



## Learning Uncut Episode 187: Recognition as a Learning Tool –

### Sarah McVanel & Lisa Anstey

#### *Michelle Parry-Slater*

Welcome to this Learning Uncut episode where we're going to be speaking to Sarah McVanel and Lisa Anstey and they're joining us from Canada today.

So yes, listeners, I have got up very early. It's still yesterday for them and today's looking great, I have to say, when they get to the future.

We're going to be talking today about recognition. But before we begin, in the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today. I'm looking out over Jellurgal at Burleigh Heads on the Kombumerri People's lands and it is my absolute pleasure to introduce to you Sarah McVanel.

Sarah is Canada's recognition expert. She's founder of Greatness Magnified, a boutique firm specialising in recognition, retention and workplace culture.

She created **FROG**, which sounds crazy, but actually makes a lot of sense when you know **FROG** stands for **Forever Recognise Others' Greatness**. This is a framework that she captured into a book in 2015, because Sarah's got more than 25 years of experience as an organisational development professional, a coach and a speaker. She's got so many designations I couldn't even read them all out for you. She's an author and she hosts the Greatness Together podcast.

And when we met in the pre-meeting, my energy was so high that I couldn't not have Sarah as a guest on the podcast. So, I really hope that you also, at the end of this, have the energy that Sarah portrays.

Now, Lisa. Lisa Anstey was one of Sarah's clients and Lisa is from a community hospital background. I'm really excited to hear more about how she even got involved. Because Lisa is a certified medical device reprocessing technician.

I'm not going to pretend, Lisa, that I know what that is, but I'm sure you can explain if you need to. Many, many years in healthcare, including 12 years in leadership roles, Lisa is currently the manager of medical device reprocessing at Waterloo Regional Health Network in Kitchener, Ontario.

In 2020, Lisa was seconded to support the pandemic response for both her hospital and the region of Waterloo. And during this time she played a key role in establishing the hospital screening programme. She managed the region's largest vaccination clinic and led the regional COVID cold and flu care clinic, so very important roles. And in recognition of her contributions to the field and the community, Lisa was unsurprisingly awarded the prestigious Isabel Campbell Award from the Medical Device Reprocessing Association of Ontario. Two very, very worthy guests, and I'm very excited to hear the stories.

But before we begin, I opened by saying that we're going to be talking about recognition. Now, anyone who knows me will have heard me use the word appreciation many, many times.

Because of my practitioner status within Nancy Kline's Thinking Environment, that's where my influence comes from for the word appreciate. But today our guests offer us even more than just appreciation. So Sarah, can you start by helping us understand what is the distinction between appreciation, recognition, gratitude, kindness. All of these things that we perhaps might be talking about today? Can you walk us through the differences?

### **Sarah McVanel**

Sure. Michelle, I have to say we could spend an entire conversation nerding it out on the root of where these words came from, to help give some really helpful insights into what they truly mean.

So, the Latin word, the roots of the word recognition is actually "to know again". And Lisa, as you will see very quickly in this conversation, is a beautiful example of a leader who is continually trying to learn and know her people as well as partners and peers and to continually make sure that she knows and is knowing again. So that's really recognition. When we talk about everyone needing to feel seen, heard and valued, that is a living and breathing experience.

Kindness, the root of that word is kin. So, it's that sense of connection and how we are all related somehow. Being kind is actually building a sense of belonging and connection.

Gratitude, interestingly, is based on words around goodwill and again comes from Latin. What's really interesting is that it's not a verb, it is actually a noun, or an experience.

You cannot "gratitude" somebody. You can thank them, you can appreciate them, you can recognise them, but you can't gratitude someone.

It's actually the appraisal cycle that happens where somebody feels like their recognition is very meaningful, sincere and true. So that's a little sound bite, I feel like that was sponsored by the Websters dictionary.

But language is power, and so it's good to know the roots of all of these words.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

It is really good to know, because it helps us to set up what we're talking about. This podcast is obviously designed for learning and development professionals.

So, you might be thinking, listeners, why are we talking about recognition?

