for leaders of how to create an environment. And I'm not sure how you describe that environment. Do you simply say an environment which encourages people to be a constant learner? How do you talk to them about what environment they're trying to create? And what are some of the guidance or advice that you give them to help create an environment that supports growth mindset?

Katrina Moss:

And I'd have to like respectfully identify that we're asking leaders to hold a lot. So holding growth mindset is one piece, but they also have to hold the reality of holding their team accountable and providing clear expectations, and holding themselves to high standards and continually growing themselves. So we actually ask them to meet several expectations of leaders at Shopify. And one of them is to create the environment for learning and growth on their team. And so like specific, it's almost like thinking of double clicking. So double clicking into that, what that looks like are things like being deliberate about your own learning. So we always want leaders to model what that looks like, and it could be as casual or informal as things like Friday fails. This often gets a lot of attention from people. I think just because the idea of talking about failure is still something that makes us a little uncomfortable.

Katrina Moss:

But what a really great leader will do is we'll talk openly about something they're trying to improve on and how that journey is going. And one thing that we did on our own team was we would talk about a fail every Friday. So one thing that I was regularly working on was my written communication. And so I would often talk about how's that going this week? So whether it was very long run on, just like completely lost the audience in this email to stakeholders scenario, and here's what happened, here's the kind of feedback I got, but certainly also try to make it also in spaces that are even a little scarier, had a feedback conversation and it didn't go well. And here's what I learned from that, to first and foremost model that you're never done, your journey of growth is never done.

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Katrina Moss:

So that's one way to create the environment. And the other is to make it safe for others to go on that same journey. So making space for that, even in one-on-one conversation. So as a team lead when you have your... It depends on your cadence and cultural norms. We typically aim for weekly one-on-one conversations. And making space in those one-on-ones to ask, how is XYZ that you're working on? Tell me what you've tried this week. And you're constantly reinforcing that the learning matters and that they don't always have to look like they have everything together. I think that's a really important element of that psychological safety that we hear a lot about.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And what then... You've got people in a leadership development program, which I can imagine is not a one-shot thing, that it's a program that runs over a period of time. So you're supporting people to embed back in the workplace. What do you see then in terms of the environment that supports your leaders to actually adopt these practices? It sounds like there's a lot of common language, almost rituals potentially. And I don't know to what extent they're formalized or people just pick up practices and rituals and they flow through the company, but what is it about the environment then that supports the leaders to be able to bring this to their teams?

Katrina Moss:

I think, one of the first things is that when we bring leaders together in their journey to meet those expectations that we have of them, we may get clear that we will provide you with the support to learn how to do these things well. So we don't just say here's an expectation we have of you, now go be great at it. It's now you're on a journey towards getting great. And what that looks like is going to be a mix of formal learning experiences, bringing those leaders together, to actually take in new practices or new concepts. But then when they go back into their work environment, we've created the type of scaffolding where their lead knows what they're learning and working on and can reinforce it with them. And then also that they are holding themselves accountable because they're talking to their own teams about what they're learning. And we give them, I like your term rituals, but we give them different practices they can use so they can apply.

Katrina Moss:

So a really good tangible example would be that we expect them to share clear expectations with their team. We give them a tool for them to meet with their team and come up with desired outcomes. So it's clear together, but then we also give them some structure on how to hold those types of conversations with their whole team. So how might I hold a meeting where I'm talking to everyone about setting clear expectations to give them more than just instruction, but actual support alongside people of course. So then we have our own team who is there to support them with questions, and then we have our business partner team and their own lead, and as well as a coaching team. There's quite a bit of folks that can then be there to support them when they feel a little lost or unsure on how to do something.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. Yeah. Being a constant learner is one of the values of the organization, so I imagine that this is expressed in how things get done in different parts of the talent cycle, life cycle as well. So it's not just about the learning team trying to encourage people. How else has the value been expressed in the way things get done in the organization?

