Learning Uncut Episode 195 - Changing Safety Compliance Culture Through Stories - Rita Slogrove

Michelle Parry-Slater

As we begin our episode today, we want to gently advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander listeners and viewers that this episode of Learning Uncut contains the names and stories of people who have passed away, including individuals of Māori heritage. In sharing these stories, our sole intention is to uphold their legacy and to honour their memory.

We acknowledge the passing of those we discuss today, sending our deepest love and respect to their families and communities, and committing ourselves to sharing their truths with the utmost care, dignity and honour.

Welcome back to Learning Uncut. We've got a great episode for you today, but in the spirit of reconciliation, we will begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. Particularly the Kombumerri people, whose land I am joining you from today. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and I extend all of that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Present or listening today.

Australian listeners and viewers, because we are, of course, on YouTube, you may wish to pause and take a moment to consider the traditional custodians of the land where you're watching or listening from today.

Now I gave you a bit of a teaser. We are in for a good episode. No pressure on our guest, but this is a subject I am hugely passionate about. At Learning Uncut, we care about compliance. And I've been pushing this to the L&D profession for what feels like decades, not even just years.

I really want to change the conversation about compliance. You may have heard me on this very podcast back in 2024 talking to Michelle Ockers about elevating compliance. I really have been on this rodeo for a long time. So why are we still on the horse? Why haven't we done it yet?

Well, this year I feel we have been given the green light, why everyone needs to care about compliance. This is ever since the judiciary here in Australia and in other countries as well, especially in the US and the UK, the judiciary have started to push for behaviour change, not tick-boxing, as a result of compliance training. And I feel like saying, hallelujah, finally, because it's never been about behaviour change and it's always been about tick-boxing, and that is the wrong way round.

So, with all good learning, learners need to know the why. Why do we need to keep ourselves and our colleagues safe, legal, ethical, and healthy in work?

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Now, today's guest had a hugely, sadly, compelling why. And it is the mandate to do something fundamentally different with compliance training.

So today we're talking to Rita Slogrove, Learning and Organisational Development Manager. Who will share the story of what Fletcher Building did for safety training after five fatalities in nine months. Rita, very welcome to Learning Uncut. I'm very curious to hear your story. And do tell us about your role and the work you do before we get into it.

Rita Slogrove

Hello and thank you for having me. I am dialling in from Yaggera and Turrbal Country in Brisbane and my role is Head of Learning and Organisational Development for Fletcher Building, Light Building Products. And I look after five businesses in New Zealand and five in Australia from an L& OD perspective with my team. And we look after all things learning, leadership, coaching, engagement, and interestingly also safety leadership.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Excellent. Well, welcome. So. can you take us back to the start? What happened in the business in 2018/2019 that shook this amazing change that you undertook?

Rita Slogrove

Yeah, very unfortunately we experienced five fatalities in our New Zealand businesses in a nine month period.

So we lost Andrew, Chandra, Dave, Haki and Soul, in work-related fatalities.

Andrew was a contractor working in our steel business. Absolutely lovely man, known very well to the steel business. He went along one day to repair a light bulb and so went up in a lift to do so and followed all of the procedures correctly and the last thing he needed to do was let the site supervisor know that he was ready to go up and they would pause the gantry crane that comes along slides along the roof there in our steel business and he forgot to do that little bit. So when he went up in the lift Cameron, who was a site supervisor at the time, didn't know he was doing that. And so he didn't turn the crane off and didn't notice until the crane was coming along to Andrew and it hit him and toppled him off.

And Andrew was a real household fixture in that site. And his wife tells this story, the last thing he did when he left the house that morning was put his cold hands on her shoulders as a bit of a bit of a joke and she shrugged and she shook him off and she said, “Get out of here.”

And she wishes now she'd said something else. But he was always that lovable jokester, rogue. It was just a terrible, terrible accident.

And then we had Chandra not too long afterwards, and Chandra was a father of young girls. And he was one of the supervisors there and he was in our steel site up

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in Auckland he was just relocating big slabs of steel. Very heavy, deceivingly heavy. And he was just tidying up the site. He wasn't even doing anything for a customer. Now traditionally we would need spotters for that kind of thing, but over the years it had become a little bit more relaxed and so he was actually moving that steel around on his own. And so when one of those pieces of steel swung and twisted and pinned him to the wall, nobody saw him and nobody could come to his aid. And it was too long, later where passers-by saw the camera. And saw him and raced to get him. With Chandra, when they got him and they saw him and they he had his phone in his hand he was trying to dial, but he wasn't trying to dial for an ambulance, he was trying to dial his wife because he wanted to speak to her and he passed away on site.

