

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome back to Learning Uncut, listeners. I'd like to pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are listening to this conversation and acknowledge the traditional custodians connection to land, sea and community throughout Australia. For my long-term listeners, you may have noticed there's been a couple of months break between my last conversation on the podcast and today's conversation. So I'm looking forward to getting back into the regular swing of our fortnightly case study examples. And I've got a really interesting one to kick off with, with my guest today, James Swift, who's joining me from the UK. Hello, James.

James Swift:

Hi, Michelle. How are you?

Michelle Ockers:

I'm excellent. Thank you. I've been wanting to have a conversation. You may not know this, but I have been wanting to have a conversation with you, a podcast conversation, probably for the better part of a year since the first case study I saw from you appeared in one of Don Taylor's AI in action reports. I imagine you've talked a lot about your work with AI over the past year or two.

James Swift:

Yes, a fair bit. I think that that particular case study was a happy accident. Not that the case study was an accident, but it being discovered was a happy accident.

Michelle Ockers:

So for listeners who haven't or who aren't familiar with that AI case study from Leyton where James works, I'll pop a link to the report, the AI report from Don Taylor that featured that case study in the show notes. And I'm very happy because it's led us to today's conversation, James. So, let's start with a little bit of your background. You came into L&D from a sales background, I think about five years ago, is that right?

James Swift:

Yes, I've been head of talent development at Leyton for around five years. Before that, I was at Leyton but worked in a sales capacity. So, I was in a business development role. I've been at Leyton total for around 13 years. Started off at the bottom of the ladder, if you like, cold pipeline, got to generate new logos for the organisation. Did that fairly well, found a way to do it which worked. Got promoted through the ranks fairly quickly, so got to senior. So I used a specific sales system to get fairly good at sales.

Michelle Ockers:

How did that transition into L&D?

James Swift:

We had two sales teams in the business. One was entry-level, graduate role, reaching out to clients, using the phone to try and tell them about what we do, book meetings, and then they'd send in someone like me into that meeting to see if there was an opportunity. And these guys were, you know, hardworking. They wanted it. They were motivated. They were at the beginning of their career. They could see the pathway in front of them, but there was a really, really, really big gap in skill between their role and that next role of going into business development and taking clients through that full sales cycle was a massive jump. And we were discussing at the time, saying, okay, is this really working? We'd given a few guys a shot at that role with some support mechanisms to help them make it, which was basically, you know, shadow someone who's good and then take what you can from that and try it yourself type thing, which I don't think is unnormal in a world that doesn't have a talent development or sales enablement team at the time. It wasn't as successful as it could have been and we were thinking, do we still do it? Don't we do it? And I thought, well, the only reason these people join this role is because they want that next step. So if we don't give them the opportunity to have that next step, pretty much why would anybody do this role? It's hard. Why would anybody prospect and make calls and get told no over and over again? Why would you do that role if there wasn't a next step? So I kind of said, I think I can do it. I think I could take a couple of these people that are trying hard, they're putting the effort in. As long as I've got effort, I think I can teach them how to do this role. So I took a couple under my wing and coached them, if you like, in the same system that I used and gave them support and got them to the level where they were successful in the role. That worked very well. And then I became known for that within the business and what I did. So we kind of created that career pathway and turned it into a thing, which I ran. And then lo and behold, over time, once you've done that with 10 people, they need to be managed. And so you become sales manager and then you get into a leadership position. And though we just kept growing and growing the size of the team, and that enabled my sales career into kind of sales leadership. So the point of that is that I manage by coaching and developing people. That was my way of management. It was ingrained into getting a person from A to B, finding out where they are, where they need to be, and breaking that down into a series of steps to get them there. was how I managed and that was successful for me. So that gave me a grounding in how to coach and develop people and get someone from... skillset A to skillset B, C, D, if you like.

Michelle Ockers:

So at this point, you're still in a sales leadership role. You're in a sort of business development and sales leadership role. You're coaching people from the entry level sales role into the BD role, growing your team. You've had some success with that. What was the trigger then to move into the talent development role, which hadn't existed before, right? You were the first person in your organisation in that role, is that right?