Katrina Moss:

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I'd say that you see it. So I mentioned hack days, and this is something we still do. So a couple of days a quarter when you go off and experiment with something new, that language whenever our leaders are talking to the organization about these types of things, they'll reinforce this is an opportunity to practice your growth mindset or to step into the unknown and try something. So there's a lot of reinforcement of the language of that value and of growth mindset whenever we expect people to step into that learning zone really deeply. And then we remind them even the zooming out and looking at the climate we're in right now is so much unknown, so much that's changing. We're often reminded that we need to be constant learners in this environment because there's so much ambiguity no one is going to be an expert right now. So we all have to be experimental, gain really quick feedback loops and then make choices from there. And that way of working is really exercising this mindset.

Michelle Ockers:

I think it's really interesting, Katrina. We've recently been doing a special series of podcasts on Learning Uncut called Emergent, where we've been looking at ideas for how learning and development professionals right now in the current environment of ambiguity and uncertainty because of the pandemic and what that's meant for businesses, how can learning professionals ensure that the work they're doing is relevant through this period and into the future given the shifts that are underway? And you've just touched on, we've just published our last guest episode last week, two weeks ago actually by the time this is published.

Michelle Ockers:

You've just touched on a number of the key themes that had really come out of those discussions, particularly around experimentation and curiosity and how important they are, both for the learning and development team and for us to be supporting and making it really safe for people to do those things in their workplace. So I think this idea of working with growth mindset really ties some of that together really nicely. So thank you for helping us to bring that to life and help helping us as we search for the so what, how can we actually do some of these things? It's great timing.

Katrina Moss:

Excellent.

Michelle Ockers:

So talking of learning, what were some of the key challenges you've faced when you look back on five years now since you've been at Shopify? And I'll acknowledge that you've been on maternity leave for the last year of those. So four years actually actively working with this in an organizational setting, what are some of the key challenges you've had to face along the way? And how have you addressed those?

Katrina Moss:

So one challenge with Shopify in general that I experience is you've got, imagine a group of people that are all so keen to make an impact, which is a wonderful thing, but also means that everything moves so quickly that even getting a hold of a concept and trying to spread it virally, it feels like you're holding quicksand because everything's moving all the time. So I found that even getting that value named and getting that reinforced took quite a bit of time, because it was just so difficult to get all the right players involved and understanding and reinforcing it as important. So I guess that's to say one of the challenges is just the speed with which we work whenever you're trying to implement something that's somewhat stable is difficult. That was one challenge that I experienced.

Katrina Moss:

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And then there's also the challenge that when you have such scarcity like we had three days with our onboarding program, three days' worth of content to cover everything you can imagine that's important for people to know to be successful at Shopify, keeping growth mindset on the top list of what's important required almost relentless advocacy on my part. So it's not easy when you care about something and you know it's important. You can't just say at once, it has to be reinforced regularly. And I would say that even seeing it now, seeing our leadership team as I witnessed messaging and things, they have to reinforce it constantly too. So that's a challenge just because it can be a bit draining when you feel like you're becoming someone who's just repeating themselves, but it's important. So that can be a very real, I guess scenario when it comes to anything that you care deeply about, is that you have to keep talking about it again and again.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And I have seen instances where learning leaders have championed something. And often it is around something more progressive, something that challenges the status quo with learning in the organization. And it does take a lot of their energy and time, but sometimes if they move on from the organization too soon before it's really taken root, it just falls apart, as you might say, just falls into that quicksand, right? It hasn't taken hold. It sounds like it's probably taken hold. It sounds like when you go back after maternity leave, it's still going to be there. How long does it take? When do you know that something is stable? And then that if you were to let go and for whatever reason not be there to nurture it for a period of time that it has taken root? What signs do you look for?

Katrina Moss:

That's such a cool question because I never really thought about it that way in terms of knowing that it's still there definitively, and I'd say that it is. And one of the ways I know is because when I... I don't pay too deep attention right now, I'm trying to focus on being with my son and really immerse myself in that. And yet I still hear people talking about growth mindset when I do spend the limited attention on it. That looks like communications. I'll pay attention to big things like announcements that go out, shifts that are happening in the business or big changes. And I still see that language being reinforced and talking about the importance of that mindset. When we moved to a digital by default model and everyone was working from home, our leader, Toby, reinforced it in that conversation, the importance of growth mindset.