But for me, the act of appreciation, the act of recognition, to know again, to recognise somebody's work, is actually all part of that reflection cycle.

And learning doesn't happen until we reflect, as far as I'm concerned.

So, it is all part of the same story. But it is often, isn't it Sarah, dismissed as the soft option, as not really important. What does the evidence suggest that recognition does for teams or organisations?

### **Sarah McVanel**

Well, this is actually what brings Lisa and I, and our career stories, together. Many years ago when I was working in organisations, our organisational development team took it really seriously that our role was to help the highest performing teams continue to excel, but also teams where they were struggling according to their engagement survey results. We saw that as

giving us a roadmap, identifying who and how to help. Some of those teams had very low recognition scores and when combined with other factors like high workload, high stress, or incivility, that created a bit of a roadmap as to how quickly/urgently we needed to address that.

So in working with many different teams in a large community organisation, we inflicted ourselves upon them, we had to be really creative. The type of work, if you're a medical device reprocessing expert, sadly organisations do not often signal that they value it. Lisa, aren't those departments often in the basement, windowless, with people working long hours and often through their breaks? And when the phone rings, are people calling to say “my gosh, you're amazing?”

**Lisa Anstey**

No, not at all.

**Sarah McVanel**

No. And yet you provide one of the most essential roles. What is the role of medical device reprocessing, for folks who are listening and don't know?

**Lisa Anstey**

Yeah, so Medical Device Reprocessing, MDR, it's found in pretty much every hospital around the world. It's not just local here to Canada. MDR is the team of experts that provide all of the sterilisation as well as high-level disinfection for all of the equipment used in a hospital.

As Sarah mentioned, we are totally behind the scenes. We're one of few departments that doesn't have patient contact. Even our nutrition services teams go to the floors, they feed people, they nourish people, they have that connection. Pharmacy takes up the medications.

MDR, the work comes down and the work goes out. We are a hidden pressure cooker behind the scenes supporting healthcare. It is a highly specialised role that most people don't even know exists. A lot of folks will have that aha moment when they hear about MDR and realise “of course, somebody has to do that. Of course, there's science behind it. Of course, this needs to take place.”

But we are very hidden, fulfilling this vital role.

**Michelle Parry-Slater**

That was me, I'm like “What's MDR?”, oh, of course we know what MDR is! Of course we have a clue. Yeah, for sure.

**Lisa Anstey**

I will say MDR tends to be a very welcoming group. If you are ever at a healthcare facility and ask the question “where's your MDR?”, I'm sure you'll be welcomed with open arms for a tour just to get a peek at the incredible work that happens.

**Sarah McVanel**

That's so awesome. I think people should start asking that, because it helps to make the invisible visible. And what a beautiful thing it is to acknowledge people by saying, “I want to walk a mile in your shoes.”

And so, all of our listeners here, I think it's really important to highlight a couple of reasons why a medical devices team would be very much at risk of disengagement, burnout, exhaustion and overload.

They're not public-facing in an organisation that values public-facing work.

They only hear when things go wrong.

They work to a very high standard of excellence, as there should be, and still they don't usually hear or see the results of their work when it's done well.

They work very long hours in a field that is highly technical, and yet most people don't even know it exists.

So, there are certain teams that are fundamental and yet often don't get thought about, let alone specifically acknowledged.

So, when Lisa and I came into each other's worlds, it was on the heels of our team going out and reaching out to teams that were struggling.

We've just established how understandable it would be that a team like this would feel undervalued. And so really, our work together began with helping those invisible heroes start to make the greatness they do every day visible to each other, such as through huddles. And did we start to measure that, Lisa, and put it right on the huddle board?

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

Can I step us back before we get into solution mode and just help us set some of the context, Lisa?

Before Sarah came in, I'm getting the sense that there wasn't a culture of recognition in your teams. I'm getting a sense to the point that you're in the basement, nobody knows you exist.

Can you talk to us a little bit about the organisation and that sense of being part of that workforce, did the wider staff even know that you existed? What was it like? And how did you know that there was an engagement issue in the first place?

