

Learning Uncut Episode 95
The secret sauce in Weber's learning blend? Experience
Jane Calleja
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

I hope you have as much fun listening to this episode as I did having this conversation with Jane Calleja from Weber. Early in the episode we talk about how Jane settled into her role and learned about the organisation when she started as the first ever L&D manager five years ago. If you are moving into a new organisation she has some great tips for how to go about building relationships and identifying priorities.

Our conversation then focuses on development of product knowledge and confidence of independent retailers that Weber partners with to sell their range of barbecues. You'll hear the word 'experience' used a lot to describe elements of the learning solution – customer experience, learning experience, product experience and one that we may be hearing for the first time on Learning Uncut – flavour experience. Find out how Jane and her partners RedSeed and DBusiness Events came up with a new approach to create these experiences when Covid limitations and travel restrictions made face-to-face workshops impossible. The program is completely optional – so participation from 75% of all retail stores is impressive amidst skyrocketing demand in the homemaker segment in 2020. The Weber ANZ New Product Hub was awarded Best Blended Learning Program by the Australian Institute of Training and Development in 2021.

You'll be pleased that I managed to get through the introduction without any bad barbecue and cooking puns. You'll have to excuse the ones that made their way into the episode – they weren't intentional, at least not to start with.

Can I ask you if you're a listener who gets a lot of value out of Learning episodes make some time, it doesn't take long, to give us a rating and leave a comment on your favourite podcast listening platform. It does help to get the podcast into the ears of more L&D professionals so we can keep learning and growing as a profession.

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome, Jane. Thanks for joining Learning Uncut.

Jane Calleja:

Thanks for having me, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

It's a pleasure. Weber, of course, is a household name to Australians. We love a barbecue. However, some of our overseas listeners may not be familiar with the organization. Can you please tell us a little bit about Weber?

Jane Calleja:

Yes, indeed. WELL, I think your overseas audience may in fact be familiar with

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Weber.

Michelle Ockers:

I have underestimated your reach.

Jane Calleja:

Indeed, it is a global product. It is accessible across the globe in like Africa or wow EMEA or the U.S, of course, because that's where it's come from across Asia and South America.

Michelle Ockers:

Here I was thinking it was a home-grown Aussie product, Jane because barbecues are so much a part of our lifestyle here.

Jane Calleja:

Isn't it? it's a huge part of our culture here in Australia, and so, yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

So tell us a little bit more. We've ascertained it's a global organization originated in America. What do they do? Who do they do it for?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, for sure. So Weber started—we're actually celebrating 70 years this year. So back in 1952, George Stephen who used to work for a company called Weber Brothers Metalworks, he was working on the line and used to make buoys - or buoys as they call them in the U.S - for the Chicago Yacht Club, and he want he just wanted a perfect steak, and he saw the design of this brilliant buoy, and decided that he might make it into a barbecue. So he cut it in half, used the bottom for the for the cook box, the top for a lid, and added some legs, and there's an urban myth story that his neighbour popped up and said, hey, mate, you need to put some holes in that thing to keep that alive because he was obviously using charcoal way back then. And so that's where these things like dampers came from. And he called them George's barbecue kettles, took them around the country. They were just a hit within years. He'd bought out the factory and was just producing these kettles and expanding his reach around the globe.

And so, they've been here in Australia for about 44 years now. A gentleman by the name of Ross McDonald started or brought them to Australia, and we mentioned before about Australia having a really good barbecue culture. Ross was integral in changing the way people barbecue in Australia with the lid down cooking if you like. So he was the guy that influenced across Australia that particular style of barbecuing.

Michelle Ockers:

Feels a little bit safer. The number of times I've seen somebody standing in front of a barbecue with bare arms, and sometimes even a bare torso when they're in swimmers cooking, and I think, "oh, there's a few hazards in there." So the lid is a bit

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safer, right?

Jane Calleja:

And a better flavour outcome at the end of the day; much better flavour outcome.

Michelle Ockers:

It's all about the flavour. So our conversation might touch on a range of parts of the organization, but we're going to be talking mostly about the retail area of the business, and the work you've done supporting learning in the retail area. Can you talk us through how the retail network operates in Australia at the very least?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, for sure. So this would apply for Australia and New Zealand and is a growing experience if you like across the rest of the globe. So we have distribution channels that involve say like an e-comm platform for instance but also working through some national dealers. But the one that we pay a lot of attention to is our independent retail networks, so independent dealers if you like that own the local store, and we have a dual model that sits within that. So we have what we call specialist dealers and then we have Weber store dealers. And they're the space where people, those owners if you like, are really passionate barbecuers that love Weber.

