

**Learning Uncut Episode 75: L&D Cares – Restoring Humanity to Career Development – Brandon Carson, Jennifer Rogers, Elizabeth Lembke  
Hosted by Michelle Ockers**



**Michelle Ockers:**

This story is about an all-volunteer support network for L&D professionals called L&D Cares. Coming up to their first anniversary at the time this conversation was recorded in March 2021, L&D Cares was created to offer a voice of support, unity and caring to those who have experienced job disruption or loss due to the pandemic. However, the community is open to any L&D professional interested in reframing or reinventing their careers – or who would like to support others to do this.

I'm joined by L&D Cares Founding Director Brandon Carson, along with co-directors Jennifer Rogers and Elizabeth Lembke. We take a look behind the scenes at the three L&D Cares activity streams which are a coaching cohort, career growth summit and virtual programming. For an all-volunteer group they are providing an incredibly rich array of high-quality career transition activities and resources for anyone to access. You could apply the approaches and tips provided to create a support network or community for many other domains.

While L&D Cares is about enabling change one person at a time, they also have a much larger ambition. They want to change the industry dynamic around career development and talent acquisition. They are growing an inclusive network of people from a wide range of roles across the industry including recruiters, candidates, HR technology providers and talent researchers to work on this big goal. We talk about what's broken with recruitment and career growth (which Elizabeth describes as a soul-sucking process) and how technology could actually be leveraged to restore humanity to career development.

I recorded this episode at 5am my time. It was a joyful start to my day, and I'd like to thank Brandon, Jennifer and Elizabeth for the warmth, compassion and dedication with which they are supporting their L&D colleagues. This is truly a delightful, optimistic and important conversation about much needed industry change.

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**Michelle Ockers:**

So, welcome to today's three very special guests. Brandon, welcome.

**Brandon Carson:**

Oh, thanks Michelle, it's great to be here.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And Jennifer.

**Jennifer Rogers:**

Hey, thank you. Am glad to be here.

**Michelle Ockers:**

It's lovely to have you and Liz, welcome.

**Elizabeth Lembke:**

Thanks, Michelle. I'm excited to have this conversation.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And that's always nice when you have a global conversation. Liz, I believe you're in Germany.

**Elizabeth Lembke:**

I am, I am, So I appreciate the timing.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Wonderful. And Jennifer and Brandon, of course you're coming to us from the United States. And so we're talking today about L&D Cares. Brandon, would you like to introduce L&D Cares to us?

**Brandon Carson:**

I sure will. Thank you, Michelle. So in a matter of just a few months last year and this is almost a one-year anniversary of, my company leaving their office and realizing that this was a much larger thing that had hit us. Right? So in just a matter of a few months, lives around the world were changed forever and definitely immediately though. And the virus spread to all corners of the globe really fast. I remember, just last February on Valentine's Day, which is our day at Delta to share our success from the previous year, it's our profit-sharing day. We were basking in the glow of 2019 being the best year ever in the travel industry and definitely the best year for us as a company. Just 30 days later, everything halted. And so this really affected not only the health and well-being of millions of people as we know. But it also affected billions of people in the industries they work in. And in my industry in particular was pretty, pretty hard hit.

With economies being disrupted and industries suffering. I was having a conversation in early April, with Elliot Masie and we were talking about, is there anything we can do? We were just kind of brainstorming about Learning and Development because as Liz once said, "training is usually the first ..." she made awareness of it, but it's true "training is usually some of the first functions inside of corporations that take a hit, if you will, when things get hard." Right? And so we were trying... We were anticipating, potentially large job displacements because of the pandemic and its effects. And so in response to this, we

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mobilized a network of learning industry professionals, that we ended up calling L&D cares. And the idea is to provide support for those in our industry, that have been displaced and were disrupted. And at first it was obviously due to the pandemic.

But as we've evolved and are almost hitting our one-year anniversary with over 800 people who have joined our community. We are now becoming a network even beyond the pandemic, to provide a united voice for those disrupted in the industry in general. And our network of folks offers support and unity to those boss or position, members of their family as well. Or anyone who just feels a general sense of loss in their community and in their industry and they're looking for a career transition. So that was our initial thought behind this organization. And now as we come upon our one-year anniversary, we're not necessarily celebrating the fact that we're still together, but we are celebrating the fact that we are now a place to help those who are in need.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Fantastic, and I like the foresight to know, to be able to see this is going to last for some time and cause massive disruption. And we need to band together to do something about it. So taking action early, I applaud you on that. So before we start looking more closely at the work of L&D Cares and what happens behind the scenes as well let's do a proper introduction to each of you. Brandon, sticking with you for the moment, can you introduce... I think you talked about your day job a little. But what is your day job? What does it look like now? And what's your role in L&D Cares?

#### **Brandon Carson:**

Thank you. Yes, Brandon Carson, So I do lead one of the learning teams at Delta Airlines. And my team's responsibility is to support and train all of our employees that work in our global airport operations. And so we do operate in about 350 airports around the world. And so anyone who works in the airport, gets trained by my team. And I'm fortunate to, quite frankly be in this industry and see all of the wonderful things that travel brings. Our mission statement is no one better connects the world. And so as we see people like to move around and people like to travel. And it's really a great honour to be able to play a part in bringing people together and connecting people. Yes, that's been challenged during this pandemic but quite frankly, we've done a really good job of keeping the operation going. We are an essential service, obviously, as an airline. So it's been a challenge, It's been an interesting year, probably the most disruptive in the airline industry ever. Not like 9/11, this is entirely different, as we all know.