Was it also sitting alongside a learning issue, or was it that people were just feeling a little bit downtrodden? Help me understand the context.

### **Lisa Anstey**

Yeah, well, for starters, you're dead on. Folks even within the hospital don't know what happens in MDR behind the scenes.

Often, we're not seen within our own organisation. I do a lot of work to try and build our brand and share what we do, because it is incredible work. When Sarah and I first started working together, it was a perfect storm. The organisation had gone through some change, in particular with leadership, and we had just done an engagement survey with our prior leader. When we got the results, there had been a change and I had taken on the supervisory position.

So that was my roadmap laid out in front of me, a very disengaged team, disappointed in the previous leadership, struggling for recognition of the incredible work that we do. And I was a new leader.

Often when you become a leader, there's not a lot of guidance. You're given the key to the door and the code to the voicemail. So, I was very appreciative of Sarah's guidance and support with recognition, to try and build the team morale, or before we even get to team morale, to build a team, that we are technicians together, and start recognising those things that we do every day.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

So, there was something in Sarah coming in that really helped sort the team dynamic. It helped you learn to be a leader. How did you get connected in the first place? Did you see Sarah speak, or you just knew about her in the world?

### **Lisa Anstey**

We were part of the same organisation. She was part of our learning and OD team and we started working together.

And often in Canadian healthcare there is a team there to help and support, and it's really what you're willing to put into it and ask for that determines what you get out of it. I was grateful that there was someone willing to listen and give me some options and that the soft side of it matters too, to make people feel good about coming into work.

I do tend to fall on the positive, optimistic side as a person, the way I choose to be a leader, the way I choose to do my work. And it was great to find an ally who also had that positive and optimistic outlook, but also had those tools and tangible things that I could implement to start slowly building that. From that time, well over a decade ago, I'm still using those same tools and skills learned all those years ago, because they actually make a real difference for my team.

### **Sarah McVanel**

And we learned so much from you too, Lisa. It was a true partnership.

And I know you practise this, Michelle, in the work that you do, when the person who has some skills brings that to the team, they also have to have a humility that they don't necessarily have all the answers. Although I knew and valued MDR, I'd never been in the field. I'd never done a tour. I'm embarrassed to say that was the third hospital I worked in, but I'd never stepped foot in an MDR department.

And I really want to share that Lisa was actually picked by her peers. When it was very clear the existing leader wasn't the right fit, despite our best support and daily presence from my team. Because we wanted daily success for everyone, and building habits of recognition and connection so we started literally the morning shift huddle, where we talk about who recognised you, what's a great thing that happened the day before, we changed up the question. But Michelle, for those that are listening, the learning experts, I think it really speaks to A) showing up and having some of those high intensity interventions when the stakes are really, really high, and also listening to people in the team to help, when they are willing to bravely make a suggestion for what needs to be done or be changed - for example leadership, needing a change and when the leader agreed that despite all the support that was offered, that he just wasn't the right person for the team, the team said "we want Lisa."

So, you know, the relationship that an organisational development and learning professional can build with the team as a whole means that we could boldly inflict ourselves on Lisa and say

you've got to go for this, we will do everything we can to support you, but the team has picked you. Please apply. Was it a lot of convincing, Lisa? I'm just curious.

### **Lisa Anstey**

I just wanted to make things better. I was the youngest person in the department at the time, and there were technicians with over 30 years of experience, they had been doing this incredible work supporting every baby born in that hospital, every surgery, for decades. And I just wanted to do right by them. I wanted the world to see the work that they do and the impact they have behind the scenes.

Somebody's got to do it. And I thought, I'm going to try. I had previous retail management and leadership experience, so I thought I could draw on some of that structure and organisation to help in the department, and then lean on my skills as a technician, actually doing the work, to fully understand what changes we needed. And then that missing piece, the support to help me with the softer side. That it is okay to do these recognitions. It's okay to talk about the good. It doesn't always have to be the hard business side of it. It was really great.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

That's just such a wonderful way of coming into leadership. I would love it if all organisations said the team generates their manager from within, because that is pure unadulterated recognition, we recognise skills in you that perhaps you didn't even know you had.