Weber stores would only have the Weber BBQ range as the only BBQ range in store, and then have complimentary products but specialist dealers might have a range of different barbecues in this store depending on the particular dealer. But that's certainly the place where we go. This is where a customer is going to get an incredible experience because these people will know the product, be really engaged with it, will have their own stories to tell because they will barbecue at home, and certainly support a customer picking the right product and having a great experience when they get home.

Michelle Ockers:

So this whole idea of the experience and the experience of the customer is baked into the values and culture of Weber, right? And I know when we were doing the prep, you talked to me a bit about a book that Ross McDonald had actually written. Do you want to talk a little bit more about this idea of the culture and values and the part that this book plays in anchoring that spreading that across the organization?

Jane Calleja:

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

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baked in.

Michelle Ockers:

That wasn't intentional.

Jane Calleja:

Little pun there, but it's certainly baked in—that is baked into our culture. And the way that we operate and the way we make decisions, the way that we interact with one another and anyone in that crosses our paths, it's all about that.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, and this, of course, is decades old. This book, it's before we really got quite enamoured in the corporate world with customer experience and it became a lot more common to try to deliver fantastic customer experiences. Weber has had that as a focus for many decades.

Jane Calleja:

Yes, and certainly even George Stephen in the U.S, that was important to him. And we see that in the way that the Weber global approaches consumers and customer service, that's certainly very evident there. I think here in Australia and New Zealand, we've kind of taken to a whole new level, and it's certainly, it's an integral part of what we do, and we see that in the way that people respond and interact or engage with the brand, both from a retail point of view and a consumer point of view.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So you've been at Weber, I think for around five years now. Is that right?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, it's coming on five and a half years now, and that time has indeed flown. It feels like it wasn't that long ago that I that I joined the team.

Michelle Ockers:

I think you were with the team when I first met you, so I've only ever known you as Weber Jane. That's where you fitted in apart from your role with the Australian Institute of Training and Development, of course, which is a different part of your story. So you were the first L&D person in the organization. It's not the first time you've been basically greenfield into an organization, the first L&D person. What was your brief when you joined the organisation, and how did you get started?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, for sure. It's a good question. So when I am/ when I was brought in to meet with the executive team, one of the things that was really important to them was that they recognized that they were growing as a business, and so one of the things that was important is that in order to stay competitive in a particular retail environment was that we had to get smarter about the way that our retailers were engaging with consumers.

We've got to just remember this was a very small family business, and when I joined, to land on the exact number of people that were there, I'd say there's probably 60 people across Australia and New Zealand. I think we've almost doubled in size in the

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time that I've been there. But certainly, a small business that was managing a large network and a lot of customers, and it was a great model but it was starting to outgrow itself a little bit in terms of wanting to make sure that retailers had the right language, we're sharing the right information, we're making sure customers were getting the right details of the right products to take home.

And so, it was about refining if you like or creating some consistency in the way that people were speaking to product, and also growing some skills around that sales process in a store.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, because, of course, the challenge here is you're trying to create positive word of mouth, fantastic customer experience, but you're having to do it through independent dealers.

Jane Calleja:

Yes, and that was supported through our business management team. But when I think, they were two people who are managing the whole new South Wales portfolio, for instance, or two people in Victoria, whatever that might look like. And so they were doing an incredible job trying to do one-on-one interactions by stores, but there was obviously a need to scale that up. And so, how do we create that consistency, make sure people are on the same page, speaking the same language, because all of that just really reinforces or enhances that customer experience.

I will say a focus of that was that I then sort of brought to the table, and really found a way to speak to was about a consultative selling approach rather than just this sales process, if you like, with it that was kind of like everyone had learnt their own way in shape and form.

Michelle Ockers:

Right. So you've got your brief, you've got your leather-bound book. How did you go about really understanding or figuring out how do I meet this brief? What were your first steps?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah. I think having done this in a couple of other businesses and learnt many lessons along the way, one of the things that I first said even at the interview stage because I was asked that question what do you think you would need to do to move forward, and I was really clear with the guys. And I said the first thing I want to do is understand the business because I've been in this situation where I've been brought into a business, and then I'm suddenly firefighting. And I was like that it kind of puts you on the back foot. You're not really resolving the bigger picture. So I wanted to step right back, and I said to them the first thing I want to do is understand the business.