But I've been in learning for over 25 years now and I've seen lots of ups and downs in our industry. But I'll tell you what, there was no playbook for a global pandemic. And definitely no playbook for a global pandemic as we operate an airline. So it's been an interesting year of working and weeding through crisis. But I'll tell you, my team has a great spirit and Delta is a great airline, so we're going to be back pretty strong.

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**Michelle Ockers:**

We're all looking forward to that.

**Brandon Carson:**

Yes, moving around the world.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Traveling again, Yes.

**Brandon Carson:**

Nice.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And so tell us a little bit more about your role in L&D Care's Brandon. Obviously, you're one of the founders. How is your role above? What is it you do in L&D Cares?

**Brandon Carson:**

So we have... Elliot and I founded it and we brought together a group of folks who are very unique and come from all sorts of different perspectives, which I highly value. My role really is... As a Founding Director, is just to provide some guidance and a little bit of direction, to the different areas we want to get involved in. But quite frankly, the band of folks we've brought together have taken this to new heights. And we're loosely formed group, who are really committed and passionate and we have been operating for about a year now with the same folks. The same folks who came in, I believe to that first meeting, are still here. We definitely got some new additions to that board if you will. To the folks who come in and help direct the programs that we drive and get involved in.

But frankly, I'm a listener and I'm a doer and anything... we're all sort of in this together, so anything that we throw off to one another that one of us will catch and do, that's kind of how we're operating. And it's an amazing group of people who have done a lot of work over the last year. So, we're all helping each other through this and helping each other through this. And that is exactly what I do, but I show up in some of the calls and...

**Michelle Ockers:**

I'm sure you're being way too self-deprecating there Brandon, because you make it sound like everyone else is doing the heavy lifting. But I'm sure that's not the case. And Jennifer, can you introduce us to yourself, both your ongoing role. Assuming of course you have one, because we can't make that assumption right now. Right?

**Jennifer Rogers:**

Right.

**Michelle Ockers:**

And what you're doing with L&D Cares.

**Jennifer Rogers:**

Sure, I have kind of a multifaceted role. So I'm Jennifer Rogers and personally, I am a home-schooling mom to two children. So the majority of my day is spent being a home-school teacher. And then the other part of my day is spent as a coach, a professional coach and Learning and Development Consultant. And I do that both for... So I have my own

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organization and I do Leadership Development and Coaching for corporate entities but also for faith-based communities as well. So, as far as L&D Cares, I was asked to hop in on some conversations and see if I could help out with my coaching background. So in addition to being a coach, I also have a Certified Professional Talent Development credential from ATD. And so I was contacted through one of our L&D Cares Directors, through the ATD side of things. To just say, "Hey, we need some folks. Are there any people that are CPTDs that are also coaches that can maybe come and help us and coach some of these cohorts? And what does that look like?"

And they put a lot of trust in me at the very beginning, they were like, "here, just take this and go make it yours." And so it's been really fun and really rewarding to put together this program of people who need the support. They need the help with career transition, either because they've lost their role or they're just looking for, what is the next thing for me to be doing? Where should I really be spending my time? And so we've had over 150... Let's see, I'm looking at my... 152 cohort requests. Since we have started this process and we've held... We've had non cohorts complete and have non-current cohorts going on right now. Two of those are international. Which, we spoke a little bit to the global piece, I think maybe before we started recording.

But we spoke a little bit about how this is more global than we thought it would be to begin with. But to be able to help folks around the globe has just been phenomenal. And what we're finding most often with our cohorts is, "yes, people, their ultimate goal is to find that next role, of course..."

#### Michelle Ockers:

So we are going to come back to the coaching cohort program and go through in more detail how it works. But that is a great introduction. And you've given us a little taste today that I think is really interesting around. This isn't just for people who've lost their jobs due to the pandemic, but anyone who's in Learning and Development who's interested in career transition more broadly. So we'll come back and tease that out a little bit more too.

#### Jennifer Rogers:

All right.

#### Michelle Ockers:

And Liz, we'd love to know a little bit more about you both in and outside of L&D cares.

#### Elizabeth Lembke:

I love it. Well, hi, everyone. So, yeah, I'm Elizabeth Lembke and I am a Chief Talent Navigator at Transforming Talent because I'm a Freelance Consultants. And when you are freelance, you give yourself any title that you want. There's no comp and bens that has to approve it. For me, really that aspect of it's not just one area, we often are rather myopic when we're looking at development. We look at L&D or we look at talent acquisition or talent management. I originally started out in Talent Management and L&D was just a portion of my job, as was corporate social responsibility, employer branding, etc, etc. I didn't know that was weird until I left my corporate job and then discovered that, "Oh, everyone else has this own department, they have staff. Oh, I wonder what that's like." So that's why I am heading up the career growth stream. Because one of my big... My, why, is helping people uncover their own potential and capability. And so that they can learn to aspire again and not what they've perhaps been reduced to in the jobs that they've been allowed to do.

That's why I do what I do. And that's why when we were talking about the aspect of career development and career growth. The thing that irritates me most is when people complain about something and don't have the people in the room. So that's why when we're talking

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about career growth, it's really about how do we get everybody into the room to co create. What can we do better? So that it's not a soul sucking process, but we actually find it enriching and fun.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I love some of the language you're using there about learning to aspire again and not a soul sucking process. And I'm sure we're going to dig into those two things and contrast the two in a short while. So I think, let's start exploring the work streams. And as we do, we can explore things like well, who's it for, who's involved? How does it work? So you've got three main work streams, a coaching cohort program, the career growth summit and the virtual programming. At least that's what you've got at the moment. It sounds like Liz, ideas being thrown around in the background, who knows what will emerge. But let's start with the coaching cohort program, which Jennifer, you lead and you gave us a little taste of that before, it's about career transition. What's the objective or goal of the coaching cohort program and who's it for?