James Swift:

Yes. So we were going through a real high growth phase and we were really looking to shoot the ball forward in our growth period over the next kind of two to three years.

So there was the overall sales director role, which was a fairly big step up. And I went for that role and I didn't get it, probably a bit naive at the time to think I was ready for such a step up, such a strategic role. However, they did say to me that they wanted me, you know, we're growing fast and this was my skill set, this is what I was good at. So they said, well, can you do that for the whole business? We're going to be hiring tons of people, growing really fast. People are going to need to be trained and coached and developed. So can you do that for us? And great move, I think I found my thing, you know.

Michelle Ockers:

That's great. So it's not uncommon that people move into L&D roles from business roles. Maybe they've got some technical skills. They've shown a little bit of flair and an interest in coaching others, supporting others. So you find yourself now in a talent role, a talent development role, rather than as a manager building a team. Do you just plough on and do what you've been doing and scale that? Or do you sit back and think, well, maybe there's something else I need to know? What were your first moves?

James Swift:

Well, first moves were, ok, great. What is this role? Ultimately, tons of questions around, you know, that's all I was given was like, can you be in charge of talent development or training, if you like? And I was like, ok, so it was up to me to define. That was the first instance. I had to really quickly define what it is that this role was going to be doing, and that took some mentoring. There's a big jump from going from, okay, I can coach a few people, to running a talent strategy across an organisation. I had to really quickly learn what that was, so reached out. Luckily, the world of L&D, I think it's the most helpful place of the nicest people I don't think I've ever reached out to anybody in L&D that hasn't given me their time. So luckily, I found a few networking, L&D networking groups, attended and just started attending sessions, looking at what I was interested in and started to kind of put together a plan of how it was going to work. And I needed to do that. At the time, I was being pulled from pillar to post. You know, as soon as you're given this role, I think, you know, people start coming at you with their training requests, don't they? And I was like, if I'm not careful, it's like, oh, could you just sit with so-and-so? They're struggling with X. It's like, I mean, I can. I could probably help them with that, but that's kind of your job, just because I exist. It doesn't mean that you suddenly stop supporting people. It's like, I've got the role, I've got the place in the boardroom. All of my colleagues and peers are reporting on the results, the impact that they've had, and they've got a plan of, this is where we need to land, this is where we are now, this is what worked and what hasn't worked, and this is what we need to do to get there now, and this is what we need to change. And it was a big struggle because I was thinking, this is what I need to be able to do and say at the end of the year, I've got to sit in the boardroom and present some results. Yet right now, people are expecting me to sit with their teams and give them ad hoc advice on how to do certain tasks. First of all, that's not scalable. I can't sit with X amount of people day in, day out and give them advice. And if I and if I get stuck there, then I'm not going to be around.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, it's not the highest value use your time, right? It's reactive. It's tactical. It's bandaid work.

James Swift:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think everyone can kind of, you know, everyone can see it, can't they? And so I really quickly had to define what the role was, what space I was going to play in, and what space everybody else was going to play in. So I had the ability, you know, the remit to kind of like go, well, this is what talent development are going to provide for you. This is what you're going to do as part of that ecosystem.

Michelle Ockers:

So lay that out for me, you know, in terms of what did that look like when you presented that back and said, here's what talent development's here to do and here's everybody else's role and responsibility in that.

James Swift:

Yeah, ok. It was a case of saying no to 90 percent of what we were being asked to do. I had to get a feel of the organisation, what we were about and what was important to us. Ok, so Leyton was at the time, it was high growth and it was developing into new markets. So if you looked at the business model of Leyton to hit those growth targets, in any role, we would have a very high number of people that were in the first six months or first year of their job. Because not only did we hire raw talent or sales and consulting, we also hired managers internally and promoted them into manager positions. So if you looked at the organisation at any point in time, you had a very, very high proportion of people that were in that first six months or year of the job. So we had to really narrow it down and go, okay, because we're hiring high every month, if we can measure, let's define what good looks like in these roles from a new joiner. When does the manager, or when do we say, right, okay, this person is now good enough? What does that look like? How long does it take them to get there? And what are we doing to support them to get there? Because we've got a lot of people coming through this ecosystem, if we can speed that up in some way, shape or form, then we are having an impact on the business. So let's say it currently takes, I don't know, five months for a salesperson to generate 100K in revenue. Okay, well, what if we can make them, we've got 60 people joining in that role, what if we can get that down to four? Okay, great. Well, how long does that take? What do they need to know to get there? And what else? What are the other parameters around that? It's not just billing 100K. You can get lucky and do that from one account. So we can't just have that as the standard. It's 100K from how many accounts, average file of X. So you really have to get deep and get clear with defining what good looks like in that role. And from there, once you've done that, you can then set that learning program and then measure and start getting some data on how long that's currently taking. And then you can go, here's the impact, this is what we're going to focus on.

