

Michelle Ockers:

Welcome back for another Learning Uncut conversation. I'm happy to be joining you from the lands of the Brinja Yuin people. Michelle, whose lands are you joining us from?

Michelle Parry Slater:

The Kombumerri people.

Michelle Ockers:

And our guest, Peter Brace?

Peter Brace:

Meanjin people.

Michelle Ockers:

Thank you very much. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country wherever we sit and you sit today as you listen to this episode and their connections to land, sea and country. So we're joined today by Peter Brace from Sodexo Australia. And of course, Michelle Parry Slater is joining as our now regular co-host on Learning Uncut, which I'm rather excited about. Michelle, it's great to have you here with us on the journey. This is going to be a great conversation. And I think people are going to find that, Peter, maybe doesn't fit the mould of a traditional L&D person. Peter, really curious to let listeners know a little bit about your background and how you came to be working in learning and development. And I think it's the first time I've heard a guest tell me that they were teaching under a tree in Papua New Guinea. So can you give us a little bit of your background and tell us how did you come to be teaching under a tree in Papua New Guinea?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, no, thanks for that. I suppose my background started in the military. I left school at 17, joined the military, did my four years there. From there, I got a taste of training there or an insight into it and started developing my skill set there. Moving on from that, I'll shorten it right up, but I effectively have worked in the FIFO, so fly-in, fly-out space for quite a number of years, nearly 30 years now. I worked across a range of different industries in that space, and then obviously PNG was a big part of that work in there. Just really had a lot of exposure to different delivery environments, so I've been fortunate enough to work across the corporate space very briefly, and then spent a lot more time in the operational development space.

Michelle Ockers:

You've left me hanging on the tree in Papua New Guinea, Peter.

Peter Brace:

Yeah, I think there's just periods of time and anyone that's worked in any of these countries and particularly up in the highlands and other areas will know that power outages are regular. So, you know, your nice air conditioned training room evaporates very quickly when that happens. So quite often you're left to go and find a more suitable place to deliver the training. So quite often that is under a nice shady tree or a coconut palm. And it's been a really good, I suppose, development piece for me because it takes it back, strips it right back to the simple basics. You don't have all that technology available. You're doing it without PowerPoints. So you've got to think on your feet and you've got to quickly deliver training that has effect, is practical, has practical application and can be understood as well because you're dealing with different learning levels, different levels of education of those that are participating in it. Understanding is different, so you've got to come up with unique and varied ways to get your messaging across.

Michelle Ockers:

It's so interesting. And Michelle, I think it's always good as a facilitator to have a backup plan, but I wonder how many people actually have a backup plan for no power, no building. What are your thoughts on the backup plan?

Michelle Parry Slater:

We always do need a backup plan. I always say be flexible, not determined. And Peter, I think that's the most flexible you can be. You've just got to take it outside. You've got to sit under the tree. You know, absolutely got to have the opportunity to think on your feet as a facilitator and you've definitely demonstrated that for us today.

Peter Brace:

Yeah and I've found that I've carried that over into my careers since working in those countries as well so even when I'm teaching in a like a corporate environment or a you know a rented training facility, I really make it a point, and particularly if I'm teaching a course that goes over a period of time, I make it a point every day to start off by going outside and going to a different space. It's a great opportunity to reflect on the previous day's training. If I'd use a perfect example, I was doing some training in Adelaide quite a number of years ago, and there was a park next door. So every morning, we'd just go for a walk around the park together. It only takes five minutes, but it was a great opportunity to reflect, you know, start the day on a nice energised momentum, but also just to have those relaxed conversations about what we learned, what the issues are, if anything needs clarification. So, you know, a lot of those things that I've learned working in those environments have definitely transferred over well to what we do now. And we've incorporated a lot of it into the courses that we run now to make things very interactive for people.

Michelle Parry Slater:

I think it's hugely important that we think really carefully about our environment that we're doing our learning in. And certainly anyone who's listening here from the UK will know that the day that the teacher says let's go out on the field and have our lesson out there. Every kid remembers that because it happens so rarely because of course it's always raining. I can say that. But we do remember that because it's

different. And when something is novel, the brain likes novelty after all. So when something's novel, but I think there's also something in using the environment and the space that you have. I know you'll talk about this as well. You're not a big fan of PowerPoint, but so many facilitated sessions are PowerPoint at the front, chairs, classroom-type environment, and that can trigger some bad memories for people who didn't have the luxury of going out on the field. Talk us a little bit more, Peter, about how you've changed the learning environment.