And then if that wasn't utterly terrible not long after that, there was an incident involving our Higgins business in New Zealand.

Our Higgins business does a lot of road maintenance. And Dave, Haki and Soul were on the side of the road. And if anyone's been to New Zealand or is in New Zealand, you'll know that we have highways and they're smaller, more unkempt pieces of road, but the speed limit is still a hundred kilometres an hour. So people can drive along there very quickly. There isn't perhaps the road infrastructure in some of the more rural parts of New Zealand to handle too much going on in those 100K roads.

The team had finished for the day and we're actually up on a berm out of the way. And there was a truck sitting on side of the road and it’s just there wasn't a lot of coning. The truck was safely parked, but there wasn't necessarily the alertness around cones to make sure that that truck was highly visible. It was something that should have been done, but it wasn't something that had been done for a long time. People were kind of used to being a bit more relaxed about that, and they were packing up for the day. And a courier driver came past and made a 20 centimetre error of judgment and just clipped that back corner of that parked truck.

Just a mistake. Just an error in judgment.

And that truck pushed and flipped and created a cascade of events which injured and fatally injured Dave, Haki and Soul, who were strong, well-loved, well-respected men and elders of their community. They were fathers, they were grandfathers and their passings greatly affected that community as it would.

And so in each of these cases, you know, if one wasn't horrendous enough in our industry, we had a chief executive who said, we need to not only get to the bottom of this, but we need to understand why this is happening and what we can possibly do to prevent anything like this from happening ever again.

And we got a third party in, DuPont, to really kind of get to the bottom of what it was. And this not something that I was a part of. So this was our executives, this was our CEO, this was our chief safety officer, really getting and all of our leaders getting to

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the bottom of what it was. And what we found was that it wasn't necessarily the processes and procedures that were set up. They were good. They could also have been better.

It was more so what people were doing when nobody was watching. It was more so the behaviour that people were exhibiting when no one was around.

So you know, it is all well and good just to ask you to put your seatbelt on to keep you safe. We can put all the bells and whistles and beeps in your car to make sure you remember to put it on, or your kids tell you to put it on. But whether or not you do so when no one else is in the car, well that's your choice and that's your behaviour.

And what we found in those instances is that they were just little routines and rhythms and behaviours where people had become a little bit more relaxed. And it wasn't necessarily the processes that needed updating. It was the way people viewed safety and the way people viewed each other to go that above and beyond in order to keep each other safe and know that sure sometimes our incidents can happen, but our focus needs to be that we believe all injuries and all accidents can be prevented and we'll do everything we can to ensure that that is the case.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Thank you so much, Rita, for honouring the five people who passed away in telling their stories. I think it's really important that we keep those stories alive, that we keep those stories told, and that we continue that honour.

It actually supports not just future people from prevention of harm, but it actually reminds us that we go to work as human beings and we all ought to come home safely.

I really appreciate you also sharing the leadership response. That was a very vulnerable time for the organisation, but the response was very honest. And I wonder as your story unfolds, whether that is actually one of the reasons why you fundamentally were able to change some of the habits that you've described, some of the norms that are in play.

And we've seen it, all of us have seen this, where, yeah, we've got a rule, but you know, we've got to skirt around it. And it's not until something tragic really happens that we can sit up and pay attention. But the whole point of compliance training is we don't want there to be a disaster in order for people to sit up and pay attention. We want people to pay attention and recognise when unsafe practice is happening, when people feel unsafe psychologically as well as physically as well.

So, Let's hear a little bit more about not so much the working environment, which I know listeners will recognise. Let's hear a little bit more about well, what happened next? You know, it's really important as an honour to those five people that something did change, and I know that it did.

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So, leading from the top, you started a programme. What was that? How did you know what to do? How did you sort of, you know, deal with the ripple effect.

Talk us through what happened.

Rita Slogrove

Yeah, sure. So we came up with some really, along with DuPont, some really important pillars to focus on. And this was led by our chief health and safety officer, but also our executives in other avenues of the business too. First of all, we wanted to change the priority of safety.

So we re-shifted our values so that Protect safety value became our number one value and all the others sat in behind. We also changed the role of the safety lead, so the safety officer, we changed them to a role of advisor or partner.

So we were trying to move that away from “the safety guy will be here soon, they'll sort it out”, as opposed to “I need to take responsibility”, because it wasn't the safety manager who had to call the wives and partners and families of those gentlemen. It was the leaders who had to do that. So then they became the safety leaders.