And alongside that, having the support. So, many times organisations promote somebody, to your point, 30 years of experience is a very typical qualifier for promotion and yet no middle management experience. Leading people is very different to leading with the technical skill that you may have many, many years of experience in.

### **Lisa Anstey**

It's funny, is it the people side? Well, it was mentioned about the pandemic response and the work that I did there as a leader.

On paper, I may not have been the right person. I'm not a nurse. I'm an MDR technician by trade.

On paper, I may not have been the right person. But I was able to leverage my skills and what I'd learned over the years in such a pressure cooker of MDR and apply them to a very different situation.

The pandemic response was unbelievable at the time. But again, to still lead through a sense of duty, it's public healthcare here, a sense of pride in what we do, trying to help for the greater good, but also recognising the people who were stepping up when most people were at home, staying behind closed doors.

They were stepping up, putting themselves out there to help others who were sick. So, it was wonderful to be able to bring that experience with me and do it from a people-first focus into another role.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

Which is just so lovely given the support that you were getting from Sarah and the team, and the opportunity for you then to support others. It's cyclical, isn't it? It kind of goes on, we talk about paying it forward and I can see it playing out in reality.

So here you are, a new leader in this role that people have suggested you take on, with experience from your retail background but an absolute enthusiasm, and an enthusiastic team behind you in Sarah.

So I'm curious: what went on? What were the interventions that took place? Sarah, how did you encourage Lisa with her new role?

**Sarah McVanel**

Well, I think we did some coaching, right?

We made that available to you as your onboarding support, which was true of all leaders. This is not "Lisa needs coaching"... it's more like, we want to support every leader to have as easy a transition into their role as possible.

And that includes experienced leaders from outside the organisation who are new to us. So, there's coaching, and there was an Emerging Leaders programme, right, Lisa, you participated in that?

**Lisa Anstey**

Yeah, I did. I remember the crucial conversations part of it. And I don't know if Sarah will remember, but we actually did a role play of a difficult conversation, "let's put the elephant in the room. We know these are the challenges we're having with communication." Sarah and I will run through it and maybe it's uncomfortable, but folks can learn from it.

**Sarah McVanel**

And having some of those things that we've been talking about took some advocacy. So again, for the learning and development professionals who are listening, never underestimate the power of your advocacy to put the right types of resources in place if you're an internal change agent. We didn't have an Emerging Leaders programme before I got there. We didn't have an organisational development department. It was hard to start it. We did not used to go to teams after seeing engagement results and say "this needs to be fixed." And we also did not have mandatory and beneficial onboarding coaching.

And so when we have a call to serve, those of us in the learning and development and organisational development field, and we can say "listen, there is data and evidence to substantiate the kind of support and intervention we want to give" it can lead to things like what Lisa has shared with us today.

The summation of all those supports was a response to a crisis in a team. But look at the leader that Lisa is today. She was chosen from within, so she was motivated to prove them right, wick she did. And then when a pandemic hit, she was there to rise to that challenge too. She's not a victim of "our team is never valued" it's more like, great, because we are always the underdogs, that means literally we can do anything, including a pandemic response. And now she's continuing to move her entire field forward having been, as you pointed out, a recipient of one of the award from her association.

And you know, I feel like it's this beautiful partnership, those in organisations advocate for what is needed to build the kind of bench strength you need. And those of us outside of organisations, like the work that you do Michelle, you're a trusted adviser to companies, still

asking the questions that may seem simple, “so who are the people getting it right? Where is the problem not existing? How can we go and learn and study that?”

That's part of what we did in the team, we looked at where the problem doesn't exist. Lisa's leadership was one of those places.

But there were also micro groups that worked really well together, certain shifts where errors were low and quality was high. We came in as experts, but we also tried to be learners. We were novices to the team, to the industry, and to knowing what would work with this particular group.

So, we got to be among the most elementary of learners and just brought our toolkit, hoping something would be helpful. And fortunately it was, otherwise Michelle wouldn't have had us on.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

I want to pick up on a couple of things you've said because I think they're really, really helpful, one is about advocacy and one is about mandatory coaching.