#### Jennifer Rogers:

I think the coaching cohort program is really for anyone who is interested in either, they need to find that next role or they're looking at a transition. Maybe the pandemic has given me an opportunity to really think about what's important to me and is the role that I'm in really where I want to be. And we spend some time... In our cohorts, we have 12 different coaches that have worked with our cohorts and we give them the freedom to run the cohort. We give them some basic guidelines, we really give them the freedom to run the cohort as best for the group members that are participating with them.

And so it can be any number of things, but we really spend a lot of time around, first of all, "who am I? What are my values?" Because when you have lost your job, you sort of are in that space of, "what in the world just happened?" One of my, our coaching, folks and it's a friend of mine. She calls it settling the ball as soccer reference to settling the ball and really figuring out, who I am and where I even need to go. Where are my options?

And then we talk about, where do you want to go? And then how are you going to get there? And then obviously, how will you know that that you've gotten there? And so we spend our time with our participants and our cohorts, it's about a three-month process. And most of our cohorts meet once a week or every other week for a three-month period. And all of our coaches are credentialed. So knowing that you get to work with a credentialed coach, at no charge, they are donating their time. So that's wonderful, for three months, I think is just... Gives people that sense of hope and support. And that's one of the things that we've seen come out of this, more than anything. We've had 38 people hired since we started our cohorts. But the hope that comes out of being with other people and not feeling so alone, I think has been really, really beneficial.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely, that sense of being connected to others is really important. Particularly when you're stuck at home. Right? And if you've lost your job, you've lost your social network, as well, which is a huge barrier. Can be a huge barrier emotionally, psychologically. It can be hard to find a new job in that situation where you're not moving around as well. So I can see how that connection is an important part of moving people forward as well as the coaching.

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With the coach, you mentioned you use credentialed coaches. What credential are you looking for, for the coaches?

#### Jennifer Rogers:

Yeah, we are really credential agnostic. But we just want to be sure that all of our coaches have had some type of coached specific training. So whether that is an ICF coach or some of the other coaching programs that are out and available. Some folks have done more life coaching, some folks have done more coaching through I think it's Jay Shetty and some other coaching programs. But as long as they've had a Coach Specific Training Program that they have successfully completed, then we would love for them to coach with us.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So you've got coaches coming with some sort of credentialing from different backgrounds. You've talked through at a high level a process, how did you settle on that process? How was that process created? And is it the same from one cohort to the other or can people expect a different experience in the different cohorts?

#### Jennifer Rogers:

I think an overarching level is the same across cohorts and if I'm very honest, I don't know how we really landed on that. As a guideline, there's kind of four buckets, if you will, of... But just a progression. And Brandon, I don't know if you and Liz want to share anything about that.

#### Brandon Carson:

One of the... No, it's really good, Jennifer. One of the things that Elliot and I were talking about initially... And I think I mentioned that a bit earlier. There's lots of job placement organizations out there. And that's not really what our focus was, to just match you to a job and you just go get that job and then next do that. There's a lot of those organizations already out there. To Liz's point and what Jennifer was talking about. We really want to offer you an opportunity to... I love what Liz brought to this. Co create your own future, take stock of where to... What Jennifer's said, "take stock of where you're at." So we thought we want it to be this. We wanted to do two big hairy audacious things, if you were. We had these goals. Right? Which are ridiculous when you think about it. But, "hey, they've got to be... They've got to be almost insurmountable In some respects for us to take them on."

One of our first conversations was, we want to change the dynamic in how people are placed in roles or in jobs. Right? That make the most for them. And we literally... Liz's vision was to bring, change to the recruiting world and change kind of the perspectives of folks in L&D. Right? And we're seeing a lot of that happening just because of what's going on in the industry. But we had a huge goal of, we want to change that dynamic and make it better. Because to her point, it can be pretty soul sucking when you're looking for a job and you're filling out one of those online applications. And you're going into this black hole of, submitting into one of these systems and never hearing back or being ghosted by recruiters or event or agencies. Or on the other side, you never getting back to those recruiters or agencies.

So building a stronger connection, we literally had that goal of really wanting to change the dynamic. And part of that process is, let's just start having discussions about what works and what doesn't work. And let's try to affect change kind of one person at a time.

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#### Michelle Ockers:

How many people are in a cohort Jennifer?

#### Jennifer Rogers:

Roughly, they start out with about eight to 10 people. And we do have some folks that will drop out of a cohort from time to time. If they're hired, it gets harder for them to participate. But we start them with eight to 10 people.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Right. And so that you're getting not only the supportive coach, but you're also getting everything in terms of input from the peer group as well.

#### Jennifer Rogers:

Yes, the peer to peer learning is huge. And I think it's so helpful. Because the people that are coming to these cohorts, they're knowledgeable, they're experienced. And learning from one another, I think, has been huge. In the cohorts that I have been a part of and as I've talked with other coaches. Their cohorts become this little family. And they support each other, but they also hold each other accountable.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so apart from the people who are wanting support with career transition, another key stakeholder group here is the coaches. Right? They're coming into this, they're donating their time. Tell me a little bit more about the coaches. What attracts them to this... I hate to use the term but, it seems obvious. But what did they get out of this? And how do they support each other? How would they support it to make sure it's a great experience for them too?