Trickling down from that became a huge shift in the way that we set up our policies and our communications and our expectations. And then we had two key initiatives that we needed to roll out in order to shift this.

So, the first was a leadership programme and the second was a frontline programme. But as you touched on, Michelle, we needed to cascade from the top. And we have a lot of programmes. And we needed to make this one different.

So, what we actually did was we formed a committee. We each represented different parts of the business, our L&D leads and our safety leads. We all worked together. We brought in a third-party Real Learning, and her name's Heidi Lance, and she was an excellent instructional designer and real creative in terms of bringing what we needed to bring to life. So the issue we had was at that time we had 5,000 people in Australia, 10,000 in New Zealand, 800 leaders in Australia, and about 1500 leaders in New Zealand.

So we needed all of them to go through our safety leadership programme and we needed to do so from top down. We also needed to design a programme that was both face to face and virtual because we were heading into COVID. And so while that was a great time to design, we didn't know how long this was going to last for and we needed to be able to roll it out both in the face to face and a virtual forum.

We started with safety leadership and we decided that as you said before, Michelle, telling people what they can and can't do is quite dry.

So, you know, particularly this where sometimes compliance gets shoved to the side a little bit. So what we wanted to do was create the why and the hearts and minds and drive it because when you have a wake up call like any of our fatalities or any

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close call or any near miss, you suddenly become alert and it means much more to you.

So we decided that the way that we would run this programme was through storytelling.

So storytelling became our number one initiative, and we started to record and collect stories from all of our senior leaders. Our chief health and safety officer has the most poignant story. I can't even repeat it without feeling quite emotional. And she was vulnerable in creating that psychological safety around what this story did to shape her life.

Our CEO did the same thing. And we created a programme that ran in four modules. So, while we're busy collecting stories, while we're busy shifting the mindsets to safety is number one, everyone is responsible for safety, not just your safety people.

It doesn't matter whether you sit behind a desk or you drive a forklift, everyone is responsible for getting themselves and others home safe at the end of the day. We created modules where it started with laying the foundations.

And so that just meant telling the stories, understanding the why.

What are we doing here?

What is the poignant moment?

Leading self, so who am I as a safety leader no matter what part I come from?

What values drive me?

Who and what do I love?

So, who are my whys?

Not just my kids or my family or my dog or my bike, who are they?

Visualize their faces. What do they look like?

What do they mean to you?

Get it right, in here, in this heart.

Your best friends, who are they and what do they mean to you?

And they are why you strive to put your seatbelt on, to take that extra step. And we had a bit of an issue initially where there was a conflict between performance of the business and safety.

And people felt that you could do one or the other. And so we really needed to that head on.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Can we dig there a little bit?

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Because this is really important.

And your craft of telling stories is clearly well defined. How you honoured those five people in this podcast, for example.

But for many people listening, they'd be like, “we can't do this in our organisation.” This requires a huge level of vulnerability, a huge level of trust. And it's wonderful to hear that you had senior people telling the stories, that still touch you today, a number of years later.

How did you go from that one state where it was okay to, you know, sort of perhaps not do safety in the more formal way, but in a little bit more of an informal way, to that vulnerability? What’s the steps could you help other people take? Because that's the difficult part, isn't it? I agree with you entirely, you know.

Telling the stories of the near misses in your organisation is an important step. But actually a lot of near misses are hidden under the carpet because no one speaks up, “I better not say that, I might lose my job.”

So how do you help people to get over that risk?

Rita Slogrove

Well, a lot of safety is data. Lots of traffic lights, heat maps and all things like that.

Building trust is done one way and that's vulnerability. Vulnerability builds trust. It's the basis of, you know, Patrick Lencioni's High Performing Teams, it's the basis of anything, right?

And so we needed to do it from the top.

So, our senior executives were excellent at understanding the why. And so it became a mandate. Now look, we were very strongly motivated to do something about that, but it came needed to come from the top.

So, we were sharing these stories of, Ross Taylor was his name. He was our chief executive at the time, and Wendy Bains, who was our chief safety officer, bearing their souls.

So, vulnerability needs to come from the top first. So whenever even when I do something around high performing teams or team building or anything like that to build trust, I always ask the most senior person in the room to go first.

And I tee them up first. I allow them to be vulnerable first and then allow it to be accepted. And that is how we do it.

So, when we created this programme, what we did was we had a leader of every programme and they were from a level higher.

And they came and they sponsored and led the programme.

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So, whenever we had our a senior leadership team from a business complete this programme, their executive general manager was in the programme helping to lead it.