Peter Brace:

Yeah, a hundred percent. So if I give an example, if I pick playing on site or remote site and doing training for the staff is a good example of this. A big part of what we do, if I give you an example from our space, is that we have three checks for safety where we go around and we make an assessment about, you know, the safety of the task we're going to do or the area that we're going to be working in. I think traditionally we've turned up to site, we've stood in this room and we have, you know, stood there and just preached to them, but now we've really changed the focus on going out and actually practically looking at the space. So we'll go out, for example, to a loading dock. If we're doing three checks for safety on our loading dock, we'll physically go out there, split them into four groups, say, you've all got the same task, but here's a different time of the year, here's a different weather conditions, get them to go off and separately have those discussions, fill out that three checks for safety, then bring them back. This can take five, you know, it could take 10 minutes. It's not a long thing, bring them back and then have a collective discussion about the variables and how the variables affect the outcomes and the process over the course of the day. A really quick way to do it, a really powerful way to do it, it really gets people thinking. And you know that thought process then cascades into the next time they're doing that task. What time of day is it? What's the weather like? Because the weather makes such a difference in our environments, particularly working in rain, you know, oppressive heat. We range across, you know, across the country. It could be down at the Snowy Mountains and you're in, you know, six meters of snow and it's minus five degrees. And then we've got teams up in the Pilbara and, you know, 45 degree heat, fairly dry. And then you go up to Weipa and you're at 38 degrees and you've got 98% humidity. So the requirements that our staff have across the country and the thought they need to give to their environment and how it affects their day-to-day is really important. And we need to really sort of ram that home. And the best way to do that is to do those practical exercises, get them out there and stand in the heat and talk about the heat.

Michelle Ockers:

So, Peter, can you tell us a little bit more about this fly-in, fly-out nature of work and the workforce with a focus on Sodexo? So what does Sodexo do in Australia and what does that then mean for the nature of the workforce and this idea of fly-in, fly-out, which some listeners may not be familiar with?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, of course. So Sodexo in Australia, we have over 5,000 employees across the country. We're focused mostly in the energy and resources space. We do some other integrated work, but it's mostly there. We look after things like we do diverse

activities such as food services, facilities maintenance, cleaning, aerodrome, concierge, security, bus driving. We holistically provide a service to mining camps is probably the easiest way to explain that. We do have other segments that do corporate strategic accounts and both onshore and offshore as well. But that's probably the main focus of our business. We deliver services to 25,000 plus energy and resources workers daily across the country. So it's quite a large organisation. And we cover a large coverage across Australia. We have sites all across Australia.

What it means for the FIFO, so FIFO is fly in, fly out. So if I use Western Australia as a good example, a lot of mining concentrated up north in the Pilbara. So majority, like all of our staff will fly out of Perth up to site and then, you know, provide the services up there at the various camps. On the east coast, up in central Queensland, we have DIDO as well, so drive in, drive out, you know, that makes it interesting to work with the staff or more so from an induction point of view to prepare people for that lifestyle, it is a big shift. If you've been working Monday to Friday, five days a week, getting your weekends off and suddenly you're you know, doing two weeks on, working every day, you know, you're in remote locations. It's a very overwhelming experience as a new employee to come into that environment.

So we talk about that induction, you know, some camps are 2000 people up and some are 2000 people down, but you've got camp life. How does that operate? You then move into, you've got to understand your role on site. You've got to understand the team you're working with. You then have to live with that team. You are separated from family for a period. So you sort of lose that connection to home as well. So it's certainly not for everyone, but if you can manage that, it's a really enjoyable and it's a gratifying role. And you get very immersed with your team. You become like a second family because you are spending so much time with them. You are working and living in that space. So now, probably having come from that industry myself for so many years, we're really focused on how do we best set people up to ensure that we have retention, but also just make sure that that transition into that role is as realistic and as comfortable as possible.

Michelle Ockers:

So Peter, you're a great brand ambassador here. I can see people thinking now about, oh, should I be encouraging someone in my family to sign up for this? What percentage of new starters are brand new into FIFO, so just haven't lived this lifestyle before?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, I'm not putting any stats on this. This is just randomly me looking at the induction that comes through. I would say probably 70 to 80% of the people that come through are new to the FIFO experience. It can be a really rewarding role. It's not an easy role. I'm not going to pretend it is. It's a lot of hard work. You're in some fairly arduous conditions at times. That remoteness away from family and events, you know, like every role that involves travel and distance, you certainly, you miss out on things, you know, you miss out on birthdays, anniversaries, family events. So you've got to be aware of that as well. So there's certainly a psychological safety piece to that as well, that making sure people are prepared for that, but also, you

know, have the mechanisms in place as an organisation to help people through those periods as well. So that's a big part of what we focus on across the organisation.