#### Jennifer Rogers:

Sure, they come to us and they find out about L&D cares and they reach out because they want to help they want to be a part of the solution. And how can I help? People, meet their goals. And so we work with them to make sure that first of all, everything is set up for them. That they're not having to do a lot of back end, leg work and things like that. From an administrative perspective, it's not an administrative burden for them to take on a cohort. And we really work around their schedules. We started out, asking the coaches to find work with the group to determine a time. And we've learned from that, that that does not what we are talking about. What Brandon mentioned about, if things evolving, that doesn't work. So we just say here's a... We work with a coach that says, "here's what I can offer to do a cohort." And we put people in it. And that makes it easier.

It gives them an opportunity to get their name out there. Get their services out there. So we've got them listed on our websites, L&D Cares. So that their information is out there because again, just like the people that are participating in the cohort, our coaches are experienced. And they're knowledgeable and they are amazing human beings. And so to give them an opportunity for people across the globe to find out about them is huge.

#### Brandon Carson:

Yeah, I'll add that, each one of our active coaches is listed on our webpage. There's a directory of them at [ldcares.org](http://ldcares.org). It's emphasize [ldcares.org](http://ldcares.org). But you can see all of our coaches and where they come from and what services they offer outside and beyond their day jobs. Right? Which is really important, because like Jennifer said, they're a great team of folks are given a lot of time to this. And so we definitely wanted to get the word out that



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these are the coaches that are donating their time. And here's where you can learn more about them.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Thank you. And we'll put links obviously to that, to the LinkedIn page. And we've got a YouTube channel as well. So all those links will go in the show notes for people to explore. So Jennifer, what do you think has worked really well with the coaching program and why?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

It's a whole package. I think what really works is bringing folks together. We tried, specifically to not put people of the same level, role level, career level into cohorts. And I think that is probably one of the keys. In addition to this peer learning, you're learning from people at different levels of the L&D industry. From Executive Directors and vice presidents all the way to folks that are emerging instructional designers. And they're all learning from one another, I think that's probably the biggest key is the peer learning aspect. And then really just the hope and the accountability. At least there's...

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Accountability is really valuable, right? In this peer group structure. And I'm a fan of Working Out Loud circles, I've done a number of those. And one of the reasons I come back to them, because it's a similar process. John Stepper keeps evolving it, but it's a similar process every time. But the process of going through in the case of a Working Out Loud circle. It's a three-month period, same as your cohorts. And having to show up every week and say, "whether you did or did not do that thing you said you were going to do, it really drives momentum and traction. Right?"

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

Yeah, it does. And we do have an agreement. Then we have folks on when they decide to participate in the cohort. And they sign it and the coach signs it. We want you to show up and we want you to engage.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

And how do you support people to remain accountable? Because things come up. Right? Life happens, a home-schooling happens.

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

Yeah.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

All sorts of things happens. People get sick and how do you support people to sustain that level of accountability that they've signed up for.

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

I think that's another place that our coaches really dive in. And they work really hard to keep people engaged in the cohort experience. They'll reach out to them outside of the cohort meetings. If somebody misses a meeting, the coach reaches out and says, "hey, is everything okay? Is this still the right fit for you?" We would never kick anybody out of a cohort. Sometimes, to your point, things come up and it isn't the right fit anymore. That

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group, that time, that day, whatever it might be. And so we're always ready and willing to help them find a different time that that meets their needs.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So what's been the biggest challenge with running the coaching cohort programming and how do you address that?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

I think just finding the times that work for most people and putting those out there. Because life is complicated. And everybody's schedule is busy and different. And I think that's probably been the biggest challenge. And it's really just working with the coaches ahead of time and saying, "hey, we're going to start some cohorts, here's when they are and we'd love to have you join them." Again, it's been an evolving process. But a lot of a lot of behind the scenes work. Some administrative stuff.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

And it's got to be done. The attentions in the detail. Right?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

Yeah.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

I think the progress is in the detail. So if someone's listening to this and they're thinking, "Oh, I'm interested in that." Firstly, "I've already got a job. But I'm still interested in this. Can I ask to be part of this if I've got a job already?"

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

Of course, yes. For a number of different reasons. If you already have a job or you've just landed that new role, it could be that you've got some perspective of how to get to the other side of the coin, in finding that next role. But if you have a role and you're looking to transition into something maybe related but different, move up in your career goals. Yes, absolutely.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Okay and how does somebody become part of the cohort? If they want to express interest, how can they do that?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

The first thing that we ask them to do, is to join the L&D Cares community. And like you said, the links to the website will be on there. And once they join the community, they can check the box that says, "I'm seeking." If they want to join a cohort, that's the best box for them to check. Is, "I am seeking a new role." Because that triggers us to send them a welcome email that says, "if you would like to join a cohort, please, there's an additional form that we ask

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them to fill out so that we have all of their information." And once they fill that out, then I'll reach out to them and start working with them to find a cohort that meets their needs.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Right.

#### Brandon Carson:

So one thing... And Michelle, quickly here is that we all agree early on, we did worry and have conversations about, "oh my gosh, what if there's a flood get thousands of people?" But we decided early on that we want to keep the human element in this. So we're not really going to over automate these kinds of things. We do ask that you fill out a couple of forms, but we are going to reach out to you individually and make sure that that human connection is always a part of your experience. And it may take us a little longer may take us a little more time to get you situated in a cohort. But in the end, it'll be worth it. Because Jennifer, goes through it. She's not talking about the behind the scenes work that goes on. There's a lot involved in matching you to a cohort. I mean, schedules and times and all that. We work with you, we don't dictate to you. So we definitely want to keep that human component in all of the experience with us.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Lovely, thank you. That's important to note. So Liz, let's talk about the Career Growth Summit program, which is... And I don't know if you regard it as complimentary to the coaching cohort or something that's quite different about it. At first, it looks quite different. Tell us a little bit about... And what's the objective of the Career Growth Summit program?