We had facilitators in the background just to do things like keep things on time, make sure the models have been introduced correctly.

But that leader is standing up and leading it. So our CEO led programmes. Our chief safety officer led programmes, which means we had to design them in such a simplistic way that they were able to pick it up, run with it, and also feel confident in delivering that.

And so we pulled every piece of learning down to three things.

Introduce the concept, allow them to experience it, allow them to reflect.

So, it's that whole David Rock piece about social learning and reflection. And so everything was broken into those three things.

Introduce the concept, whether it be the leader or the facilitator doing so, allow them to experience it. And that's where our stories came in. So, we shared a story or we told a story or we showed a video, whatever it was. And then we allowed for reflection.

So, that time where people are actually chatting and talking about how they're feeling about that and what that means and where it feels uncomfortable and where they think this won't work, and kind of allowing that comfort and the discomfort to push through, that's where we were able to make traction. And when we did that, we would always run out of time for all the stories that would start to emerge. And while maybe you know, when we came to leading self, that's where we actually taught the storytelling framework, which was an OWL framework. I don't think it's an uncommon one. And that's where you start with the what happened, so that the observation and then what happened and then the learning. So, all you need to do there is really talk through that story. But the learning is the important part of the story. The learning bit around the reflection.

So, when I told the stories of those five gentlemen, I was reflecting at the end about the impact that their lives made. And the impact that that little mistake that was made or that, you know, lack of awareness or that little blip is what had that impact. It wasn't the a big unsafe site.

It wasn't an unsafe side at all. It was these little behaviours. And so that's kinda how we started to build that trust and then we cascaded all the way down.

Michelle Parry-Slater

What I'm loving hearing here is that, you know, your industry, it's blokes, you know, we don't talk about this stuff, that kind of mentality, and people perhaps, in

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hierarchies with seniors, and they're afraid to speak up, you know, they want to keep their job, they don't want to be “that guy.”

And yet, here you are describing a response to something utterly tragic, in a really vulnerable and trust filled way. And I think it's really appropriate, for so many organisations, they just wouldn't go near it. They just wouldn't go there.

Help us to understand, you know, how did you get there? How did you deliver this across so many sites to so many people, in COVID as well? You were perhaps not necessarily receptive, you're countercultural to, you know, Aussie bloke culture here. In fact, global bloke culture. Let's go with that.

But you know, help us and what do the sessions look like? PowerPoint slides?

Rita Slogrove

So in New Zealand, so I looked after the Australian side of things. In New Zealand they chose the face to face model and they would have someone in there. Yes, it is blokey, but we are all big softies. And I honestly it didn't take much.

I think the worry about they're not gonna like it was more than the actual impact. When you got in there and you got a group of people who genuinely care, which let's face it, most people do, and you hear that story, it is very hard to then say, well, I don't really care. It was, it was a lot easier than we thought.

For the Australian side of things, which is what I looked after, because this a massive team effort, is I had 400 sites in COVID and 800 leaders. So bringing anyone together was completely ridiculous.

So, we spent a lot of time talking about the learning environment. And then we Persona-ed our audience. So, who are the audience? What are they currently doing? They're going on site and then getting things started and then they need to close off-site at the end of the day. They're probably site supervisors, but they're also probably financial controllers.

How do we get them to learn? So we had two one-day workshops. I split them into four half-day segments, and I ran them over two weeks. So Tuesday, Thursday, Tuesday, Thursday. And in the middle of the day, because I had you know three, four time zones to work with as well, so it got a bit a bit exciting. And in that half day, it would be three and a half hours. So two 90-minute sessions and a half hour break in the middle. And each 90-minute session consisted of introduce the concept, allow them to experience it, allow them to reflect.

We also got rid of all PowerPoints. PowerPoints, if anyone's ever been on a workshop online with a PowerPoint, the first thing you start doing is your own work. Or looking at your phone. I find it really difficult to sit still, so it is quite difficult. So we got rid of all PowerPoints and we made the classroom smaller.

So nine, ten people tops. And so you can see everyone's eyeballs.

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When we wanted to share a video, we just popped the link in the chat so everyone could play the video themselves. It stopped with any buffering.

And what we had was a little playbook. We created this playbook to be a little bit like, it's a bit funny. From that movie “Waterboy”, it's got Adam Sandler in it, and the coach has a playbook under his arm, and it's all tattered because he uses it so much. And we thought, how great would that be?

So instead of having a workbook that people just put in their drawer. That workbook is everything. So instead of slides, everything they needed was in this workbook.