Michelle Parry Slater:

Peter, what led you to develop the Operational Development Academy? And when we, I've become aware of you because you won an award for that and deservedly so. So I'm really curious for you to share what was the problem that you were trying to solve in the first place?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, I arrived at Sodexo two and a half years ago and I came in, took over the training team and sat down and just looked at the training we're delivering and assessing it. And then further to that, I spent a lot of time on site looking at what our requirements were, what was the end state of where these new employees were going to be. So what did that actually look like when they landed on site? What sort of skill set did they need? So lots of assessing that across the country as well I was fortunate enough and have a great management team that were very encouraging about travel across the country, understand our business very specifically, and then make some changes. So we did that and the delivery that was there prior was probably more of a, it was a six-hour induction course and it was a lot of just being given a volume of information. And you know, some really valuable information, but there just wasn't the retention there of the knowledge that was being shared. And that was quite visible on site. You go out to site and you talk to people, come off the induction course, and hey, you know, and you just ask about subjects. There was just no retention. And that's not surprising. You know, you've got people who are brand new to the industry, it's a large volume of information. As I said, this whole process is overwhelming. So you generally can't be surprised to get two weeks into their first rotation and have a chat with them and be surprised they've forgotten a lot of information.

So one of the gaps that we noticed with that particularly was around the safety. Safety is everything. Zero harm is our goal. So safety is everything in our industry. So there was a real focus and a real gap, I suppose, in the retention of information around safety, understanding how that applied from day to day in the workplace, and about making sure that not only were they safe, but those around them were safe as well. So we had to sit down and have a serious think about, was it working? And it wasn't, it clearly wasn't. In saying that, the information being shared was good. There was a portion of people that felt really prepared, but there's also a lot that weren't. And I think it was assessing that demographic, like who's coming through. We get a lot of people coming through that are sort of transient as far as being on work visas and looking for opportunities to move into this space. Their levels of learning and understanding are different levels based on their culture, upbringing, education. So it was like, how do we address that? How do we instil that safety consideration particularly? So did you want me to go in and talk about how we did that?

Michelle Parry Slater:

It's always useful to get some practical information. So yeah, please do feel free to share that.

Peter Brace:

So, what we did firstly was strip out what the various aspects of the information was being given. The big piece, as I said, was safety. So, what we chose to do was separate that as its own session. So, we reduced the time as well, but what we made that was completely interactive and aligned it to a day at site as well. So, if I give an example, they come in for their first day, first thing we do is fit them out with a uniform. So, they get to put their uniform on, wear it for the day, which makes you feel engaged with the company, makes you feel part of the role already. It's great to have that instant sort of introduction.

When we bring him into the training room, you know, congratulations on joining Sodexo. And then we straight into, you know, consider me your manager for today. This is what the day would assume. So please stand up, let's have a look at how you're dressed. And then we just have those discussions around you know, why is it important that we do our boots up properly? You know, why is it important that we've got our shirt tucked in? Why is it important that we, you know, are we following these safety? And then we go into what we call pre-start boards. So every morning on every site, we have a pre-start session where we discuss any safety issues or any activities that are going to be done for the day and then how we best prepare for those. So we go straight into that process with them. So that's getting them to stand up, go over to the board, start having those discussions. It's certainly about teaching them the process of the, of the pre-start, but what it really is about is getting them to have those conversations about safety and hear from their experiences.

And then our facilitators will, rather than tell them what they should be understanding, we actually pose questions to them and get them to start thinking about the perspective from the perspective of safety. It's been a big shift in the way we do it. And for the next four hours, they barely sit back down. Which is a great thing, you know, it's to keep them active, keep them moving. We move them around the room to various stations. We cover all the subjects of safety that we want to cover. Each element builds on the previous element and each discussion deepens. And the concept is that by the time we get towards the end of the day, we start posing questions that we're getting answers to that incorporate everything we've discussed over that four hours. And you can really see a huge shift in that understanding the application, particularly of these, you know, taking this theory and making it a practical application. So, if I give you a good example from us is we have what we call a stop work authority card. So, there's a red card, stop work authority. So, if they're going to move forward with any task on site, and they deem that the conditions aren't right, or it feels unsafe to do this task, then they have the authority to call stop on that. And then we will discuss it as, or the team will discuss it as a collective, find a safe way to do it and move forward safely. So, in our previous induction, we used to talk about this particular card, but what we never gave them was the tools to actually use it. Because as you can imagine, being a new person on site with a new peer group, it's difficult to have that voice and to say these things. But

we've really worked hard on allow giving them practical examples and allowing them to practice that so that when they get to site they feel comfortable having those conversations and yeah we're showing them how to have those conversations in a respectful manner and and if it's not being listened to, then they can escalate there.