I want to get around to meet with dealers, meet with the business team, meet with the team here well because we head office here in Adelaide, just really understand where are we at. And so I did that in my first couple of months in the business apart from doing some really fun like education around culture and product and all that kind of stuff. So that meant lots of cooking by the way, Michelle, which is not hard to

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take.

Michelle Ockers:

Which probably means lots of tasting as well.

Jane Calleja:

Indeed, it means a lot of tasting. We all eat well in this business, I tell you. Yeah, so I think spent the first couple of months, I travelled across Australia and across New Zealand, and met with many dealers. Spent time with them understanding their business, what was important to them, how did they upskill their teams, how did they interact with their business managers, and spend a couple of days with each business manager on the road, and understanding what were they doing, what was their focus, what were the things that were important to them. How did they interact with head office? How did they interact with the dealers?

So just drawing this big picture, if you like, of the business and then taking the time to analyse that data and bringing that back and going, okay, well, I can see there is these opportunities. These are the things that would be low-hanging fruit for us to do differently, and get some wins or these were the things that we can work on over time. This is the structure, and I was really blessed. I presented that to the executive team, and they're an incredible group of people who were—like I think one of the things my MD said, "I'm very pragmatic about what I know and don't know," and I love that line, like just to sit there and go, please, help us where you say you can help us. We acknowledge that we might have not done everything as best we could, and there was no blame. There's no ego. It was just like let's just get this fixed. Let's just find a way to work we'll make this a little bit better for everyone.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's a great example. So for anyone who's listening, and I know I often get people who are new to role or in the first person into an organization in an L&D role. I think what you've given there's a great example of how to start off on the right foot by getting to understand the business and build relationships and setting the tone and expectation of what you are there to do, because you said you could have gone into firefighting and reactive mode, and then, all of a sudden, everybody gets used to interacting with you as, oh, you're the person we go and place the order for the course with or you're Training Jane instead of Business Partner Jane who's here to help us with business challenges and business opportunities. I think that's a great example for anyone who's listening and is new to role or going into an organization perhaps for the first time into a new L&D role. Take a leaf out of Jane's book. I think there's lots of good stuff in that approach, Jane.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, I think when you first join the organization is the time to do it. I'm facing a struggle right a challenge right now where I've taken not on just the Australian team now. I'm now looking after APAC. It's an emerging market, so I am doing this trying to do this analysis concurrently while fighting fires. And so that is far more challenging. So if you're in that position as you say when you're first starting the business, lay down that groundwork at that very early stage. This is how I'd like to move forward and I think it definitely serves its purpose in creating a really clear

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pathway on the things that you can move forward with.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. We had another story from Debbie Key when she started at Forty Winks. I'll put that episode in the show notes because she did something similar, so I think if people knew to role want to listen to both of your episodes, they'll get a really clear plan of attack for building relationships in the business and getting to understand the business, lots of common-sense advice there. So you've come back from getting to understand the business, obviously pre-covid days when it was really easy to move around and meet people, and you presented back to your senior leadership team. What did you see is the biggest opportunity for you to add value at this point in time?

Jane Calleja:

I think that they had done well in identifying if you like that need for consistency and that need for processes almost that would enable that consistency. And so what I could bring back from that was some evidence to talk to, like this range of views in a range of ways that people are working and the way that they're interacting even within our team. And so it was very clear the path we could go forward, bring the structure, bring the focus on people development and skill development. Not only internally but externally so our retail network, that product knowledge even that sales ability and more structure around the way that the business team was interacting with retailers.

To some extent, there was some customized or tailored approach—the words around that, but certainly that was the case. The other thing that was really clear to me and I could see that there was a need or a way for us to move forward was like realizing that we were growing, realizing that things were—we were starting to move quite fast. How do we do that in a way that enables us to scale up or to make sure that whatever we're doing going forward is easily managed with a really broad diverse group of people and situations? So that was really clear to me.

I come from a background of working ... People often think about like, "oh, I've got to get an LMS" and I could see that had a place, but I was very conscious of not—I'd worked with so many LMS programs before and I just was a bit scarred from them, so I just wanted to—I knew there had to be something that was going to fit the need of the business and also our audience that was super important and so that took a little moment of project weight to kind of come to a conclusion that worked for the business. But certainly, that was one of the things that was important.

And I'll share with you briefly a really quick story. I remember I was sitting in a store in Melbourne, and I was meeting with the owner of the store, and I remember they had a person start in their team that day, and I was just sitting waiting. And I could see that owner was trying to have a conversation with me and this new person started and they palmed them off to their offside. And I was watching this process of this person trying to induct, and I put that in air quotes into the business. I was like, wow. They have no construct because they're just a little retail store, right. They have no construct, no program. Like, imagine the struggle of that new person trying to get their head. They had a huge showroom of products, not just Weber, like all this

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outdoor furniture. What's the pathway for that person to learn?