That phrase "mandatory coaching" is very unheard of. So, let's start there. Why mandate it? Why make sure everyone has coaching? Because coaching is expensive. A lot of people see it as something for very senior teams. I'm hugely an advocate of putting coaching where it's needed, because if you've got the perception that coaching is for important people and you give it to somebody who just started yesterday, then actually, wow, they feel like they're investing in me. So there's a sense of that being a recognition in and of itself.

But I'm curious, I don't want to guess, why mandatory coaching, Sarah?

### **Sarah McVanel**

Well, I'll tell you why and then I'd love to hear Lisa's feedback and thoughts on it.

Before my first leadership role, I hired my own coach and it was a game changer in reducing the learning curve and boosting confidence really quickly.

So I thought, if it worked for me, it probably works for other people. And so I got myself certified so we could make this resource available in-house without a per-unit cost.

Now that I work for myself and support organisations as their external coach for new leaders, it's also actually partly a recruitment strategy. If you are considering a few different organisations and one of them that give you coaching and again, in a public sector context, you almost get the same base offer across the board, you can't easily offer someone a significant pay rise, because it's a publicly funded system.

But what you can do is offer coaching. And that will sometimes encourage and support people who might otherwise feel too humble to apply, or to accept a role, very complicated role that they're walking into.

The bottom line is anything we know about the first 90 days of starting a new role tells us that that is one of your biggest predictors of how the next two years will go. I'm a big believer in front-ending the support. If you're going to offer it a year from now to a high performer, why not make them a high performer immediately?

Don't waste the best, most motivated, most excited time that people have. Why wait until they know what they're struggling with?

Let's give people six months, if that's what it is, of mandatory success.

We're hard-wiring people to have confidential, regular, consistent support for them and them alone. And because everybody has it, there's no mistaken belief that "Lisa's having it because she's not going to be able to do it, but Fred is fine." No, everyone gets it, because everyone deserves their best chance of success.

That's the thinking behind mandatory onboarding coaching.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

It's just wonderful. The way you set out the argument for it, yeah, why aren't we all doing this? Making people feel special, making people feel supported.

So Lisa, how was it?

Did it make a difference?

### **Lisa Anstey**

Yeah. Even to have a sounding board, a safe space to talk things through, to build your confidence when you're a new leader, I'll speak for myself, you second guess your decisions. Is this the right thing? Am I going too far? Is it too hard, too soft? So, to even have someone in your corner who's going to tell you the truth, who's going to say yes or no, to help guide you through that, it's incredibly impactful for the long term.

### **Sarah McVanel**

And coaching is also a beautiful complement to formal training. For the trainers who are your main listeners, it's not one or the other, it's together. Because you can teach the broader skill set through a programme, these are the soft and technical skills every leader in the organisation needs.

But what you're specifically dealing with, Lisa, with the lowest engagement team you're inheriting, is very different compared to somebody walking into a back office support team of human resources or the nursing team that just won six awards and has the lowest turnover in the entire place. Those things that you need to dig into will be very unique.

So, the learning journey is about supporting the individual where they're at, as well as supporting the broader group to have some shared foundation. And of course, coaching is not the only tool, it could be peer mentoring, learning cycles, debriefs. There are so many ways that learning specialists have become very savvy about making sure it's not just a formula of "these six things" that never changes. It all relates to listening and intuitively tuning into what your clients need at that point in time.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

I think there's something really important in the end, end user here. The end user is not Lisa and Lisa's team, it's actually the patients in the hospital. If those teams aren't working at their best, patient safety is ultimately at risk. This is not a corporate making food or widgets.

This is genuinely a serious situation. If the team is growing faster than the leader, there's real patient safety at risk.

So Lisa, just tell me, when you're taking on this role and people are supporting you to be that leader, I want to go onto this advocacy thing from a learning perspective and an organisational development perspective, but what I'm thinking about is the emotion you were carrying in that moment? Because people are saying "you're the one, we choose you", I've got an image of Toy Story, you know the Claw is coming down and picking you out. But ultimately patient safety is at risk. There's a lot of pressure. How did you feel supported?