The great thing about those cards is that Keith Weston, our managing director for Sodexo Australia, his email and phone number are on there. So if anything has been escalated and it's not being listened to, or there's any roadblocks to this, then they have the option. And we've had people use it to go directly to Keith and point out some of these safety things that will obviously be dealt with fairly swiftly, a great initiative from the business as well. And it's an easy thing to support with that zero-hour mindset that we've all got. It's easy to get people motivated if they understand the why. And we use that a bit in the conversation as well. One of our opening conversations is about why are you here? What's your why? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing FIFO work? Why are you taking this opportunity? And it relates to family, finances, everything. There's always an answer and we get them to write that on a post-it note. We stick it up on the board and we actually keep that all week. So every group that comes in over the course of the week, we keep those post-it notes. And it's a great opportunity for reflection, not only for us as a team, but also each of the groups that comes through over the course of the week and reflect on what other people, what their why is. And we refer back to that why throughout the whole session.

So, you know, if it's around, you know, obviously being safe to get home to see your family, no one wants to have an injury, which would ruin your career, sports, social life, whatever it is. So it's really focusing on why the safety is important, because it's easy to stand up there and talk about safety. You've just got to give it, you've got to give it a reason. You've got to make it important to them. It's got to be individualised and it's got to be important to them and to their families. So, and that's another big part of our conversation is, you know, you've learned all this stuff today. You're going to go off in this amazing career, but consider your family as well. You're separated from your family. They're going to be left to manage the tasks that you potentially have been doing. So, have you had that conversation with your family? Do they understand what's coming, the separation, how the mechanism works? So, what we give as facilitators is incredibly important. Not only for them, but their family as well, is to give some surety around their safety, their lifestyle and mental health while they're on site as well. So it's a big piece, big responsibility as a team.

Michelle Parry Slater:

So much to unpack there. It's like a masterclass in all of the things that we should be doing. And what I'm loving particularly hearing is how much belonging and inclusion you are putting into this, the fact that they're wearing their uniforms from the beginning, the beautiful experiential learning, they're part of that family from the day they walk in the door, not when they go to site, not when they're separated from their actual family. And I'm more than sure that that's having a massive impact on how they're retaining that information, because they're literally walking through their new life, aren't they, in your training environment, which is a safe space that you're creating for them. So thanks so much for sharing that.

Michelle Ockers:

I was just going to comment, I came across a new term this week, listening to a different podcast, This Working Life, the idea of psychosocial safety, which Peter, you may already be familiar with, I'm not sure. But legislation was passed, I think about 12 months ago in Australia that extended workplace health and safety responsibilities to psychosocial safety. And some of the things you're talking about here was, you know, have you had that conversation with your family, working through what's the experience going to be like of this lifestyle and it not just being about physical safety. That's a really important aspect that we need to be sure to embrace where there are certain elements that could create and discomfort or have an impact on people's psychological and emotional well-being. So well done on picking up on that. Is that something that you very consciously designed in, Peter?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, 100%. Sodexo has done an amazing job, actually. They've got a program called Start Program, actually, Safe, Trusting and Respectful Teams, which we've developed around psychological safe and healthy workplaces. Our HSE team has led the way in that. It's gone from being a countrywide initiative to now being utilised across Sodexo globally, which is an amazing reflection of the culture that we're developing here and that safety culture, particularly from the team. So, that's something that we started, the organisation and the team started here. The HSE team led this is now going to be rolled out globally across the next stage. That's a fantastic initiative that started here. We're really fortunate in Australia as an organisation that because of the unique environment that we work in, that we have had quite a few initiatives that we've started here for our own environment that have now gone global, which is pretty special considering we're such a small part of a very, very large organisation.

Michelle Ockers:

Peter, I believe there were some things that used to be done as part of somebody's onboarding out on site that you've now brought in to be done as part of their formal onboarding training before they head out to site for the first time. Can you talk to us a little bit about some of those activities and why you decided to bring them into a training environment rather than leave them to be done on site?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, I think it's particularly around the skills space, so like around your housekeeping, chef and utility sort of roles. That's where we've started. We've got plans to expand that into other areas, but it's definitely difficult there because they go to site and under the previous process, they would go to site and then you get a buddy or you get someone to team up with and you just start learning your job, follow along type training. The issue with that is effectively as an organisation, because of the pace, we knew that it's a dynamic environment. We really want staff to be landing and being already at a fair point already within their developments. They can just start participating and support the team straight away.