Michelle Ockers:

Just to ask a couple of clarifying questions there. When you talk about defining what good looks like in the roles, you talked about some of the things you were talking about there were like outcomes, when they can bill 100K over a mix of ex-clients in a

a certain period of time, in terms of, I think you did also talk a little about what are the skills and knowledge that's needed to achieve that, right. So were you defining both what's the outcome and what do they need to be able to do to achieve that outcome? Do you want to give us an example of the distinction there?

James Swift:

Yeah, sure. So always start with the outcome. The outcome is a business metric. Of course, there are layers behind that. But you've got to start with the outcome and what the overall performance metric is in measurable outcomes. And that starts with revenue generation. And you've got to get that super clear, because if good is a consultant, when a consultant bills 100K, that's good. Okay, but hang on a minute. If they bill 50 clients at 2K, would you still be happy with them? Well, no, not really. We wouldn't be happy with that. Okay, well, what would you be happy with? Okay, well, they'd need, well, 100K, and if at least 20% of those were in this bracket, or this size of business, it's like, okay, so now we're getting somewhere. If you need to bill 100K, and that means, you know, 40% of that revenue needs to come from companies that are 300 plus, okay, well, now you're dealing with multiple stakeholders. You're dealing with 30 people to try and get the job done on average. That's a different skill set than dealing with, than billing 50 small companies of 20 people where you're only dealing with one stakeholder. That's a completely different skill set. So you've got to enable that person to go around and navigate stakeholders in a business to get the job done. So I don't think you can have clarity on what skills, capability, knowledge, and all of that stuff, unless you've got absolute clarity on what it is that you want the person to be able to do. And that's what we kind of started to define really, really clearly. And the other problem with that is we had to turn that into a standard and get agreement from it. We had four or five different offices, and you'd find that each manager would have a different idea of what good looks like. So again, it's like, okay, well, you can't really have that. We've got to get standardisation on what good looks like across the business with regards to what is it that we want people to be doing? And that's the starting point. What's the metric? What do they need to do to get there? What's the list of things they need to do? Well, you can see that it's either measurable with data or observable. That's the other thing. You can't measure everything, but it's got to be measurable with the data we currently have, or it's got to be something that you can observe really clearly so that there's no doubt that that person is doing that thing the right way.

Michelle Ockers:

How did you get agreement on that? How did you actually define this list of things people need to be able to do? Who did you have to work with? How did you work through differences of opinion and so on? What did that look like?

James Swift:

Yeah, you're going back a bit now. Yeah, so first of all, I think if you've got agreement on the aim, then it's relatively straightforward. You have to do a full 360 analysis and get everybody's input. And I kind of find that if everybody has an input into that standard, they've been included you know, they're not really too disappointed if the standard isn't exactly what they have said individually, right, so it's about including everybody, it's about getting sign off. You've got to go down to the staff, you've got to observe them, you've got to ask them questions find out why they

do things a certain way and, you then got to go through management, mid-level management, same thing for them. What challenges do you face? What do you want people to be doing? What do you think good looks like? And you've got to go all the way to the top as well and go, right, okay, what does good look like for you? What are you happy with? What do you need people to be doing? And then you gather all of that information and all three or four, and then your own observations as well go into that. And then the data goes into it. So you've done a needs analysis across all of your stakeholders from the top, top-down and bottom-up, we like to call it. We've looked at the data, and we're observing what people are doing and how they're interacting. And then the other part of that that you may want to add into the ecosystem is, where's the industry going? Like the megatrends. What are the big skills that are lacking within the entire industry that we need to account for? And then you build out your framework from that. And when it comes to getting agreement, again, you've got to go around your stakeholders individually, give them a say on it, put it together for them, right? And go, right, okay, this is the current version. What do we need to tweak? And just get them in a room and work it through with them so that it's theirs. But agreeing the metrics is key and going, okay, well, how do we now measure these things? What's that system look like? Do we have this data? Don't we have the data? How do we get there? Can we get the data? Okay, well, the data isn't in the systems. All right, well, how do we get the data in the systems?