Katrina Moss:

So it's when I hear that, that it's still so paramount in how we need to operate that lets me know that it's alive and well and thriving. And then when I also hear in speaking with those that are on my team, talk about the shifts they had to make, ensuring all of our programming was excellent in digital by default world, that they're still keeping that content, that the growth mindset content is still a foundational piece of what we offer also lets me know that it's alive and well. So I guess it's those three pillars that I spoke about, the culture and communications, the work practices and systems and the talent programs. If you know that it's still in those three areas, then you know that it's still very much alive and functioning without your ever-present advocacy.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And I think finding ways to embed it outside of how things happen in the learning space is a really great strategy that you used and one that others who were advocating changes and building learning culture should be thinking about, that learning teams on their own can't carry this stuff if it's creating a whole of organizational environment for something to happen differently with learning.

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Katrina Moss:

Right.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. You touched on the next question a little bit around evaluating the impact of growth mindset or knowing if you've got a growth mindset and then, well, what difference is it making? It is mindset, so it might be tricky to evaluate, but have you tried to evaluate in any way or how have you approached this question of, A, do we need to evaluate it, and B, what tells us that it's in place and that it's having an impact in the organization?

Katrina Moss:

Yeah. I find this as the one that I never quite feel like I can give the most tangible response to. And it's just because it's so hard to measure something like a mindset. And so looking at the fact that it's still alive and reinforced and in our practices, that's a great way of knowing that it matters and that it works. And I would also say that you see it in second or third order consequences. So you don't necessarily see it right in the cause and effect of the behaviour, but you'll see things like when we shifted to a digital by default world and everyone had to adapt to very different working circumstances, like working from home with the child screaming in the background while they're trying to run a meeting.

Katrina Moss:

When all these new realities hit and people were able to do that, that they were actually able to be successful in learning how to do that, that to me is a big indicator that the mindset is alive and well, versus a scenario where either those people would struggle to adapt and wouldn't find themselves being able to make an impact any further, or they would find themselves so stressed and shut down that they couldn't function and do their work. It's certainly a reality that everyone's been under strain going through this experience because of how challenging it's been. But by and large when I see the Shopify population talking about how they are today, they're strong, they're doing well, the business is doing so well. And those are big indicators to me that we're able to actually practice this mindset when it really matters when there's so much learning that's to be done.

Michelle Ockers:

So the impact is apparent when you see how people behave and how the organization responds to different situations and under stress by the sound of it?

Katrina Moss:

Right. Right. Exactly.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So in terms of the individuals, for our listeners as learning professionals, as individual professionals, what are your key tips for them to cultivate mindset for themselves?

Katrina Moss:

I think there's four key ingredients. So when I talk about growth mindset at the individual level, what I really mean is that you want to identify what you need to be better at. That's the first thing. And once you identify what you want to be better at, you want to apply four key ingredients. That's effort. So as I was sharing my story of going back to school, you need to be willing to put the effort in. And taking on challenges. And that means things like stretch assignments or hosting meetings with people that you're not usually familiar talking with. It's stepping outside of your comfort zone really deliberately. The third ingredient is making

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mistakes. So you can't look good all the time if you're learning. Those two things don't go hand in hand, you actually need to be willing to stumble across, practice something, make every attempt to get better by making mistakes in the process.

Katrina Moss:

And then the fourth ingredient is feedback. And that can come from so many different sources, but ultimately imagine that you need to constantly be on the lookout on whether or not you are getting better. And that can be through people giving you that feedback, or that could be through things like systems. If you were trying to reduce the amount of typos that you'd actually see that the number was going down. So those four ingredients are a method that you can think of in order to practice that mindset. And then watch out for the things that will trip you up inevitably within each of those categories. So when it comes to effort, watch that you don't tell yourself what's the worth, why would I bother? Because that's a fixed mindset trigger right there. Watch yourself with challenges that you don't say things like, I don't want to not look good, I don't want to not succeed. That's a trigger that you might be slipping into fixed.