So every time we have someone land on site, if they're not getting close to being ready, then we've got to take another staff member out to spend time with them and that delays the quantity of completion around tasks that we're doing all day. So, we focused on making sure that we sort of developed that skill set as best we can prior to them landing on site. So, what we've started doing is running, once again, practical courses in regards to, you know, if I use housekeeping as a good example of that. So, just running them through the practical application of what their task is, explaining what their task is, what equipment we use, how we use it, how you do that safely. And that feeds once again back into that safety essentials piece from the day before and it's that application of it. The other part of that is SOPs, standard operating procedures around what the safety requirements are for each task, each piece of equipment. You know, they're landing on site and previously they're being asked to sit there and, you know, read all those and try and make to read a document and then try and understand how that practically applies can be difficult at times. So by us taking them visually and practically through that process, it just gives us a greater level of understanding. And then we will complete those SOPs while they're at our training venue. And that way, when they land on site one, that piece of administrative work is done. And also they're a lot further along the path to being ready to be fully operational before they land on site. So that's been a big shift for us.

Michelle Parry Slater:

Can we talk a little bit about the development of this? Because this is very different than, you know, potentially what's happened before. And in other organisations, people might be listening to this thinking, well, you know, we sit there with our PowerPoint and we tell them stuff. This is definitely not your experience here. How did you make that shift? You know, talk me through a little bit about how did you get stakeholders on side? And then your team, you know, how did they make the shift from being that sort of sage on the stage to now just, you know, sort of facilitating, you talked earlier about sort of asking questions, that's a coaching approach. How did that shift come about?

Peter Brace:

What we did was when we looked at redeveloping, we looked at what's our end goal. Our end goal was to support site by delivering staff that are fairly highly trained in skill set or have at least have a base level understanding of their skill set. The expectations, that safety piece was big. We wanted them to have a really thorough understanding of safety. So when they land on site, any further training that's delivered is just a reinforcement of that and a further development of that. And it was around developing that safety piece around that mindset. What I was looking for is that every time they did any task moving forward, or even just moving around the site, or even as part of their travel and day-to-day life, that safety aspect was a thought process in everything they did and every action they did. That was the piece we're trying to embed. You can tell people to be safe, but you need to get them to self-address that, think about it in what they're doing. That was chasing the end goal. So what's our end goal? What's our purpose of this training? What do we want to see these people at the end have? And then we worked our way backwards. How do we best get those outcomes?

And the shift for the team has been large because they have gone from standing up front effectively, the majority of the team that we've got in Western Australia have all come from site, so they all understand the operation. They all understand that fully. They've all worked in roles there for various periods of time. So they have a good knowledge of sites, and it's easiest to deliver information if you understand it. But there's also a catch-22 because you become so used to the terminology, you forget to explain it in detail. You're not looking at it through a learner's lens, you're looking through it through a facilitator and operational operator's lens. So, a big part of, I think, the thing that I've focused on across my career and a lesson I learned many years ago was really to look at every session and sit in every session that's been facilitated and look at it through a learner's lens. So, even down to critiquing, what did you say? So, if they use an acronym to go, okay, look around the room and notice that 10 people in the room didn't understand what you just said. So, go back and address that. I think it's a gap that I watch so many trainers across so many industries as I've traversed it have.

It's easy to get caught up in talking about our industries and forgetting that the person we're talking to has no comprehension and people are reluctant to ask. We always sit there and say, oh, if you've got a question, ask it, because there's no silly questions in that. But what do you do when the whole room's not asking? So you've got to circumvent that by being on the front foot and explaining and giving good examples of what we're talking about. And then the other piece for me is relating it back to real life. I talked about the demographic we're getting through now. For those that have had exposure to the safety model, the Swiss cheese model, which is a making sure that we have mechanisms in place to stop the holes in a Swiss cheese lining up and, you know, a safety incident happening. So we're having difficulty explaining that because it's easy to stand there and say, you know, Swiss cheese, but it doesn't mean anything to a lot of people. So it was like, how do we apply that? So one of the mechanisms we've used is applied to roadworks. Majority of people have driven on roads. They've been to roadworks, they've had to stop, whether it be for lights, people there with a sign, cones, whatever. So we open that up as a conversation and just talk about, well, what would happen if we removed the lights? What would happen if we removed the cones? What happens if people weren't wearing safety helmets or high-vis? And that is relatable. That's actually something that tangibly people understand.