And we made it A5 size. So it was quite small. Any models we used were in the workbook. But then they could write. What we did though is what we piloted everything. So we didn't get hear naturally.

We tested online workbooks, terrible idea. Particularly with guys in manufacturing trying to get it to work on their little laptop, you know.

We tried no workbooks, too difficult. So, we had these little A5 - we called them playbooks. And the idea was you wrote your action plan in it, you wrote your thoughts, your feelings, your why is all in there, so you can take that with you. And then we had little cards with reminders from any of the models that we needed to use, like the OWL model, and they it fit perfectly in the top pocket of the PPE.

So you can pull that out and flick through it as well, the GROW model. So in this leadership programme, it wasn't a safety programme. It was a leadership programme that happened to be about safety. And that was really important.

So, we taught the GROW model because basics, right?

We taught how to give good feedback. We taught how to have courageous conversations. And really importantly, we taught how to stir up and shake rituals and practices.

So how to be the one to say, hold on, your gloves have holes in them. Hand injuries are our number one injury. Let's get you some new ones. I've had these for ages, and the last time I asked, no, well, what let's ask.

So, we're trying to shape that mindset to get it going. And so what we found was by running it like this and creating the coordination and having it cascade down, we had facilitators holding up the programme, and we had a leader who was we called the sponsor, who would always kick off with their own story, who would always kick off with sharing or being vulnerable and people felt more comfortable with that person in the room.

It also meant that any of our operations leaders could come in, get the site running, and then go in, do their three and a half hours worth of learning, go out, close the site. So they weren't distracted. And we got through many people in that format.

Michelle Parry-Slater

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What I'm enjoying hearing more than anything is this: know your audience. We recently had a podcast with Starbucks Australia, and their audience is young and they were live online with little mobile gamified type learning because that suited the audience. That definitely wouldn't have necessarily suited your audience here, but you know, just the care to make the cards the right size for their pocket, the care to, you know, I'm assuming you posted out these playbooks, did you?

Rita Slogrove

We did, yeah, a little package, you know, with little posters and handouts and badges. We love badges. And it even said, certified safety leader. Because it wasn't a formal qualification, so we had to use a word.

And people were wearing their badges on their lanyards, stickers on their hats to say that they had now done it.

Michelle Parry-Slater

This is a real sense of care for your audience. And that will help with the trust. That will help with the vulnerability. That will help with the engagement piece for sure.

Did it work? Did it reach people?

You've mentioned they were wearing their stickers and their and their badges?

Did things change?

Rita Slogrove

Yeah. It did. And people felt quite emotional in the session. There were often tears and as a facilitator I found it difficult sometimes to be like, Goodness, okay, I've got a pull myself together now and speak this.

We ran it over three years. And in Australia, so I can't speak from New Zealand. They did a fabulous job in New Zealand.

In Australia we put eleven hundred leaders through, because, turnover. So we had to do more than we expected. We also followed up the programme with three one-to-one coaching sessions with your direct leader. As you went through your action plan. So we had about 1,500 of those. I've got a couple of learnings from that one.

Our positive feedback was at 97%. So would you recommend this programme? I feel like I'm a better leader after this programme.

But most importantly, we had a 61% reduction in TRIFR scores. So TRIFR is total recordable injury frequency rate. Very, very important. Now we had a 61% reduction. However, initially it went up. And we expected that. So we created some predictions. We used contribution analysis, which is where you take all of the data points before you start an initiative and think what could possibly be impacted positively or negatively by our piece of work.

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So is it turnover? Is it retention? Is it safety? Is it engagement?

And we marked all those points regardless of whether it actually made a difference in the end. And then at the end we re-measured those points at baseline. And We forecasted that our TRIFR score would go up in the short term and down in the long term because we hoped to create such a safe environment that people were reporting more and reporting the more near misses. And we hope to see more red. And we had this phrase called embrace the red, like let's embrace the red, let's do so, and start to reward behaviour of, hey, I've made a mistake and here's what I think we need to do.

Well, I see this issue, and here's what I think we need to do about it, creating that bravery.

So it went up initially and then it dropped.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's such an important message to everyone because that's the fear that actually you'll create a problem. But it's better to create a problem with near-miss reporting than to deal with the ripple effects of there being a fatality. So absolutely agree with you. If compliance training is done right, you should see more. You should see more people talking about these things. So I'm really pleased to hear that for you. And that means that you were doing a good job. And it tends to, like you say, it spikes and then it plateaus when people start to understand the judgment, the human judgment of what is reportable and you know what is on-site adjustment.