Michelle Ockers:

So what was the trickiest part of pulling this picture or framework of what's required for key roles? What was the trickiest part of that?

James Swift:

I think the trickiest bit is where do you make that decision to either keep building it and keep doing it, keep it in that, you know, because there's that thing, isn't there, of like, if you're building something, that's great. But if you're building it, no one's using it. So where's that level where it's actually good enough to launch and get it going? We've got X amount of people. If we just launch this in this format this month, that's X amount of people that are going to benefit from it. And if it works, then let's just test it out, see how it works, gather feedback, and make amendments to it over a period of time whilst it's being used. So that was, I think the trickiest part is to actually go, when do you make the decision to launch it? Stop looking for perfection, get it out there, get it used and do it that way.

Michelle Ockers:

So is this initially for your sales and BD roles or the scope of it, or was it broader than that? Your initial framework?

James Swift:

Yeah, it was broader. So we started with sales because that's, you know, usually the easiest to get some measurements. We started very slowly. We started with a particular team, got proof of concept that that picture worked. Once we'd run it and we could see it working with evidence that it was working, and then all of a sudden I was in the boardroom and my slides were, we've developed this program for this team. The amount of days it takes them to get to X point of meetings attended has been reduced by 20 days per person. Then you've got buy-in and everyone goes,

can I have some of that? And of course, you know, you're going to scale it across the business. But getting buy-in and going with a small group and getting the results is going to help you scale it much more quickly because you don't get any kind of resistance when you start working with other teams. So we started with the sales team, we got proof of concept, and then we scaled it across the consulting team and other areas of the business. In fact, we're still scaling it now. That's the process. When we have a new team, and they're big enough to scale, and we've worked out what good looks like, then we go through that same process.

Michelle Ockers:

So once you define what good looks like, and maybe if we just start with where your start point, which was the sales area, what's your next step? How do you help people to develop good once you've defined what that looks like from a performance perspective? Do you go out and buy a stack of online content, run a sack of courses so they can just get on with it?

James Swift:

Yeah, no.

Michelle Ockers:

I knew the answer to that, of course.

James Swift:

Yeah. No, not a big fan of it. There's a lot, once you've got that standard and you've defined it, you can find that, if it's clearly defined, some people will read it, look at it and go, okay, cool, so that's what I need to do.

Michelle Ockers:

Is that what you found? You just made the framework visible and that was enough for some people to know what good looked like?

James Swift:

Yep, absolutely. It was enough for some people and they would already start going to other people in the business and going, right, this is what I need to learn to do. You're good at it. How do you do it? Can you help me? So that was good enough for some people. When it comes to new joiner programs and defining it for new joiners, that's where you need to go much heavier on what I'd call program design. People need to sit in a classroom, it's a bit more classical isn't it, sit in a classroom, you need to show them what good looks like, take them through the step of learning it, practicing it, build their confidence until they can kind of go live and practice that. But, you know, look, content for me at the time was, here's person X doing it really well. Let's watch them. Let's have a discussion around it. What did they do? Can you do that? What's stopping you from doing that? Well, let's have a practice. Maybe you'll do it a better way. So for me, no, it didn't look like buying a content library. We created best practice ourselves. We observed our good people with them. Yes, of course, we broke that down into a training program over time where we allowed people, we broke the skills down over time and we enabled people to practice that skill. Even with our systems training, it was the same thing. This is what you need to be able to do. You spend some time in the system doing it, practicing it. And for me,

learning is around being as close, getting people as close to the on-the-job performance as possible. So that was our thinking, and that's what I found when it came to even new joiners. Show them what good looks like. Give them an opportunity to try it. They'll land 70, 80% of the way there. Give them some feedback, and they'll get to 90. So we controlled the standard in our training processes, and we made sure everybody reached a level before they went live into the role, and did it that way.