And then that applies back to what we're talking about. So it's been a big shift for the facilitation team in that they've gone from talking about operational experience and knowledge to actually having to facilitate conversations and make them applicable, relevant, and also have impact as well. And that's a big shift for any trainer. I've got to be honest, in my career, it's taken me 30 years to get to what I think is a reasonable level of competency in that. But it's a complete shift in mindset. It's thinking about what the learner's start point is. And as I keep saying to the team, at the end of the day, I'm up there talking, I know my content, I know it intimately. What I'm looking for is the reactions. I'm looking for that lack of understanding, that acknowledgement, whatever it may be. And the other thing is I'm looking for those people that aren't participating because I need them to participate because on site, and when they get into the role, they have to participate. So, you know, we've got to

find respectful ways to draw them into the conversation and have them participate in that. So, a good example, that's that pre-start board.

What used to happen is our training team would get up and actually start talking and drawing on the board. So, we've cut that out. So we just stand back now and we do the conversation or do the questioning and we let them move around. A different person takes an opportunity to be a scribe. Another person takes an opportunity to pose the questions. We let them lead the task and we just facilitate the task itself. Because we know they're going to land on site and do pre-start once, twice, three times a day for the next however many years they're working in FIFO. So we don't need to teach the process in detail. They're going to learn that pretty quickly because they're going to watch other people and experts do it every day. We just need them to be engaged in that process and actually considering that safety piece. So that's been a big switch for our training team or our facilitators. And probably the definition I always give, it's going from training to facilitating. I personally made that shift many years ago and we are like, there's so much value in facilitating a session. There's so many times in my experience that the knowledge is in the room, you just have to draw it out. Instead of standing up there telling people what the answer is, ask them what the answer is, they know. And it's putting it in a relatable manner that allows them to reach those aha moments is what I say to the team all the time. I'm looking around the room for people to have aha moments where they go, wow, that makes sense. I connect with that, I'll utilise that.

Michelle Ockers:

Peter, listening to you talk about this shift for people from being trainers to facilitators, That's actually quite a big shift for many people, particularly if they've been training for a long time. There are issues around identity, comfort zones, level of control, predictability that come in. How have your trainers, now facilitators navigated that. What's been difficult about that shift for them?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, 100%. It's not an easy transition. It's a lot, it really is a lot. It's sort of, as I said, taken me years to, I suppose, do it myself and do it comfortably. I think the mindset is that observation piece. It's thinking about your outcomes more so than thinking about the information you're delivering. All my team knows their stuff intimately. And it's getting them to realise that you don't need a learner's guide, you know your stuff. And this probably started for me in my career back when I was working in operational environments where we'd have operational changes overnight. So we'd have a set structure and a course, and it could be PowerPoint-driven. And we would have an operational shift overnight. So, they would come to me overnight and go, hey, Pete, we don't do that process like this anymore, we do it like this. So, we don't have time to update the instructor guides. So, we just have to make that change on the fly and deliver. And that was my first exposure to this. Difficult to do, but then I realised the effect it was having and the positive effect was by being able to learn to share that information in a practical manner and just do it really quickly and directly and have outcomes from it. And that's where my mindset started to shift around the way we're doing things and PowerPoints became less and less. As you've

mentioned, I'm not a fan of PowerPoints at all. I think there's a hundred other ways we can get our point across.

Michelle Ockers:

How do you support them as their leader? What have you found most effective to support people who may be getting a little bit stuck with that transition?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, so what we've been doing is we've been like, I could go over to the venue quite often and it's just sharing my experience as well. So I sit in the room and then look at what they do deliver and then we just talk about it as a collective. Say, okay, you delivered the message this way, is there a different way we could have delivered that? Is there another analogy that we could have used? Is there another example that might be more applicable? And as a collective, we have those discussions. So it's continuous coaching, it's ongoing development, and it's a bit of self-directed coaching on their behalf as well, empower the team to, you know, as I keep saying to the team, yep, you've been in operations, I respect that, you've got an incredible amount of knowledge, but if you're going to come into the learning and development team, then my expectation is this is your profession, so you need to work hard at it, you need to add to your skill set, it's just, you know, I call it tools in the toolbox, you need to be doing your research, you need to be focused on this as a career, I think, and I'm certainly not saying Sodexo, it's not the case here, but other organisations I've worked at, you know, at times, the training team has been a fallback position for people. They're like, okay, well, I want something a bit easier now, so I'll go and jump into the training team, that's easy, I've just got to stand up and talk.