#### Elizabeth Lembke:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)- So yeah, absolutely. So the Career Growth Summit program. So for me, it's complimentary. So back in the day, we had an original pilot group of... We had a focus group, lo and behold. And so that's kind of like where the buckets came from, as we were going through, what do people need. And as we were talking about this black hole that your application goes through and then what happens. And when I was first starting out, Talent Acquisition Community, for some reason adopted me. And I was hearing it from their end. And in terms of their experience with candidates and their experience with, how are people like even applying for jobs or informing themselves about jobs. And then on the other hand, we had a lot to do with HR Tech companies, which were developing things that didn't necessarily meet the needs of the recruiters or the candidates.

And then on the other hand, I have some friends at the university who are doing, talent and learning research. I'm a psychologist in work psychology and very rarely do I actually get to bring my expertise in that, anybody really wants to hear. So one of my pieces was, is we're all involved in career development, but we're all doing it very separately. So what we need to do and what would actually help, is saying maybe, "what's wrong with career development here, talent management. We wait for three to five years and expect people to be patient for that next step in their career. And lo and behold, that three-to-five-year button never changes. So here people are waiting for career development, it doesn't necessarily happen. So what can we do to be more proactive and also to take Jennifer's word, be more accountable?

And so getting these different folks into the room to kind of understand, by building perspective out of... As a recruiter, this is what I'm looking for. As a job seeker, this is what I'm going through. And then to say, "how can we advise and help?" So for example, back to Jennifer's point, we're looking at, maintaining your own self agency. This aspect of believing in yourself, it is so hard. And oftentimes we come from a job, we're doing whatever that job

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tasks and where our responsibilities are. And at times, we forgot that we have capabilities and competence beyond what we've been asked to do at our role. So one of those big pieces of the coaching and then where it also comes into the summit. Is seeing yourself through a healthier lens, but then also seeing where do you have potential to learn. Because here, if we're only looking at how our jobs are affected by the pandemic, we're forgetting that the future of work looks different. That here how we do our roles in learning, everyone's virtual.

If we're not able to be good in a virtual environment, then we're losing out our customers, because they're experimenting with it right now. So we don't want to become so obsolete. So the Career Growth Summit is also about our own employability, at the end of the day. To make sure that we're looking at not only other people's skills, but experimenting, going into a brave space, because, "hey, we're all volunteers, these growth summits are all volunteers. So if you can't experiment there, where can you experiment." So creating that kind of that opportunity to learn with one another, rather than just perhaps passively just listening to something. But really saying, "how can I apply this? What does this need for me?" And then how can I follow up with these great relationships where I've met someone at a table?

And it's much easier to just, DM them or have a 30-minute conversation. And where you feel like okay, "I've built up and I'm able to see that I'm beyond what I perhaps was and what I perhaps reduced myself to." To then say okay, "where can I see that there are different opportunities for me?"

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So you use the term Career Development there, Liz. You spoke about, waiting three to five years for someone to hit the Career Development button. When you use that term in this context, what do you mean?

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

So sorry. So I'm a former Director of Global Talent. So I was responsible for the talent management process for a large group organization. And we had these annual talent reviews, where we would based upon performance and potential and do an analysis. And then also look at, what are potential roles that someone could go into. And then we would talk to them.

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

We would actually talk to them about their career development and say, "what are you interested in?" And then say, "Oh, well, we have you in this talent pool for Plant Manager." But we have you three to five years out, this is what we're going to need to be doing in terms of work design. And in terms of opportunities, so that you'll be able to gain the competence in those areas, so that when you actually do get promoted, you're not going to be just thrown into cold water and say, "good luck." But you have the experience underneath your belt, so that when you get that Plant Manager job, you'll be able to just flourish. Unfortunately, as the nature of the world, we're no longer in these string, these hierarchies, where it's like, top down and these ladders of where you go up. But really, there's a lot more lateral moves, there's a lot more lateral development.

And so we had a lot of disappointed people, I just put it this way. Because they never got career development. In terms of what are those next positions, where can I grow, how can I have impact, what are the options for me. And so that's why, as part of my former role, I was always looking at, your people want three things to be fulfilled at work. They want to have impact, they want to have some sort of growth and they really have thriving relationships. So we've looked at those three areas, what can we do in terms of career development for someone, so that they really see okay, "here, this is my progression." And it doesn't need to

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be a title progression. Oftentimes, it's really about what is your span of responsibility and learning, that is the most fun.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Liz, other thing that's happened is hierarchy levels have collapsed as well over time. So this idea that we were in a role and we progress up a ladder, that was still the way it was when I started my career. But it's not the way it is now. So that whole view of what career progress... I would label that career progression.

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

And so, that old model doesn't work anymore to your point. But there's still a lot of organizations using those, performance potential grids to try to look at people and the potential for people. Right? Is that broken, Liz? Is that what you're suggesting that the whole model need to change? Or is this still merit in there?