But I think it's a really good goal to measure training around compliance for sure. your leaders were really involved at the beginning and then involved throughout. You know, were they interested in the reporting? Were they interested in the measures?

Rita Slogrove

Yeah, they were. Yeah. And I think what doesn't get measured doesn't get done. So I'm a huge Dr. David Rock fan. And so, you know, he does a lot of research on a little bit of fear. So a little bit of let's report on our measurements creates the strongest performance. Not a lot, not none, a little. So that let's report every month on how we're going. Let's see what the data says.

And the data is also particularly for learning and org development, we know at our core that it's the right thing to do, but we have to be able to show business change and we have to be able to show a drive in performance or a it's a moving of the dial in order to be able to justify the money that we're putting into learning programmes.

So, if we can increase engagement which we did, if we can decrease turnover, if we can increase retention, if we can increase business performance, we now have a good argument for running this. And what we found is that our people were just such genuine people. They cared for each other and they followed a lot of the safety process. But what we actually just did was join the dots and create that discretionary

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effort of going above and beyond because I care that John has fourteen grandchildren and he needs to go home and see them. It matters.

You know, well Bob loves to do this. And so it matters that he goes home and does that. Our businesses then all went and created their own things.

We created a beautiful heartwarming video for the Australian businesses and New Zealand did wonderful things as well.

We have an aging workforce as well. So there's a lot of grandparents, you know, or you know, pseudo grandparents, you know, that it really resonates with.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I'm brought to the communications piece then.

How did you communicate this across? When you're especially starting with the top, with the leaders, what's happening? You know, is this sense that, they're not doing anything about it, these guys lost their lives, and you know, you're not talking to the workers.

How did you run a communication campaign? Because for me, that's one of the most important parts of caring about compliance is actually the communication around it. How are we going to talk about this stuff in the everyday?

Can you help us understand what did you do whilst you were concentrating at that sort of top level, what communication campaigns were in play?

Rita Slogrove

Yes. There had to be a change movement because a programme as a programme is a programme.

It's one part, one mechanism and we built a beautiful frontline programme as well off the back of that. But none of that matters unless you've got clever comms. And sometimes I think that is an essential part of L&OD, right? Is really clever comms. So having our leaders personally make videos, show up on sites, tell stories, tell their stories. Our CEO at the time told an amazing story about why it matters to him and repeating that message.

In Australia we also created a video that combined and it used our real people. So we actually went out to the business and we asked and we ran focus groups and we said, you know, if we were going to do something like this, what does it matter? And you know, what matters to you? And they said, keep it real, no BS. That was it. Just keep it real, no BS.

So we that's what we did and we created a video and it was 'We've all got a legacy to protect. What's yours?' And it's beautiful, but it uses our real people looking staring down the camera because it is very hard, if you just let someone go and you saw

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them without a seatbelt on their forklift and I'm raising that because it's really common, you'd be like, not my problem.

But if you were like, that is Jean, and Jean is a mum and an auntie and Jean needs her kids and they need her. Jean, wait. Go and put your seatbelt on. I can't bear to watch you drive around without it. Please stop.

We had posters reinforcing the messages, lots of catchy slogans. So find your five, the five things that are going great today. Speak up. And every picture, every poster was a picture of our team members staring straight down the camera.

“This is Dave. Dave has three dogs. Dave loves mountain biking on the weekend. Dave wants to go home at the end of the day with both legs and both arms, so he can do that.”

All of our messaging was consistent like that and we were relentless. So, the key to good comms is simple, consistent, and repetitive. We have nine layers sometimes in our business and I'm sure other people have as many layers.

It's a heck of a ripple in order to get to the end and then it needs to be able to come back again so you can check that it was heard. So just submitting it, just pushing it out means nothing. We needed to check that it was heard.

And then we rewarded and shared stories all over the place, we created this channel with a QR code where people could just continue to record and upload their stories, and it just got momentum.

We actually we won awards with our programme. We were finalists at the Australian Workplace Health and Safety Awards for Leadership and Culture in 2022. And we were also finalists in 2022 in the New Zealand Safeguard Awards. And then we won the Best Leadership Programme at the NZATD Awards in 2022. And that was with Real Learning, Heidi Lance from Real Learning, and the way that she pulled it together and pulled our ideas together in such a simple way, just using photos and people and it was just hugely effective.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I love that we've honoured your awards as well and your finalists in awards as much as we've honoured the lives that created those awards. Because that is testament to their lives, isn't it, that you did this work to change the hearts and minds of your organisation.