That's not who I want in my training team. I want people that are driven, motivated. The expectation in the industry has changed and should have, and market licks. But we need industry professionals in the teams that are driven about what they're doing, they're consistently looking to learn, they're practicing. We've taken the opportunity to go and visit some other clients' training teams and have a look at the way they're doing it, you know, just looking at what's out there and what's new and what's sort of cutting edge, what different thought processes are out there, ways of doing things, you know, research, research, research. So there's so much great information out there now with the internet that there's just no excuse for not having a really solid understanding of, you know, of facilitation techniques and you know, what's available to you. And the biggest thing is to be free to try. You've just got to have the opportunity to be free to try and I keep saying that to them. The years that we've spent doing this and what we've learned is from trial and error. There is no perfect way because every group is different. Every person within that group is different. Some of your techniques will work for other, for some groups that won't work for others. So have a toolbox of conversations and motivators and ways to bring the conversation back to where you want it, to realign. Have a toolbox of skills to do that and then apply them in the right context with the right group. But it takes time to build that knowledge.

Michelle Ockers:

Great example of setting professional standards for the team, Peter, and supporting them to get there and creating the right environment. Thanks for sharing that.

There's something you haven't talked about. This is induction, right? What about e-learning, Peter? Where's e-learning in this mix? What's going on here? That's the click next quiz at the end.

Peter Brace:

Yeah. So e-learning, we certainly use it. We use it for our pre-onboarding modules, that essential stuff that every employee needs to know and needs to understand around codes of conduct and requirements. And we certainly introduce all these subjects there. But yeah, I think across the course of my career, I just have watched learning management systems definitely have their place and there is a lot of good learning out there. But I'm going to be quite honest here, I think as an industry, we've relied on that a bit too much and we've sort of turned it into a tick and flick exercise. And I find that quite frustrating at times. Yeah, I think that we've become to be a bit reliant on it. And I suppose, you know, organisationally for some organisations, it's easy because it financially makes sense from an L&D perspective. And, you know, at the end of the day, we're talking about businesses are in the business of doing business. So, I understand that. But I think if we're genuine about developing our staff, and then we need to spend the money and the time to, you know, to train them, give them the skills, develop the mindset and the culture that we want as an organisation, and that has to be an investment. And so learning management systems definitely 100% have their place, really good material out there. Not convinced it's the solution for every problem in L&D.

Michelle Parry Slater:

I think you're being hugely respectful, Peter. Let's call a spade a spade. Some of it's just terrible, let's face it. And your way of welcoming people to, you know, you just used the word there, culture. You're welcoming people to your organisation to say, this is who we are and this is who we need you to be. Especially, as you said, so many of them are new to FIFO. You know, they've got expectations and who knows what they are, but you're really meeting them in such a practical way. It's just a beautiful story to hear. But I am curious, there's no point doing learning unless it actually works, unless it has some impact. Some of the problems that you identified earlier that you were solving, people weren't remembering, you mentioned about attrition, the opportunity for people to settle and to embrace this new lifestyle, those were the problems. Well, has this new way of coaching or being very practical of welcoming people with your belonging type approach? Has it worked?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, 100%. We only introduced this in just before May. So it's only been for a short period, realistically, with a lot more to go. But as far as contributing to retention rates have definitely or attrition rates have definitely decreased, which has been amazing across this period. The other piece is, and once again, it's that on-the-ground feedback going out to site. The feedback from site managers has been phenomenal in just that people are landing prepared, understanding the safety piece, integrating into the team a lot quicker, picking up those skills a lot quicker, being a valuable

member of the team at a much faster rate, which is just a fantastic thing. And at the end of the day, that was the end goal. So I suppose I feel quite justified in the fact that we've made this development given that these are the outcomes we're getting. And it's tangible feedback as well. You can have all the surveys, all the data in the world, but it's that tangible feedback directly from the people that actually matter or who have a direct involvement at the end. The end result is really what matters for me. And this has been a big shift from where we were to where we are now. And we've got so much further to go. Of course, this is just what I call baby steps and what I would like to see over the coming years. But it's certainly been a marked change in outcomes, which has been really good. And from a personal perspective, getting out to site, having those same knowledge check questions on new people and just getting completely different answers. It's been fantastic.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, lots of great signals there that you're drawing on that things are shaping up well with the program, Peter. So May, that's about seven months that the new program's been in place. Is there anything you've adjusted in that time based on what you've seen working or not working?