I went "what an opportunity if we could just nail an induction program that takes the pressure off the retailer to get that person up and running getting them loving the brand early, how amazing would that be." And so that was one of my goals sort of walking away from that experience going that's just going to be—that's got to be a thing for us. We got to help these guys, and it helps us at the same time. Helps consumers.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So not only have you got new people starting in the business who need to come to grips with your product range and understand the kind of customer experience you're trying to create and get on board with that, you've also got new product development on an ongoing basis and products being launched. And you could see that there was a need for you talked about introducing consultative selling, a more consistent approach to selling as well as people understanding the product range and knowing how to provide a great customer experience.

And so, in terms of creating some sort of solution or raft of solutions, what were your design considerations then? What was important for you as you started looking at designing a solution?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, it's a great question, Michelle, and I think that this is one of those things that every year, there's new products. And so I talk about that element of needing to scale up, the how do we get that information out there. So one of the things that I landed on was this idea of what we called a hub program, if you like. And so this was about developing a workshop that would be delivered in each state by our business managers with my support initially to deliver a full day program for new product experience. So that would take the retail teams, and so all their teams were invited because we'd run maybe three, four days in a in a region, and they would do—we would introduce them to the product—talk about what kind of customers might engage with this product what's the F&Bs?

Michelle Ockers:

What, sorry?

Jane Calleja:

The features and benefits. So the features and benefits and talking to them about importantly, not just rattling off a list of features to a consumer but engaging that in terms of that consultative piece around matching needs. And then importantly, what was super important and what I'd learned to understand in this business was creating what we call a flavour experience. And so this has become a really big part of—and had always been there with the business managers doing that in small groups, and what have you. But being able to create a flavour experience that helped people understand how the product worked because from that is where you create stories for to share with consumers. It helps people understand it. They can explain it, they can talk about what they cooked, and how versatile the product was

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and how it tasted and all these amazing stories.

And so the hub program was something we did pre-launch for new product every year, but that was in a face-to-face block over days. That was a face-to-face program and would just get people excited. They'd leave that day, and they'd be like so excited for this product. I can't wait for it to be in store, and I can't wait to start talking to consumers about that.

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Michelle Ockers:

So did you call it training or did you call—you used the word, product experience. Did you call it more—did you use that language? How did you pitch it?

Jane Calleja:

So we used it as a new product hub program. So the idea of these retailers who wouldn't often interact with each other, we would like, hey guys, everyone in Sydney or Melbourne, come to this program. And so I guess an unintended consequence of that was that people started networking, and we've started to build this idea. You're not guys that are competing with each other. You're actually working together. So creating those links and those connections being between these different stores has been a really powerful exercise as well.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So how did you then/ I mean what else did you put around that to support it because obviously this is an event and a powerful one we're creating great experiences, people are cooking, they're tasting, they're understanding what the product can do. It sounded like you're weaving in the selling process rather than doing separate selling programs. It's all kind of woven through the whole product hub program. Was there collateral? Were there resources as well? What did that look like?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, so in the first couple of years, that was what we offered particularly for both Weber stores and specialist dealers. So we'd run that we ran that as like it didn't matter which store you were, that's what you came along. And so the collateral if I think about that would be like a handout on what would be the settings on this gas BBQ, or how much fuel do you like? These little resource tools if you like that they could take back and use or we as part of the program we started to introduce this idea of four pillars. So like what are the four key things that consumers need to want or want to know about in terms of this product. So these frameworks that we'd started to build in.

And so that was working well. What we were—and what I'd seen in my first couple months was this need to support that with this learning solution this learning platform of some description. And so I could see that in the first couple of years, I didn't have the capacity to do that. And so I could see that we needed to do the next level of learning if you like to continue that. And so this was being supported by business managers being in the store regularly visiting with their stores and following up and all that kind of thing, but it wasn't the ideal solution yet in terms of how do we manage that ongoing, and how do we build around that. And so about three years ago, we introduced a platform called Red Seed which ticked all my boxes around simplicity and a great interactional experience, if you like, for our retail partners. And so we've introduced that, and that's been the way which we've supported that induction program that I've talked about. We've created pathways of learning around brand, around product, and around sales ability as well.

So we've got a quite a comprehensive suite of learning now that we've managed, and so I had to wait till I could bring someone else into the team to support that process. I had no space, a bit like a new start-up business you just gotta build it

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when you can.