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

I think there's still merit in that. But what I would say and I haven't changed my language, is potential for what? So I think that we have had a myopic view in terms of leadership development, that we are constantly looking for the leaders rather than oftentimes looking at the specialists. So this is a little criticism that I have gone down about the nine cell that we have. We have way too many cells for the mallow line, but we really need to say, "okay, who are those really in career specialists, we need those." So as you look to your organization, it's really about how balanced are we and not to skew it only for the high potentials, etc. But saying, "Okay, how are we in balance as our organization? And as we're looking to potential, what is that potential for?" And then as we look to performance, I am an old fan of La Mancha, universal performance dimensions. I think I'm like the only like, hold out. Because I think they're really good. It's, what is your team or unit contribution? How are you learning? So beyond the quantity and the quality and the timeliness, which oftentimes may be talking about performance. Those are the things that people look to like... I did my best for us no matter what I give them, they just do it. And they don't expect much? No, we need to look at performance more broadly and say, "Okay, here, what is the context?" So I think the nine cells are very helpful for fostering and conversation. But it's always around potential for what? And then I like to say learning agility is, figuring out what to do when you don't know what to do. So that's how I look at it.

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**Michelle Ockers:**

Sounds a lot like life agility. Right?

**Elizabeth Lembke:**

I know, all right?

**Michelle Ockers:**

We got to do a lot of that.

**Elizabeth Lembke:**

Exactly throughout. Particularly over the last 12 to 14 months.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Absolutely. So let's take a step back, you mentioned right at the start of this part of the conversation. A number of different stakeholders that you bring together through the Career Growth Summit. So can we perhaps unpack a little bit for each of these stakeholder groups. And what's their perspective or need. What potential value is there for them in being part of the Career Growth Summit. So let's start with recruiters, which was interesting that that was one of the early stakeholders that you mentioned. And what's the kind of change that recruiters might be interested in? What challenges they have, what change might be a value to them in this career development process?

**Elizabeth Lembke:**

Great question. So here, particularly recruiters roles have really changed as HR tech is really coming strongly into the talent acquisition arena. So they're also questioning, "what is my role? And how is AI taking on my role? What is the value that I bring to the table?" And one of my statements is, "your value is that you know people and you know the industry." And this is really their magic sauce, is how are they able to understand what's going on within a particular sphere of work. How that's evolving and how can they bring that back to the candidates that they're talking to. To the hiring managers that they're trying to discuss as to what are learnable skills and what is really absolutely necessary.

So being able to have better conversations around understanding what's really going on in the industry is a big kind of win for them. And also that they see their own career development. That for us, at least for me, as part of the first Career Growth Summit, I was really surprised as to how many recruiters were taking part and taking away lessons for themselves and their own career development. Because I had my naivete, thought they would just be the advisors. But they were really active and particularly this last one, very, very active in terms of questioning how they do their role, where's the role continuing to develop and how are they seeing it embedded in a larger context, rather than just filling a requisition.

**Michelle Ockers:**

That's so interesting. Go ahead, Brandon.

**Brandon Carson:**

Sorry, I am going to go ahead. If I can add to that, because this actually just came in the other day, from someone at a company who's looking for a certain kind of talent, if you will. And I think they know this, part of the challenge is, especially if it's recruiters or folks looking for talent who are working for the company, they may not be a part of the company. They get... And I think, it was Liz, who said, they get this myopic view of what this individual needs

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to do in this role, and part of the challenge is, then they get very list oriented. So there's, seven or eight things that this person has got to be able to do and show proof and evidence of it. When in reality, you're going to find out a lot more about someone's ability to be a great performer by talking just really more about what they don't do at work. What do they do for hobbies and for family and outside of work? And where their interests... Where do their interests lie and all of that?

And so what's happening is companies are finding it challenging and difficult to find these perfect profiles that they're coming up with. And that is persistence that's been like that for... I've been in this business for 25 years in Learning. And I've seen these job descriptions not really change a lot other than just adding new lines because of technology or whatever that's been integrated. So part of our BHAG, our big hairy, audacious goal. And I think, Liz is succeeding wildly at this. Is how do we change this narrative, because we've got to start looking at someone's capabilities differently. And companies are finding the challenge of just talking to someone who's looking for an executive. And they're like, "I don't even know what to do anymore. I can't find this profile." And I'm like, "you have to start over and you have to think differently about it." Otherwise, you're not going to ever find that unicorn.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah and too often, when you see job descriptions, they're looking for people who have experience in a whole stack of stuff. And some things that are evolving so rapidly, that it's very difficult. And you can block a lot of people out as potential candidates who had enough of the foundation to build upon. Right? So and at least one of the things that I just found really interesting when you were talking about the perspective of recruiters, I'd never thought about it from their angle before. I'd always thought about the angle of the candidates and how dehumanizing the process of job search has become. Because of the use of technology and submitting your resume and online platforms and not even knowing is a person ever looking at my stuff. From the opposite perspective for the recruiters, they lose something. If all of the context and all the interventions through technology as well. Right?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

Yeah, absolutely. And Liz, don't misunderstand me. I think that recruiters need technology to help them.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Yeah.

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

With what? Jennifer, talking about... Like the logistics... I'm sorry, but logistics of booking meetings is still one of the hardest, stupidest time sucking things that we do. So whatever we can do to make our work more effective is important. I'm always a little bit careful with the word efficiency. Because I think often times, by our love of efficiency, we lose a lot of the human touch and a lot of the things that we actually ought to be doing. But here, how do we understand how we're leveraging technology to help us so that those more human moments actually come? So that other people rise to the top where we are questioning those laundry list. Because this is me, I'm former HR. People would take like, "Okay, what has that... What do we have in terms of our union, etc.? Where there's a job description that has been graded."