Peter Brace:

Yeah, we've made some small changes to the program, and it was just probably some of our concepts originally around, or some of our practical examples we've probably shifted based on just watching the groups and going, okay, they really got that, or they connected with that, or they didn't quite connect with that. If I use a good example as the manual handling, we're doing a couple of manual handling techniques, which probably came over from our old way of doing it, but we consulted with our SME in that area within the business, out of the safety division, and we've certainly improved some of those practical aspects, which has been really good. It's a never-evolving process, and it will change and continue to evolve as the business evolves. We've added new contracts in the last 12 months, two years, so our dynamic nationally has changed, our environment nationally has changed, so we need to think about that with our delivery as well. Probably the other big piece of that is we have grown as a business at quite a rate, particularly over the last few years. You know, mobility across the country has increased exponentially. So it's also being aware that we have to definitely have a national purpose and a national training framework and making sure that it's consistent across the country. But giving, you know, localised consideration to the environments people are working in, but that framework overall needs to remain at a national point, which is, you know, always challenging because everyone wants, you know, the contracts want a fair bit of specificity, which you can't blame them for, but how do we balance that with delivering really positive outcomes, but also making sure that it's consistent across the organisation.

Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So, Peter, we always like to wrap up with some practical advice and tips for other listeners. And I think the big story here is moving away from PowerPoint and teaching to facilitation. So, for other L&D professionals, maybe individuals in these kind of roles, or they could be L&D leaders with a team who they want to create this

shift in. What are your key tips to support either yourself if you're a trainer wanting to become a more confident facilitator or a leader with a team that you want to help to make that shift? What are the key pieces of advice or tips you would give someone in that position?

Peter Brace:

I think the big one for me is understand what you're trying to deliver and get out and talk to the people. That's the biggest piece for me. And the thing that I've seen not done well over the years is everyone has an idea on what we should be doing. Everyone has a thought on what the outcome will look like. I think the biggest piece is to get out, talk to the people on the ground. And I mean, don't do a VIP visit. You're not the star of the show, go out. So what we do is when we go out and do these conversations, yes, we support service, we can sit in the senior level. We wear the uniform that our utilities wear, and we go out and we interact with them. We sit down, we help them. Housekeepers will help them make beds. We will help clean dishes in the kitchen. We actually get in and do the tasks that they're doing and talk to them and interact with them. So, we understand what their needs are because executive management will have what they think the needs are. Every level of management down, supervisors, the staff on the ground will have a thought on what it should be. But really, the gap, I suppose the gold is in there, in between there somewhere. And it's our job to dig that out and find the find the elements that actually make this training impactful. But my big advice to everyone is just get out and connect with your team. I've watched so many times across my career. We send out surveys. Great. We have data. Great. Certainly impactful. There's a lot to take from all that. But you cannot beat connecting with the team, regardless of industry. And I've been fortunate enough to traverse across quite a few industries now. You just can't beat connecting with a team. It builds credibility in what you're developing. It builds ownership, you know, people feel a lot more involved in the training if they've had a part in its development. It's easier to send stuff to people and then be shocked when they don't have the uptake or they're not invested in it. But if you utilise them to give you the information and the outcomes, then you're going to get a lot more buy-in on what you're delivering.

Michelle Ockers:

I love the whole get into their world and ground the work, or ground the learning in the real world of their work. Just thinking of you standing there washing dishes alongside someone who's working in your kitchen at one of the sites. It just reminds me of a conversation I had back on episode 130, September 2023, with Dustin Lacasse, who works at San Diego Zoo. And he talked about mucking out the faeces from the animal cages alongside workers, you know, as part of him learning about their world. So rolling your sleeves up and getting in there and really getting a taste of the work and the world and the work environment that your learners are operating in so you can meet them where they're at and make sure the learning works for them. I love the practical focus. Any rounding out comments, any final thoughts, Michelle Parry Slater?

Michelle Parry Slater:

I have got so many things that you could take away from this. What an absolute masterclass in how to shift from being a trainer into facilitation. The sense of context was really important. You really did ground the learners in the context from the off. The belonging, the inclusion, you know, I am now part of a new family and you are welcome. That just felt really important. I love that you've just said you're not the star of the show. So many people who work in our profession think it's about them. I'm sorry to bust the bubble, but it's not about us at all. It's never been about us. It's always about our learners. It's about the outcomes that people are getting. And Peter, you've really shared so many practical ideas today. I really thank you for it.

Peter Brace:

Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity. It's been a 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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