Michelle Ockers:

Bootstrapping. I really like though that you started with experiential and social learning that you started there and it wasn't about, well, if we just throw out resources and content, that you really want to give people an experience. And you've used the word experience like customer experience, around product experience, flavour experience. So it's all kind of very tactile and this idea of experience and that's woven through your strategy starting with experience. And then later on, when you had the capacity and the resource looking at well how do we underpin this with more resources, with content, if you like.

So in terms of preparing business managers because they're really your facilitators, how did you go about preparing the business managers? The consistency was going to be important. You need some consistency with the whole product experience that you're rolling out, right?

Jane Calleja:

Indeed. So from the very early days, I started taking that team. So we'd bring them together for regular conferences, for instance. So I started taking them on a journey about refining and learning some presentation skills. Like just some foundational facilitation or working through how do you-some basics around instructional design. And so, I've always developed the workshops if you like because I want that consistency, but then what we would do is we'd bring them in, and we'd run a train the trainer, if you like.

And so we would take them through the experience as participants and then work with them to upskill or to prepare themselves to run the program. Now, that comes with all sorts of challenges because not everyone's born to stand up and present to a group of people. So that creates some challenges along the way. What I did do though was because my first experience in learning a development was with Westpac, and I had an incredible learning that I just thought it was way back in the 90s, and that program taught me the process if you like.

I went through the hard school learning - of learning to write, learning to present. Like if a five-day program, I presented a 40-minute session. It was my first session. I got feedback on it. I was watched like a hawk until I ran it beautifully, and then I was released to more and more of that program so that mindset of like coaching, mentoring, learning, etc. So I've had that experience. I didn't have the luxury of doing that with this group though.

So what I did do was every—we'd stagger the start of this program around the country, and I would go in at least for the first day and work with the team who were presenting. And so if they wanted me to run a segment or co-run a segment, so that'd be negotiated with them depending on how they're feeling. Then I would do that, but I'd also give them feedback on the first day, like, hey guys, in this segment here, just need to make sure we're touching these points, make sure we're tweaking this, think about this way, so giving them lots of feedback and guidance. So they've

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just improved over the years and got a little bit more comfortable in that space.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. And the storytelling, you talked about one of the things that comes out of the experience for the participants is they have their own stories about what they've cooked, how they cooked, what it tasted like. They probably go back and cook it at home, and they've got more stories to share and so on. In terms of what goes on Red Seed, have you found a way to leverage stories and incorporate stories in the content and resources that are shared on the platform?

Jane Calleja:

So the way that we do that in the content is we use a lot of video content if you like, but also we've been building out the last couple of years, and certainly covid has driven this to some extent is being able to get people to reflect on what they cooked. So we've built that as part of our induction program for our internal team, and then it's like, well, you've just cooked on this product. Now, reflect on what did you learn? Well, how does it taste? What was the flavour experience, and we've done that with the business managers about reflecting on stories and then through the hub program as well. There's an element of like what is the story you're going to tell from this. So we just know that it builds credibility. It's like that third party evidence when you're in front of a consumer, and you're being—you're faced with objections or whatever that might be, but it's also a way of taking out the angst of that sales process and making that more consultative and going, well, you know what my experience was this.

And I saw that first-hand when I first was doing that those rounds around the business. Honestly, I'd been in the business maybe two months, and I was standing in a store in Brisbane actually up in Sunshine Coast I think it was, and I was just meeting with the team and these customers had walked in and they were looking and then they started engaging with this frying pan, and I started sharing my story about my fry pan with this customer about my full minute breakfast cooking. I was just amazed at how easy and great it was and the taste, and that woman walked out with a frying pan because she was just like, oh, I've got to have that now.

So, I could see first-hand the power of that and it's genuine. So what I say to all the retailers is the need to have these experiences yourself because you can borrow someone's story but that doesn't have the same power as if you've lived it. And so certainly, our Weber stores have cooking facilities in store so they can do that in store. But wherever we can, we're encouraging people cook, just cook. Get on us. Play with it.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, there's nothing like using your own product in terms of authenticity in the sales process as well, being able to answer customers questions. I've done some work previously in the airline sector, and I saw the pain it caused when the customer apps were being introduced in the airline sector, but the staff where they didn't have to use the customer apps to book their travel and so on, they were experiencing a different customer service experience, and then they didn't have the wherewithal to answer questions properly about how to use the app and so on, because they weren't using it. So being a consumer and user of your own product is brilliant and you've baked that. There I go again. You've incorporated that beautifully. Okay, I'll get fired up,

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Jane.