### **Lisa Anstey**

It honestly was hard. We can talk about the support, but there were also naysayers, there's always those few in any group. And it was difficult. When we talk about some of the early initiatives, about meeting twice a day, having those huddles, the peer recognition, it's happened in every instance that I've had, in the beginning it's almost like a joke: "I'm going to thank you for doing your job?" Yes, you are going to thank folks for going above and beyond.

So, there was always some pushback, and in the beginning it was there. But eventually, when you keep at it, that broken record, saying it over and over, reiterating and coming at it from a genuine, positive place, it slowly turns. Where it is now is an excitement for the peer recognition.

Here at WRHN we have custom MDR WRHN water bottles that the team can win for recognition. There's always a little gift card in there for them. And it started from "I'm going to thank you for doing your job" to folks genuinely being excited for this limited edition water bottle that's just a token to appreciate them.

So, it was a lot of pressure. And when I would second guess myself, to be able to have that check-in, to talk with someone else and realise, no, you are making a difference and you're slowly moving the needle. You're never going to win everyone around, which is a tough realisation to come to.

But when you've got the majority and it's better, that's where the team really shines. And I say to my team quite a bit, don't let perfect get in the way of better. We are better. We are learning. We are growing. There is no such thing as perfect. And don't let perfect get in the way of better.

I would focus on the day to day because it was a very overwhelming thought that this responsibility was on me. And even those who were very excited "I'm going to come in and save the department, I'm going to make it better", that's almost tougher than taking on the negative folks. I can prove the negative folks wrong. But it's harder to prove the positive folks right, yes, I am going to make a difference.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

Can I just appreciate you saying that? I just want to appreciate you sharing that with us, because so many times when we hear podcasts and read books and case studies, we just hear the good stuff.

But actually, I'm appreciative on behalf of the audience that you're saying it wasn't all just flowers and chocolates. There was a journey. And I think this is why I wanted to talk about advocacy, Sarah, because for many people in learning roles, we may be the only learning professional in the organisation. We don't have a team around us. How do we keep going when

we don't have a voice in the organisation? How do we keep pushing an agenda which could feel very different, as recognition could be, very different from a traditional approach.

Your energy is infectious. I can imagine being Lisa and having you on the side as that guide on the side, as just a beautiful thing. But how can everyone have a Sarah?

How can everyone get that energy and keep going with the advocacy when you know and believe something is right? Because Lisa is describing a very true story, oftentimes you're pushing water uphill. You're constantly getting soaked but you've got to pick yourself up and go again.

I don't want to bring it down, so what do you think? How do we get advocacy when it's hard?

### **Sarah McVanel**

Well, as we know, teaching soft skills is far from soft, it's sometimes the most challenging work. Same with backing up why those things are needed. Sometimes we think it's too soft to put data around, but actually it's not. It matters, there's measurement there. You sometimes just have to pick your moments or dig in and find enough data.

In the case of when Lisa and I came into each other's worlds, this team had the lowest satisfaction and lowest engagement results in the entire organisation. So anyone who says to me it's not worth spending a lot of time getting the leadership right, spending time with the team daily, making sure they feel valued and supported — I'd say: I don't know about you, but I feel like the people who need the most help should get the most help.

And so, you don't have to just believe engagement survey data. Look at the turnover. Look at the absenteeism and sick time. Oh, that's right, it's not just HR data and people data. Look at quality. Look at incidents and injuries. If you're wagging your finger saying "you need to have fewer errors" but the errors are because departments aren't communicating with MDR quickly enough, because MDR feels like they can't do anything, so they're not going to call and let them know there's a missing instrument, when they knew about it, so, there is so much data to substantiate the value of supporting a team. And learning and development professionals, we don't need to wait for people to come to us. We need to say, this is the data I'm seeing.

What else is there that substantiates that we need a significant investment? Maybe it's financial, maybe it's time, maybe it's energy. If it matters enough, we will advocate for that. And it's okay if people don't listen to us straight away, because we're not going anywhere. That's the benefit of being passionate about your work.