Michelle Ockers:

So one of the things you talked about when we had sort of a conversation in advance of today's recording was the idea of building accountability for learning. Do you want to unpack for me a little bit more about what you mean by that and what that looks like in the context of the kind of approaches you've been talking about?

James Swift:

Yeah, sure. For me, accountability for learning is the biggest thing. It's the thing that has the biggest impact in making a difference and seeing an improvement in performance. And I think we kind of, we take it for granted a bit, or it's very easy, I think, in the world of L&D to say, well, my job is to give them the training, I'm accountable for that. But then it's the stakeholders' role to make sure that they're performing in the job. I think that's the easy way. If you can keep people accountable for the standard, level one would be, don't let them leave the training until they hit the standard. You hold them accountable for that, right? What level are they going to reach in the training room and ever get them to evidence it and they don't leave the training until they've got to a certain level so that you can then say to your stakeholders, I've had this person in for X amount of time and here's the evidence that they can do this to this level. Now they're yours. Take them into the role and take them from that point and your job is to now get them to that extra three or four or five percent. but I've got them from zero to 85 in the training room. You need to get them from 85 to 90, 95 over the next month or so. So if you've got a clear standard, you can then generate accountability. If we really want to scale good, then how do we build that accountability into the infrastructure of the organisation? And that's where it kind of, I thought, how do you go about doing that? And is that a better use of my time?

So we started trialling programs that were just about standard and accountability. Absolutely no learning, no content, no nothing. It was, here's a really clear competency framework which outlines really clearly what it is that you need to be able to do in 10, 13 competencies. I'll be your coach. I'll meet with you once a month. And all I'm going to do in this, you know, I say coach loosely. This is very direct coaching. Because people are, you know, they're moving into a new role. So it's kind of directive learning. And I found that, you know, we do a quick assessment of areas they needed to learn or do. And then every month we'd work on a certain competency. So it might be how to motivate a team. If someone wants to be a manager, okay, one of the things you need to learn about is motivating a team. How do you do it, etc. So that's in the competency framework. Someone's got someone, you know, you've got a coachee or a person on the program, they don't know how to do it. If you simply tell them that that's something that they need to go and learn, and you say, I'm going to meet with you in a month's time and I want to find out what

you've learned, what you've done about it, and what you've tried on the job, and come back to me with some evidence of what you've tried, all of a sudden they've found a way to learn it. They found the learning themselves. They've got their own, they know how they learn. You know, personally, I would say, well, I read this book on the tube on this particular topic, and this is what I did with it. Okay, did it work? Yes, it worked. Okay, great. You know, person number two, same thing, motivating teams, but they would learn it in a completely different way. They'd go, I'd listen to this podcast whilst I was in the gym. All right, cool, okay.

What I found interesting about that program is that there I was developing skills for new managers and I've got absolutely no content. I have provided absolutely no content to these people. All I've provided them with is a clear direction of what they need to learn and I've defined the standard to them of what good looks like to enable them to get that job. And the other thing is around accountability is that we're also saying If you don't get to a level on these 10 skills, then you're not going to be able to go for a manager position. So there's a consequence. A consequence of accountability is what happens if you don't reach this standard? And if you can build that into your ecosystem of development, here's the role, this is what you need to be able to achieve. And here are the really clear skills or things that you need to be able to do to get there. And you can then build that into your development pathways for each job. Again, you will find that people will go and find their own learning and they will learn themselves in their own way, shape, or time. And that was the big thing for me that I kind of thought, as an industry, are we spending enough time in this area? Why is it I've got, you know, you've got 30 stands at a conference and 29 of them are people trying to give me content and it's got to be in my LMS, and I've got to be able to track who's done it and who's learnt it, and that's the most important data I need. It's like, no, no, I don't. What I need to know is, can someone do it? Can they do it on the job? Can they evidence that they can do it on the job?