Jane Calleja:

I was just gonna say this. I was gonna use the same pun. You're firing up then, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

We'll have to think of some more barbecue puns before the end of the episode, I think. So let's talk about the pandemic. For some sectors, the pandemic was really bad news and made business really hard. For others, it led to more opportunity and more demand. What was the impact of the pandemic on Weber?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, it's really interesting because people were suddenly stuck at home. They weren't spending money on overseas trips, so they were like maybe looking in their backyards—obviously, I'm not in everyone's backyard knowing exactly their experience, but people were like going why not get something that I can cook at home with? Maybe I'm improving my backyard and maybe I'm updating my barbecue. Whatever that might be, there was certainly an uptake in the interest in people having a barbecue. And so there was—season for us is normally let's say August through Feb, and things might slow down a little bit in March.

Now, pandemic comes and nothing slows down. It's just crazy the whole way through. So we're feeling it. Our retail partners are feeling it because their stores are just like going nutso, plus they're getting lockdowns and they're trying to manage that in a way that their store might be locked down but they're still trying to service customer needs or anyways a variety of things there. And then as the year progressed, of course, we then there were logistical issues around shipping that the world was starting to feel.

So you've got all these elements. Our team was sent home. Internally, we're trying to manage from a learning team perspective. We're trying to help keep people engaged, running little workshops with people on a myriad number of subjects, introducing people to teams because we hadn't been using teams prior to that. So there was this huge draw on just getting people setting up, starting to do things like virtual calls with retailers for—so we'd have an owner's summit, for instance, for our Weber store owners, and we were doing that online with the sales conference normally take a week. We were doing those two-hour sessions a couple of times a week over two months. It was just mental anyways. It was crazy. And during that time, of course, we were getting ready for the hub program which we'd normally run like July-ish and it was like this will get better, this will get better, and we're still like planning face-to-face.

Michelle Ockers:

Like every face-to-face event organizer in 2020, ever optimistic.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, we're like it's going to get better surely. Then we're like—at one point, I said to the business, we have to make a decision right now. We have to say whether we're going virtual or we're not because there is too much work to be done for us to wait

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any longer. And so, I got an agreement that we would move to a fully virtual environment, and then the work began.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. So how do you replicate this experience in a fully virtual environment?

Jane Calleja:

Well, let me share with you, Michelle. That is a struggle when you're trying to think of that the importance of things like flavour experiences and engaging people. We had an additional element here where we had a product that was brand new. Like when I think about things like a kettle, for instance, that has some changes from time to time but not significant changes, or a gas barbecue might have some iterations of change but this was a whole new thing. This was what we call a smoke fire which is a pellet BBQ; different way of cooking, different way of engaging with the barbecue, had technology on there that we hadn't used. Anyway, so a whole bunch of things.

Michelle Ockers:

A brand-new product concept almost, new product line, not just an enhancement of existing product.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, so now, we weren't able to get in front of people and go, hey, this is the way it works. This is what you need to consider. These are the messages you need to give consumers to make sure they have a great experience. So that was interesting. And then with all those other challenges, we were struggling to get stock in time to get our retailers engaged well before the supposed season started even though it felt like it never finished. So definitely, there was a lot of pressure on to try and make that happen.

And so to answer your question, how do we replicate that? Well, we would always put new product training after we've done hub as a module of learning onto Red Seed. So we'd add that to our induction pathway. But we're like, okay, so we can do that, but we'll do that post. That's not going to be enough to engage people. That's not going to be enough to get the message across and take people on the journey with us. So we went, okay, well, let's use—so we engaged with the business who we worked with before in event management. They introduced to us this portal. So it's EventsAIR. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, but EventsAIR has this portal that allows for—they'll be quite agile if you like in terms of providing that as an opportunity for virtual conferencing all that kind of stuff. So we went, look, let's take a look at this. Let's have a look at that, and we just went yep, this is it. This is the thing.

So this is going to allow us to deliver some really cool video content. This will allow us to provide resources for people we could add gamification to increase engagement, and by the way we can run what we landed on was some live cooking webinars. So we went, all right, we've got to get people in the space. So we did four webinars. We looked at because by the way, you can't do all that cooking in—you can't spend a day with them online.

So then here's an hour of grilling session an hour of a roasting session and two hours across a day; so beginning of the day and end of the day on low and slow

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cooking. So we wanted to show the versatility of this barbecue. So we did that we lined these up and we ran them. A couple of sessions, we'd offer for each of those so that could fit with people's availability. Then we ran another series for our New Zealand team and stores that couldn't get stock in Australia at the same time as the initial group.