Katrina Moss:

With mistakes, it's definitely around how you appear. So you want to be willing to make them. This is the area where safety matters. So you want to be making those mistakes and in the right types of circumstances. So look for things like peers you can practice with or low stakes scenarios that allow you to really embrace those challenges and mistakes. And then with feedback, watch that you aren't looking for your feedback to be perfectly packaged. Sometimes people deliver feedback and they get it a little wrong. And that's okay. I know we focus so much on being awesome at delivering feedback, which matters, but when you're in a growth mindset you just want the information, you want to use it for your improvement. You don't need it to be perfectly delivered.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you. And then bringing it up to organizational level. What would your tips be for any of our listeners who are keen to introduce growth mindset or do things more deliberately with growth mindset in their organization?

Katrina Moss:

Okay, great. I think those three pillars I spoke over are worthwhile investigating in your own organizations. So look at your own current culture and communication norms. How do you talk to each other? If you were to just right now do a... I'm struggling to think of a term, but it's when you get like a cluster of words that pop up like a word storm-

Michelle Ockers:

Word cloud.

Katrina Moss:

Yeah, word cloud. If you were to get a word cloud of your current organization around learning, what kinds of words would come up? You want to be able to speak to that instead of something in that's so alien or so different from how you currently speak and behave that it won't stick. So look at your culture and communication norms, look at your systems and work practices, and identify opportunities where it can be reinforced that growth mindset is needed to do that space well. So as I mentioned with things like a fresh eyes approach to a project where you deliberately look for feedback, that's an awesome example of practicing growth mindset that people might not be readily aware they're even doing. So look for those

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work practices and those norms that you have in your organization that can reinforce this mindset and spread it, perhaps even further than the teams that are currently using it.

Katrina Moss:

And then looking at your talent programs, this is the one where you have the most opportunity to really lead. So looking at your learning and development programs. If growth mindset content isn't in any of your programs, why not challenge yourself to make that different? And you can start with small things like small reinforcements at the beginning or end of a session that talk about, "Okay, everyone let's remind ourselves what it looks like to be in growth mindset during the actual learning experience." And then at the end of the session, ask them when they notice themselves slipping into fix. So you can do simple things like that, that start building it into the fabric of how your programs operate. So I would suggest looking at those three buckets, understanding where you currently are, identify what great could look like in each of those buckets, and then shift yourself towards it incrementally.

Michelle Ockers:

Wonderful. Thank you for those tips. Katrina, it's so interesting to hear about the work you've done with growth mindset. And I know there's going to be plenty of interest in this episode. It's part of building learning culture. It's part of making that shift that so many learning teams are looking to make towards not having to physically be there and being controlled, but sharing responsibility, encouraging people to constantly learn and equipping and enabling them to do that. So thank you so much for sharing this body of work, really appreciate it.

Katrina Moss:

It's absolutely a pleasure. And I think for anyone who's chosen to listen that the fact that you've tuned in shows that you're exercising that mindset. And I just say to you, keep pushing. There'll be days when it'll feel more challenging than others, but it's so rewarding. I've never felt like I've done more important work than this.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you so much. And we'll share a link to your LinkedIn profile, if anyone would like to get in touch with you. And of course we post all the episodes on LinkedIn. So listeners look out for those and join the conversation with the hashtag, LearningUncut. And feel free to ask Katrina questions there so we can explore the topic together. Thank you so much.

Katrina Moss:

Cool. My pleasure. Stay well, stay curious.

Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. You too.

Katrina Moss:

Take care.

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ReThink Learning – A Message from Michelle Ockers

I created Rethink Learning to help learning teams and learning professionals with this challenge. The barriers to learning innovation are lower than ever. Now is the time to engage business stakeholders, embed good design practices, work in agile ways and use technology more effectively.

ReThink Learning will accelerate the shift in mindset, skills, practices and tools you need to quickly design and develop effective learning solutions for the virtual environment. You can apply it to your work immediately to redesign of an existing solution or design a new solution as you learn.

For more information on ReThink Learning check out <https://bit.ly/ReThinkLearning>.

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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