And so we'll take that as a foundation and then we'll add some extra text that we had per email. Because heaven forbid, we would actually sit together with the hiring manager and some others and have a conversation about what does this role do and how will it evolve? No, no we go back to that job description that was there. And then we post it and pray and

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hope for the best. And maybe we'll find somebody. And now, with technology, we can actually find better hits in terms of the probability that this could be a good potential talent. But at the same time, we also need to really look at it as to conversable. Now, where is it going? And then what you were saying before Michelle, about this, opting out. Today's International Women's Day.

One of those big challenges with those laundry list of requirements is also that aspect of opting out. And it doesn't get talked about enough in terms of, what can we do to really make it inclusive. So that people who perhaps would say... Because they're like, "Oh, well, I don't have that 120%, so I won't apply." And so I don't even go into that space of giving myself the opportunity to even be rejected because I self-protect.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, so talk to us a little bit about the mechanics in this. How does the Career Growth Summit work? What does it look like?

#### Elizabeth Lembke:

So, good question. So I've mentioned that we crowdsource. So we crowd sourced before the first summit. Like, "what would you be interested in?" As you look through your lens as the job seeker, as a recruiter, etc. What would you be looking for in terms of career development? So that's kind of how it first started out. We had a crowdsource and then here within our group, we created a subgroup called the career stream. So basically, we all said, "okay, who, based upon these themes that have crystallized..." And I think now we have nine major themes that we're going after in the Career Growth Summit. For example, 21st century competencies and plurality. Here, looking at what is the state of learning? And where is learning going? Back to, "Okay, here, how do I apply for a job? What are the basic fundamental logistics of looking for a job? Because I haven't done this in 20 years."

So those are different things that come into what goes to the Career Growth Summit. And then we section it out. So for example, this last one that was in February, we have the first day, really about the perspective of the job seeker. So here we're looking at how are we maintaining self-agency, how are we looking through those different roles of talent acquisition fundamentals. And then next step career opportunity. So having a talent here and there. The second day, we said, "okay, what is the state of learning? And where is it going? So how am I keeping current as an L&D practitioner. And then talking about what are those different career paths? So we had a talent fair in the afternoon. Where we had all sorts of different paths that you could go into and have discussions with different people, who had an L&D hat.

In some way, shape or form on, that people could have discussions around how did they develop their career. On the third day, we said, "okay, I'm learning sciences. So here, do we understand what is objectivity? What is validity? What is going on in neuroscience? We hear a lot of these things, do we actually understand them?" So and then Jennifer, was instrumental in doing day three. Because it was not only understanding the learning sciences and then saying, "okay and how do we become future ready? So how do we take that and then looking at our own, do all the plans, what do we need to do there?" So that was day three. And then the day four was looking at the future of learning is social and connected? And that's something that we've seen over the last 14 months.

So how are we moving away from being kind of the experts with the job aids to saying, "okay, we need to be the guide on the side and also connected and in the mix." So this aspect of a Corporate Centre of Excellence being very far away and advising, that role is really but changing a lot. And it's not only within our area of expertise, but we're really going back to kind of the oracle method. Where we're like getting expertise from these different areas and saying, "okay, how do we come together in terms of hastily formed networks. Is



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the new way of working. So how do I work together with people with different expertise? And that's the fun piece. But it's also an interesting challenge, because oftentimes we have been so kind of narrow in the silos that we've been in, that we haven't necessarily been exposed. So it was about how do we have a little bit more of the playfulness, of working together with others and seeing that role as an opportunity?

#### Michelle Ockers:

Liz, I'm so fascinated by the things you're talking about here. And there are more questions coming up for me, but I'm super conscious of time, because we could talk for another hour. Just around some of the stuff you've raised, right here. So if people are curious and want to find out more about the Career Growth Summit. Have you got artifacts that you put out into the public domain about what you're discovering, because it does feel like a process of discovery. That there's conversation ongoing. So if people want to dig into it more, given that we don't have time to keep going with the conversation today, how can they best do that?

#### Elizabeth Lembke:

So there is a mother lode coming on to our YouTube channel. So we had that... We have 103 videos, plus Career Growth Summit one. And then we have... And this is that aspect of, "here this is a community we have someone looking at how do we create playlists." So we're creating micro learning of five to seven? How can you take this wonderful collateral that we have and then we're portioning it out? The other thing that we're doing in terms of... Because we want to blow it up. There's going to be a Career Growth Summit 2.53, we haven't determined the name. But it's about transition and re-entry. What does that look like? And we're going to be doing some kind of building that agenda together with people via welcoming to the awesome for first time speakers and then a Career Growth on the regular. So two programs that we are getting ready to launch in April, anyway.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Right, so at least with your agreement, I would like to circle back at a future date on Learning Uncut. And just understand not just how it is panning out over time. But the whole bigger sense making process and how you're seeing this translating into action for change in the industry. So I think it's... You've laid out a really important agenda and discovery process you're using. So if you're happy to do this, let's have you back maybe after the next round of summits and just focus more specifically into what's happening with the industry. And what are you finding through the Summits. And so, I know you've got virtual programming, as well as maybe just a very brief taster around the virtual programming and then a couple of general questions. So Brandon, did you want to talk about the virtual programming briefly?

#### Brandon Carson:

Sure and Liz, has been a little, "oh, yeah, we're going to do a playlist." We actually have a person working on taking all of the recorded videos from Career Growth Summit to... And being learning people we are in the nerds we are in some respects. She's correlating them along learning paths and connecting the different videos. So that you can get a broad holistic view of all sorts of like Liz talked about, learning sciences and social and the future of work and all that. Or you can dig in on these real granular learning paths. So she's spending a lot of time building these connections with all of these artifacts and these videos we have from the summit. That will be valuable and very valuable for someone to dive into. And our virtual programming, we have this YouTube channel, we're just now kicking off. We've got L&D Cares conversations where we're pulling some folks out and spending some time with them.