Anyways, we did all that, but to support it, we took it one step further and we want to make sure that these stores actually cook with us. So how do we do that? What's the way to engage them? So we thought about do we send them food packages? Do we get our business managers to just drop them off? How do you do that when you've got stores in a regional environment? There's just got to be a bit—

Michelle Ockers:

The logistics is really challenging of that.

Jane Calleja:

Yes, really challenging. So I thought I would apply that idea of reciprocity in terms of what can we give them that helps them feel compelled to do the cooking? So we sent a pack, and, Michelle, there's a lady whose name has escaped me right now, Tanya but you will know — I think it's Tanya. And she presented at ATD a couple of years ago and I was there, part of the Aussie cohort that was going over there. And she talked about this example of giving people something, like surprised them with something tangible.

And so I did that. We created a cook pack that was in a Weber folder. There was the list of recipes that we were going to cook across these four workshops. There was a shopping list. There was an equipment list, and when we talk about equipment, talking you need tongs, and you need these accessory, you need that because we're showcasing accessories as well. And then we sent them a Coles voucher, like go and use this to buy all the produce you need for this program.

And so there was this sense of like, oh, we've bought it. But we added the flexibility if you could join us live, we were using like Zoom, and going into break, how we do some presentation. Then go into a breakout and the business managers would manage the stores in their portfolio, get the phone out and have a look at what they're cooking, and they would show, they would talk and give them tips and advice. And so that worked really nicely for those that could participate live. And then, we'd recorded those. So if people couldn't participate live, they could go and they had all the equipment that they needed to go and have that experience.

And so, we'd given them the content, the learning, the products, the food, the product benefits and features. We explored all the things we would normally try and do in a hub program, and then we did like a little module on exploring options, so this sales element came in again. So we just tried to find different ways of engaging them, taking them on the same journey but in a completely different format to what we've used previously. And then just by the way, one of the things that my MD had said to me, he goes, "I want to make sure they have this flavour experience." I'm like, "yeah, no, I get it, I get it." We've got to try and do that, and so we did. But we added an element of having people then reflect back to us and go here's a video of my cook or here's a photo of my cook and reflect on what they'd learned. Yeah, so that was

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kind of the way that we approached that to try and create that experience and that worked with varying success so some stores just really engaged others were just inundated with customers walking through the door, and so had to do it as much as they could where they could, and yes, but we learned lots of lessons from that one.

Michelle Ockers:

So what were some of the key lessons you learned?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah. I learnt I think running live webinars is challenging in retail stores. So I learned that I really needed to consider offering a session outside of business hours. That's, of course, challenging when you're working with a New Zealand audience through to a WA audience.

Michelle Ockers:

So for people who may not have a sense of the geography, so I'm just thinking I'm in Brisbane New Zealand, that's five hours' time difference, New Zealand and Western Australia, right?

Jane Calleja:

Yes. So we tried to schedule times to meet both those audiences and we did that, but I think running something outside of retail operating hours may have had a part in creating opportunity for more people to participate, but also hard for us because we don't own those stores. We can't make them do it. Does that make sense? They have to engage.

Michelle Ockers:

Hence this whole idea of the reciprocity of giving them something tangible to encourage and to connect. And we'll figure out who it was that you picked up that idea from, and will include something in the show notes as well. So giving them the ingredients and so on, making it more attractive, more compelling for them to want to participate.

I think there was something about 2020 and virtual events and this sense of connection at that particular point in time that even now is potentially dropping off a little bit that in terms of inviting people to do things outside of normal hours now that we're sort of not locked down to the same extent and normal family life and demands of being outside the home have shifted, but I think there was something very special about that period of time for connecting over things like this and people being open to doing things outside of normal business hours.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, I agree. I think it's been really interesting because I think some of the other things that we learned for last year, for instance, for 2021, we added more flexibility. We didn't do live sessions more. We sent all the materials that they needed. We provided them that pathway, but we increased the engagement in the portal so people were sending we're posting photos of what they were cooking, and we sent challenges each week or each two weeks like get on there and you can win a prize

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partway through the program.

So there were those kinds of things that we did. It was just amazing how many people wanted to share that, but I think as we move forward—so this year, for instance, we are—and it might be, I don't know perhaps a bit too optimistic. We're planning on live programs this year, but we will have this portal element to the program regardless because we recognize that—and we've done some surveying to really understand our audience, but that some people prefer the face to face, and some people love the online because it means I don't have to travel, and you would know like if you're in Sydney, that can be a two-hour, three-hour travel time to get to an event. And so if I've got the flex to do that when it pleases me or suits me.