And you know, when Lisa was mentioning about the naysayers, it's the same with people in our field. People who say, it's a cost centre, it's a nice to have, we'll put it off until next year because we've got the AI project right now.

Really? Because I'm going to look around behind me and see how many people are lining up to get involved in a project that might do away with their job.

We have to sometimes help people see forward into the future. Let's look at what the past has brought us. Let's look at the mess right now. And if we look down the pipe and do nothing, I don't think the story gets any better. So, let's maybe have a real conversation about that. And because we've got the data, we're credible. That's kind of the way I see it.

## **Michelle Parry-Slater**

You get no argument from me, taking an evidence-based approach is the answer, because it gives us the backup. It gives us the opportunity to say it's not me and a whim or a wish, it's the evidence pointing towards it. I can totally understand your approach.

And I think your mindset, coming from that organisational development bigger-picture perspective, is why looking for evidence beyond learning metrics, beyond that narrow field of data, looking at all the data, can help us bridge these two worlds of OD and L&D.

So, we get to the place where Lisa's being brilliant in her role. They're no longer in the bottom third. I'm curious, Lisa, what did you start to notice? What changed? Where did the team get to?

## **Lisa Anstey**

In a word, change happened. People were willing to try new things. They were willing to put themselves out there. We went from one of the lowest engaged teams, to when we did the next engagement survey, the results so drastically different from the original that Qualtrics reached out to ask what was wrong, because they'd never seen such a turnaround in a team before. And it was just by applying recognition, addressing things head on.

We went from the department that nobody knew about in the basement to being recognised. Our organisation was involved with the association of manufacturing an AMA conference and MDR was highlighted as a tour destination in the building. We welcomed folks from around the world to see MDR. We went from behind the scenes, where nobody knew we existed, to out in the world, with people hearing our stories and being involved in corporate and organisational initiatives.

And it's very true here with my organisation, WRHN. I'm involved with the Business and Education Partnership of Waterloo. I'm supported to go and talk to high schools. Shad Canada, a national STEAM camp, outreach into the community. We welcomed the Canadian Association for Girls in Science. All of those things.

Recognising within our walls how amazing the team is allows us to step up and shine outside of that. With our peer recognition programme, we talk about the little things day to day that are exceptional, that can make a difference. If somebody's having a bad day and someone does something as simple as unloading one of their racks for them, it's a huge ripple effect.

And taking all of that recognition and what we do behind the scenes and sharing it by welcoming people like the Canadian Association for Girls in Science, it's just our normal, our day to day. Did you run the BI? Yep, it's done. But if we explain it to someone else, this is a biological indicator, this is the spore strip, here's the food medium, this is the purpose of it, it reinstalls that sense of pride in the individual sharing it outwardly. So it's really great not only to recognise each other, but also the simple recognition of the work itself, its importance and its role in a patient's health journey.

## **Sarah McVanel**

I mean, it's such a beautiful way to also remind yourselves of the meaning and purpose of your work. Because nobody else is qualified to do this. And if you're putting something in my body, I want the most qualified person. This is one of the fascinating things when we think about the meaning we get a chance to highlight. And I think any listener who knows people who are

invisible heroes in their community, especially if they are people they like or love, encouraging them, like Lisa is talking about, to bring people into their world and make their greatness not invisible as a group. Because when we do that, we get to re-almost fall in love with the work.

Why it matters. It's so easy to say, we have 16 trays to sterilise within the next insert-time. And then it's about the tasks, the indicators, the deliverables, the data.

But actually it's about, we get a chance to make sure that we have done preventative screening for 18 people who may have cancer, and hopefully make sure that they either have good news or really quick care if it's not good news.

That's what the work is all about. And if people have peer-to-peer connection and a great relationship with their leader, then they talk about that. I'm guessing, Lisa, that some of what shows up in the recognition is the purpose and the meaning and the impact of the work?