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Like we are with you today talking about what they do and learning more about how we can apply what they do to what we're doing in our career transition.

So those conversations are ongoing. And I believe, Michelle here, Michelle Lintz, is running those. I think they paused for a while because of the new stuff that there's picking back up. We're going to be publishing those. We're publishing all of these playlists and these learning paths from Career Growth Summit 2. And I believe we have a lot of them from 1.0 up there as well, up there. And so this programming is available free of charge for anyone. And I had several people come to me personally after the last Career Growth Summit saying this was the best co conference I've ever attended. So all of this collateral and content is very valuable and will move it on through our YouTube channels. And of course, Liz is kicking off all sorts of virtual programming that we're going to be doing through the year. And if she could take a second and talk about this really great idea around if you've never been a speaker before, she's got this great program together in partnership with some folks. To help those people who have never spoken at conferences or publicly come and actually do it.

And one of the things that she's pioneering is, really get outside and stretch yourself and get outside of your discomfort or whatever and try something new. So lots of things we're doing are there as well. And we're looking forward to just really building on this foundation we have with a community to help everyone that wants to be involved and advance themselves.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So what's your aspiration for the future for L&D Care? Brandon.

#### Brandon Carson:

It goes back to that initial discussion of building more unity in our community. By that I mean, those initial discussions where Liz, was talking about the soul sucking process of finding job. Let's keep the humanity in work, let's make sure that we're... Especially with technology and everything being automated in some respects. Let's make sure that the human element really is what drives this co-creation, if you will, of building our careers and our futures. Our CEO at Delta, actually, last year said a couple of things. He said, "we need to be a Learning Company and we need to keep the humanity in the airline." And so I think that's a key driver. For us is, we're never going to over automate, we're going to keep the humanity in L&D Cares where people first community... And our aspiration is just for us to come together to a community and let this community dictate where we go with it. But we definitely want to make sure that we keep that human connection in our industry. And yes, that we BHAG goal of changing the process and building a more human centred Career process for people.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So if anyone else is interested in creating some sort of community right now and improving connection between people. Be it within L&D or within their own organization or some other network or community group they're involved with. And through doing something similar, some sort of community building process, which at the heart of it is what you've talked about today? What tips do you have for them?

#### Brandon Carson:

We were fortunate in that when Elliot and I started this, we reached out to our network. And I remember asking Mike Ruska, a really good friend of mine. "We need someone that's edgy and a different thinker and that it's not status quo." He's like, "Liz Lembke." Really, that's what he said. And then finding Jennifer to lead this whole cohort. So it's really all about your connections, bringing smart people together and letting them do what they do best. We are a loose affiliation. We call ourselves a board of directors. But we're not really... I mean, we

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don't command each other around. We come together, we talk about things and what really sparks our interest, we go and we try to do that.

And so I would say come together with smart people in and don't think too small, think big. We're thinking really big here and we're trying to change the world. And we're not being silly about it. We really think we can change the world. And you can change the world. That's how it happens one person at a time, one person using their network and building on that network. That's how we do this. And we know we can make this, not a soul sucking experience for people to make a career transition in this industry. And to forge a new industry, which is what we need anyway, going into all this world of digital technology.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Jennifer or Liz. Well, if you'd like to add anything in terms of tips for anyone who's interested in starting some sort of community. To support people through transition, disruption, change that's going on at the moment in any domain?

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

I think that what I would add, is just put it out there. There are lots of people that have some of the same ideas. I wish that somebody would have this group or pull this group of people together or find this group of people. And I think just having the courage and that's the key is having the courage to say, "hey, I want to start a community or gather folks to do and talk about this idea. And if you want to join me, come on."

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative)- I think that's awesome and it's so true. And I think one of the other things perhaps I would really... Don't be afraid if you have no funding.

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

You can get a lot done nowadays without funding. So don't worry if there's no VC or Angel, if you're on that shoulder helping you out.

#### **Brandon Carson:**

No money, but we've got...

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

We've got no money.

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

Plenty of soul though. I can say that.

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

We've got soul.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

Absolutely, absolutely. And I know we don't share the video, this is a podcast. But I will say it's been an absolute delight from a visual perspective to watch the three of you interact in the background. We're recording this via zoom and there's been all kinds of encouragement, body language, use of emojis to cheer each other on. It's been wonderful to get that sense of how connected you all are and how supportive and I'm sure that L&D Cares is just like that.

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And I love to have a crack. I have tried to join a couple of times on LinkedIn and I haven't been successful through the form. Now I'm going to go to have a crack at the website.

#### **Brandon Carson:**

Use the website first, that's the actual key.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

All right, the website. The website is the key.

#### **Brandon Carson:**

Yes.

#### **Michelle Ockers:**

So people go to the website, look in the show notes. And if you are curious, if this looks like something that there's some sense of, yes, I'm excited, I'd like to be part of making a bigger change in the industry. Then, without having to join another professional association. Then L&D cares could be just the right place for you. Thank you so much for putting links to all of your LinkedIn profiles. If people want to reach out to individually. But of course, you've got all these great spaces where people can connect with L&D cares and satisfy their curiosity about what makes? So thank you so much for being my guest today on learning uncovered.

#### **Brandon Carson:**

Thank you, Michelle. Appreciate it.

#### **Elizabeth Lembke:**

Thanks a lot, Michelle.

#### **Jennifer Rogers:**

It was fun.

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## **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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