We've kind of landed in this place that this blended solution kind of addresses everyone's needs, and how do we keep engaging people before we launch a program? And then afterwards, how do we keep them on that learning journey and continuing to grow? So I think it's been really interesting.

Michelle Ockers:

So I think we're in an era where we have more versatility now and it's not a matter of either/or, it's and situation and how do we make the most out of both face-to-face and online, and both have their places in terms of the kind of connection and engagement we can create.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, I think the last two years to your point, like I noticed like for our engagement from 2020 to 2021, we increased like, I don't know, over a hundred percent in terms of registrations in the program. It was really interesting and it went from 96 stores to 122 stores, for instance, participating last year because I think people are now in that mindset that it's acceptable. Like that's been a really interesting learning journey and people were now in their space. They're like okay, I get this. I can play in that field, but I do yearn for that face-to-face connection. So our plan is to play in both camps this year just to be ready as well, I guess.

Michelle Ockers:

So I know you're still sort of this is the hybrid world that we're now all playing with and living within trying to figure out, and it may be a little bit early because you're not quite there yet, but in terms of advice you may have for others who are looking at how to retain the best of what we've been through with adapting to virtual engagement and support to people with a return to the option of face-to-face at least in creating hybrid events, what advice do you have potentially for others around playing in both spaces?

Jane Calleja:

Yeah. So I think thinking outside the square. So I wouldn't have sat here three years ago and go let's just do a live cooking workshop because that just wouldn't have even been a consideration. And so I think thinking outside the box and coming back to what are the things that are most important for you to deliver, what is the outcomes that you need from this program and then designing backwards obviously from that. I don't know they're stating the obvious, but I really do think that that's just drawing attention to that and going what is the things that we need to come out of

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this with and working backwards.

I was like how do we engage people? Can we offer them barbecue prizes, whatever that looks like, and then going I'm just going to ask the business like let's just put it out there? And there was like go, do whatever you need to make this happen. And so it's just that sense of like if you're not sure what's okay, just go and explore and find out. Like you know what I mean like just look at all the options, that would be my advice, and be flexible be prepared to step up.

We had to learn video production skills, for instance, really quickly. I feel like we've become quite good at that like scripting and producing those that footage and so forth. And I think the other thing I would consider is what's the power you've got in engaging other people in the business that will be meaningful to your audience? So we've engaged a group of people across the business that I think our audience would have—they loved to see. Like people that were important to them that made the time to come and contribute to our program. So that was really quite powerful too.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, thank you for that. You received an award in the Australian Institute of Training and Development's Excellence Awards last year. I failed to mention that up front. So, congratulations. Tell us a little bit more about the award.

Jane Calleja:

Thank you. Yeah, so that was in our recognition that program that we put together in 2020, that combination of providing those cooking programs the live cooking or the resources or the video content and then the connection with our Red Seed learning platform driving people back to that because all the time, we're trying to grow engagement in that. And so that—yeah, it was just a real honour to be—

Michelle Ockers:

Is that in the blended learning category? It's the most hotly contested of all of the categories of awards for the AITD. So congratulations.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

Smoking hot Jane.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, smoking hot.

Michelle Ockers:

And I look forward to seeing what else you're going to be cooking up in the near

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future.

Jane Calleja:

Yeah, thanks, Michelle.

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Michelle Ockers:

So if anyone would like to follow up with Jane about anything she's talked about, keep an eye out on LinkedIn. We share the episodes on LinkedIn, and encourage people to ask questions and engage. And you'll also find a link to Jane's LinkedIn profile in the show notes on the website if you want to get in touch with her. Thank you so much, Jane, for sharing your work and insights with us today.

Jane Calleja:

My pleasure. It's been a delight. Thank you.

Michelle Ockers:

It has been fun. Thank you.



About Learning Uncut

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that work with learning teams and/or business leaders to accelerate learning transformation. We specialise in supporting organisations to create or update their learning strategy, enhance their learning team's capabilities, align learning to business value, and implement modern learning approaches.

We are highly collaborative and pragmatic. We partner with organisations to align learning to their business needs, unleash continuous learning, and build capability to help them thrive.

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

About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the founder of Learning Uncut. She is an experience, pragmatic organisational learning strategist, L&D capability builder and modern workplace learning practitioner. She also delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D *Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – *for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*



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