There's a big investment, in a programme such as this and without a shadow of a doubt, I can totally understand why you've made it, but I can hear people listening to this going, well, they had their why, you know, we work in desk-based environments, we're not really that worried about safety, but yet the alarm bells in my heart say you should be just as worried.

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I work from home, my dog trips me up on a regular basis. It doesn't matter where you work, keeping yourself safe and legal and ethical and healthy at work is just paramount in my mind.

So, what would you say to an L&D colleague who's listening who thinks that this in the ‘too hard basket’? You know, measuring safety culture, it's just too difficult. It doesn't impact us enough to actually have a business case or a why.

Any thoughts that you could share?

Rita Slogrove

Yeah, it's a really good point, Michelle. We went across everywhere because if you are desk bound, your safety is mental health and your safety is resilience, it is fatigue, it is burnout, it is all of those things. So we actually integrated that in. We actually created a Safety Leadership 2.0 that focused specifically on mental health and wellbeing and psychosocial. So we just continue to move with it.

The stories that we shared were not necessarily work-related. So it was around driving a car. DIY in the weekends. Ask anyone in ED [Emergency Department] who their highest visitors are. It's the man or woman who thought it was really cool to clean the gutters with an unstable ladder. So we shared stories like that.

I whenever I dropped my children off to school, I remember CFOs talking about how he was trying to dial into a teams meeting while dropping his kids at school and had to slam on his brakes because he wasn't watching and there was a lady holding a baby looking shocked standing in front of him because she had gone to cross the car park in front of him and he hadn't seen them.

I think about that, it sits here in my heart and I think about that.

I think about one of our general managers who sliced his hand with an avocado knife while he was trying to get his kids ready for school and he was stressed because he had to make a meeting and he ended up passing out on the floor of the kitchen and his kids had to abandon school and go and save him. Sorry.

I think about that. I think about that. And I think about them all the time. And so when we talk about sharing stories, there's no financial investment in doing that.

Michelle Parry-Slater

We need a trigger warning on the episode.

Rita Slogrove

When you think about that movement, it takes a really, really long time. And I'll be honest, we've started to lose some of our momentum because I think we kind of really rose and then needed to keep it going. And that's hard to do. We're gonna have to do a bit of a refresher now to really gain that momentum back again.

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I think we thought it would just carry on, but it does settle and then we start from the top, you know, everybody looks up. Everyone looks at that leader who parks the car and forgets to reverse park it in because they're a bit late and walks across and maybe is talking on their phone, when we've made deliberate work and rules around not doing that for safety purposes. Everyone can see that person and they think, If they don't do it, why would I?

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, that's the difference. It's the difference between policy on a piece of paper and policy lived in reality.

I used to work in an organisation, we reverse parked in, not because it was our policy, but it was our customer's. One of our customer's policies was to reverse park. And if they ever came to site and any cars were in our car park were not reverse parked, they had a clause in their contract to say that they could withdraw the contract. So this is how much they cared about our safety as a supplier to the organisation.

As far as I'm concerned, this is never in the too hard basket. For some organisations though, this cultural shift. And cultural shift is hard to financially quantify. And therefore, we have the whole, it's the return on investment, you know, tell me what we're really getting for this.

Are we really getting ourselves to be protected in the case of a court appearance? You know, with our tick-box compliance training, or are we really changing that culture and hearts and minds? There's not a lot of ROI, or am I just making an assumption on behalf of the entire profession?

What's your thoughts?

Rita Slogrove

I think that. I work very closely with my workforce relations manager. So I am the person who assists to, I'm talking more broadly now, assists to prevent or upskill people so that they have the knowledge of what is right and wrong what they need to do. She's the person who has to work with the cases when it doesn't go so well. And I often think about when the person says, I didn't realise I wasn't allowed to treat someone like that or nobody told me that and she looks at me and goes, "Did nobody tell her that?" And I have to go, Did we? Did we do that? And I think for us the ROI is in the time and the money spent when it doesn't go so well.

It's like insurance. So, you know, even if I take psychosocial risk, for example, what we're actually finding and in Australia obviously we have legislation around psychosocial hazards and risk and so it's very, very important. We're finding that the number of cases has increased in terms of people submitting psychosocial risk cases.

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Not as many as we thought are getting accepted. However, the ones that are getting accepted are worth millions. So if we're thinking about compliance, we are precautionary. We are insurance. We are getting that knowledge across to people. And if compliance is the word they don't like, don't call it compliance. Call it something else. It doesn't matter.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, that's a really good point. A lot of those cases are being helped by helped to be written by AI. And so they're not going away anytime soon because it's easier for people to actually build their business case without the need for expensive lawyers. And there's no judgment from me whether that's right or wrong. It's just a fact that your colleague in workforce relations is going have to deal with more cases. And so, you know, did we tell them? That's actually a really important part.