I thought, the amount of time, energy, and effort that we seem to spend in the industry creating exceptional learning for people, making it a great learning experience, you're putting money into that, you're putting your budget into that, You're spending time trying to make a training course really, really good so someone goes anywhere near it. Whereas if you just do it the other way around and focus on accountability and the standard, no one went into the LMS to find their learning. Someone bought a book. Someone listened to a podcast. I didn't even need to provide the books or the podcast. They went and found them themselves and integrated the learning into their lifestyle. That was the other thing. They didn't want to be sitting at a computer doing a digital course, they'd integrated the learning, it's their lifestyle, and I just thought, that's the epitome for me, is that actually people, they're all adults, they know how to learn, they know how they like to learn, they know when they want to do it, what's their best format, and if you give people complete freedom over that, then all of a sudden, you don't need, so I cancelled, I got roped into buying a content library a couple of times, and I just went, no, I cancelled them. So we don't need any content. I cancelled them and I spent that money on coaching. Because for me, it was the coaching that was making the difference, having a clear accountability, a clear pathway or set of things to do.

So I spent that money on coaching and started using external coaches instead. And again, we found that that was the best way to get results with the amount of people improving their skills moving up through the system and developing their careers. And I think, again, it's linked, right? Why does coaching work so well? You have a person holding you to account at the end of that session saying, what is it you're going to do? What are the two, three things that you're going to do? And you go, I'm going to do these things. And they go, ok, see you in a month. And you don't dare turn up to that coaching session a month later, having not done them.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. It's more direct accountability.

James Swift:

Exactly. And that's when we started going from, ok, we've got a number of people going through training programs. They all say it's great. It's fantastic. They love the training. That's great. All of a sudden, as soon as you start building accountability into the infrastructure of the organisation, you've got real impact and real difference. You've got more people getting better, more people performing to a level, and you've got more people moving through the organisation. So all the big metrics improved. Tenure improved. Turnover improved. You know, went down, if you like. And all the big people metrics that we look at that impact performance, you know, you've got to, if your business needs to perform, if you need your business to perform, you need to keep your people and you need them to be good for as long as possible. So building those standards into the organisation had a much bigger impact on overall business performance and growth of the organisation than when we were, you know, let's say more program focused, if you like.

Michelle Ockers:

You know, with this counter model, which is set the standard, make it clear, make it transparent and hold people accountable for meeting the standard. And they'll figure out the learning supported by that critical element of coaching is how you've gone about it.

James Swift:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

What's the role of managers in all of this at Leyton?

James Swift:

Yeah. So for me, it depends on where the person is in their learning journey. If it's a new joiner, if you've got a new joiner, the L&D team will do a lot of the heavy lifting with regards to getting them to a level, right? We'll take your new joiner for X amount of hours per day, and when you get them back, they can do these things. Your job is to then build them from there to the next level. So the role of the manager is around the environment, it's creating the right environment, it's welcoming the person into the team. These are all things that facilitate great learning. Someone needs to feel like they belong there in the right place. So it's to make them feel comfortable within their team, it's to help and support with getting the right information for them

informally, pointing in the right direction of who to find, who to have conversations with. And, you know, coach, coach, coachie, coachie, coachie, coachie, coach, coach, coach, coach, coach, coach, coach, and coach, and coach again, and coach again, and coach. And it's more around observe, and coach, and doing that whole on-the-job learning ecosystem. That's the role of a manager for me. You have your person. We've got them to a level, you know what that is, now your job is to take them and fine-tune them. That's the role of a manager, is to now go, you've got to tweak this person over time, give them the opportunity to try on the job and get them to that next level, but it's going to take a lot longer to get them from 80 to 82 than it's going to take to get them from zero to 80, if you like. So for me, that's really the role of a manager, is taking it into work, supporting them on the job, giving them feedback, having clear areas where they need to improve and work on, supporting, giving feedback, creating the right environment for them, getting to know their motivations again, where they want to go, supporting with their career path and kind of linking it, linking the rest of the ecosystem together.

Michelle Ockers:

So how do you help managers to be able to do that?

James Swift:

So we build that into our leadership development program. Our leadership development program, we've put, wow, if I think back now, I think we've put, we have some ridiculous statistic, like we put 70% of the organisation through our leadership development program. It focuses on people management and coaching. Three days plus two months of coaching support, and we really grill into the detail of personal development plans, coaching conversations, practicing, giving feedback in the right way, the difference between feedback and coaching, and when one happens, when the other doesn't. How you manage long-term development. So we give our managers the skills. We support our managers to give them the skills to do that, and give them the frameworks. We give them the frameworks for the long-term development plans, etc., so that they are empowered to coach is one of our pillars of leadership at Leyton. We're coaching and supporting our managers on the job to build those coaching skills. And then we can take that further if we want. We've got people doing coaching qualifications. So I would recommend a coaching qualification for a manager over a more general operational leadership qualification, for example, so that we're building those skills over time.

Michelle Ockers:

Yep. And how do you create accountability then for the managers to coach?

James Swift:

Yes, this is a, okay, so if you were, this is something that we've worked hard with the senior leaders. So if you are a manager and you're going for an interview with one of our senior leaders for another role, or you're in your quarterly, you bake it into your quarterly review processes as a manager. So a manager needs to come to their quarterly review with evidence of where their people were, where they're at, and how they got them to that next step. So our senior leaders are holding our managers to account for developing people in our internal people review processes. It's a core pillar of our HR review process.



Michelle Ockers:

So to close out the conversation, James, I want to circle back to a question you were kind of asking yourself and trying to answer shortly after you landed in this talent development role, which was, well, what's my role and responsibility? And what's everybody else's role and responsibility in this talent development space? If you have someone moving into a role as a manager in the organisation who's just new to Leyton and you needed to sit down and have that conversation with them to explain what your role is and what everybody else's role is, be they managers or general workforce members and so on. How would you now explain that?

James Swift:

I'd sit them down and I'd quite simply show them this is the support we provide. This is what you're going to get from us. Equally, this is what you're not going to get from us, and this is where you take over. And this is where the lines are. And I think that the reality is my role, your role, I think anyone in L&D, you can kind of put your stamp on the role and go, this is what I'm going to provide, right? I think what's absolutely important is that you provide that with real clarity, but also outline the things you're not going to do. What's the role of, this is what we're going to provide, and this is what we're going to do. This is what you're going to do in the people development ecospace. And this is what you're going to get. So that's what I would do. How I would describe it, I'm not sure I can describe it because I'd have to sit down with them for a couple of hours and walk them through so they were absolutely clear on what it was that people are gonna get their role, etc. But I think that's the bit for me is, be absolutely clear on what it is you're not doing, as well as what you are doing.

Michelle Ockers:

So clarity and boundary setting alongside accountability are some of the key ideas I'm taking away from this conversation, James. Is there anything you'd like to add to round out the conversation?

James Swift:

I think the only thing to kind of add is that if you're, listen to the world of L&D, right? Find out what people are doing, but then don't negate listening to your own organisation and actually observing how people learn in your organisation, right? Find out what they're already doing. Find out how they, before you go and create something, find out how people are already getting that information, because people are very, very good at shortcutting learning, right? If there's a way to shortcut it, we will, because it takes time, energy, and effort to learn. So you need to work on those high-impact, high-effort things, like building skills, etc. It takes time, energy, and effort. But yeah, really clarify how people are learning in the role right now, and you may find that half the stuff you think you need to do is actually already happening without you. So why do you need to step in and own it? Would be my advice.

Michelle Ockers:

I think that's fantastic advice for anyone either new to L&D or moving into a new organisation. And really, you know, the advice is just take a look around you, understand how learning is already happening, what you can amplify, what you just need to leave alone because it's working well and where to focus your effort. Thank

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you so much, James, for that conversation. And I really, for me, that key idea about setting the standard, making it really clear and holding people accountable to meet the standard and giving them lots of choice in learning to make their own way through that is what stood out for me. Really appreciate you sharing that experience, James.

James Swift:

OK, thank you, Michelle. Thank you for having me on the podcast. It's been an absolute pleasure.



Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

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About your host, Michelle Ockers



Michelle is the co-founder and Chief Learning Strategy at Learning Uncut. She is an 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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