Now as we bring this to a close today, I wonder if there was anything that didn't work quite as well as you hoped.

What your learning about your own role about this programme?

Rita Slogrove

We made lots of mistakes and I think that was what helped us to succeed in the way that we did. We tried a lot of things.

A couple of things that didn't work so well is that we were in all of our areas just a small number compared to the amount of leaders we had to get to.

So we often had to upskill leaders to then deliver the training and workshops and toolbox talks, which are short little 10-minute practical sessions to deliver that to their people rather than us doing that.

A) It's the right thing to do because it's called leader-led and they are the ones who need to be supporting their people.

B) It is hard because it's kinda out of your control and we needed to think we needed to really make sure we wrapped our arms around them a little bit more so they could have that momentum.

We also found that the coaching didn't create as much momentum as we wanted to, again because we left people to their own devices. And so we needed to find a way to really, you know, because everyone's really busy to really prioritize that learning and create more of that shared place. We actually offer that learning created cohort coaching, so tried five people coaching so you could share your coaching journey as you went.

And the other thing I think was for me in New Zealand they did a very, very good job of upskilling their leaders to run the programmes on their own sooner than we did in

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Australia. I think I hung on to it a little too tight. And hung on to it as that facilitator because it meant so much to me.

And because I kinda held onto it a little too tight, I think now I'm gonna need to go back and refresh a little bit because when we did let the managers and leaders go in terms of running it themselves, they were a little bit more like, ooh, I need a bit more help here.

So I think for me a learning was always develop a programme, if you're like me and your ratios are low, practitioner to leader, develop them with the end user in mind, knowing that the end user is going to need to turn around and start educating others.

I think the real skill, particularly in L&OD and in organisational psychology, is to take something incredibly complex and deliver it in such a simplistic way that it can be on a poster, five bullet points on a poster, and still have the same message.

We teach our placement students that all the time. Take that knowledge and that learning and make it look like a flyer because that's the skill and that's how it will be practically applied.

Because the people you are educating, particularly in compliance, they're not calling, it's not pull content, they're not calling for it. You're pushing it. So how are you pushing it in a way that either lets them think that they do need it or that lets them think about, okay, this why we need it.

When I start talking about mental health and the stats, particularly in Australia, when I sat all of the general managers down and talked to them about the impact of that and what that looks like, you can hear a pin drop and they say things like, “What do we need?” “What can we do?”

So, it's not that hard to get buy-in when you really break it down to those really deep stories.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, yeah, I agree entirely. And that's why the comms piece is so important because our subject matter experts they want to shove all the law and all of the information in. But on the ground, actually, what needs to happen is that we suddenly and instantly just know that this the five key points that you said. Yeah, absolutely.

Look, we need to bring this to a close.

So before I let you go, where's the best place for people to find you and keep learning from you, Rita?

Rita Slogrove

I'm on LinkedIn, you can find me Rita Slogrove on LinkedIn. I think that's the best thing, or you can just email me rita.slogrove@fbu.com. I'd love to chat about these things. I think I don't think we do it enough.

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Particularly like to hear where we've got problems to solve because it's just people. It's just people and their behaviours, right? And so people don't want to do anything differently unless they understand why or unless it was their idea. So that's all you have to do is either explain why or make it their idea.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Yeah, absolutely. Now, today's podcast is a stark reminder to not let habits put your people in danger.

Nobody in Fletcher Building was really doing anything fundamentally wrong, but they were doing what they do every day, and they were letting those poor behavioural traits slide for fear of speaking up or for simply just the way we do things around here.

So this why we need to change the conversation about compliance as a legacy to those five people who didn't get to go home to their families, just think of one habit in your own organisation that everyone treats as normal. How could that be improved? Question it. Are you brave enough to question it?

And if yes, please do go ahead.

And if not, then I think your work starts there.

Perhaps share this podcast with other people in your organisation to really get them thinking, like Rita and her colleagues did about compliance differently.

Thank you so much today, Rita. It's just been an absolute pleasure to speak to you about this and really hear a story that worked, a way of approaching compliance that is entirely different.

It is definitely not click-next-elearning and rolling of the eyes. It's sharing hearts and minds and vulnerabilities.

So thank you.

That's it for this episode of Learning Uncut. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time and do share this one far and wide.

Rita Slogrove

Thank you

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Learning Uncut Episode 195 - Changing Safety Compliance Culture Through Stories- Rita Slogrove

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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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