### **Lisa Anstey**

Absolutely. And sharing the work outwardly does fill a person's cup. When you talk and you see people light up, this is what happens behind the scenes, this is what you do all of this for, one pair of scissors, it's huge. And it's that recognition of each other, but also the recognition of the day to day and the importance of the work.

### **Sarah McVanel**

I'm so excited that you're going to get more people coming into your field by making it visible. The world needs a lot more Lisas and her teams. We cannot have healthcare without your work. So I'm so glad you stepped up, Lisa. I'm just so grateful that you trusted us and you went for it.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

The ripples are clearly there, not just in your own career, Lisa, but in the wider setting as well. And I'm curious about the wider hospital. What does that recognition-rich picture look like across the hospital? Have you influenced it with the recognition approach?

### **Lisa Anstey**

I do my best. I try. I put it out there. Whatever role I've worked in, I've always done some sort of recognition. When we had the vaccine clinic, it was over 600 people who came together from all different roles, physicians, pharmacists, members of the community, students out of school, people in the service industry who were out of work, who came together to make the vaccine clinic happen. And we did a "Cheers to Peers" programme: a weekly peer-to-peer recognition. It was successful. It was great. When we had volunteers come back, we rolled it out to include cheers to volunteers as well. And the organisation I'm with now, WRHN, Waterloo Regional Health Network, is really shifting to a people-focused direction, talking about thriving teams and making sure it is a people-first approach.

So, I don't know if I've influenced it, but I'm so happy to be a part of it, because these values and this approach are really reflective of what I want to be as a leader in the organisation.

### **Sarah McVanel**

Well, that's 600 people who knew what it was like to be in a team, in an environment where people were valued for their contribution.

So, nobody can convince me that you didn't have those ripples, because 600 people experienced the magic of it, not because you said it needs to happen, but because they experienced it happening.

And the reality is everything we're talking about and I'm sure all the listeners, especially given that they're learning professionals you know there's science behind this. There's learning psychology that is the foundation of recognition. What gets appreciated gets repeated. So, if we want behavioural reinforcement loops, we need to recognise. It's like "I'm not thanking people for doing their jobs." Well, really, don't you want them to keep doing it? So that's the data behind it.

But there's also another layer when it comes to motivation theory. Self-determination theory says that to have your motivation needs fully met, you need relatedness, you need autonomy, and you need capability and competence. Recognition is a way of tapping into all three. We feel more connected to each other.

We feel able to independently act, maybe even make suggestions for improvements.

And we feel more capable and competent. And as we talked about the sooner we can create those connections and that competency loop and inspire autonomy, the better.

So, that was what we were just talking about with the coaching.

I just hope that everyone listening really feels and experiences the importance of, in a learning role, how much you can be the one to reinforce systems of recognition to help make learning stick and to encourage people to pursue more of it.

Even if you are in a learning role where you have something mandatory and not when we have prisoners in the room, people who would rather not be there. Recognising the discretionary effort, the ideas, the bold questions, any of those little things makes it not a chore, it makes it a privilege to be in that room. And that's an exciting thing for educators of people, whether those people are learners by choice or learners that need to be there. You can help create an experience where they feel valued for who they are. And then hopefully they'll take that back and spread it to their peers, volunteers and give them some cheers.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

Beautiful. Well, as we start to wrap up our episode today, I'm just curious to know, is there anything you haven't talked about that you would have liked to?

Any final thoughts as we close out on this thinking around recognition?

### **Lisa Anstey**

Even if it's small, it's important.

If somebody calls in and someone picks up a shift, even though yes, they're getting paid, yes, it's their job to pick up.

I make a point of saying thank you for coming in. Recognition doesn't have to be the gold watch after 50 years. It can be day to day. It can be a simple thank you. It can be an acknowledgement. It can be personal. Like I said, we've got the monthly peer recognition, it's a water bottle, it's unique to MDR, it's something the team can share that's special to them.

And it can be hard to get started, some folks may think it's a little hokey. But you stick with it. It wins people around. It really is worth it and it's so valuable.

As a leader, I value my team. I appreciate the work they do. I respect what is done in the department so much. And any way that I can get that across to the frontline team who are there on their feet in the trenches with the sterilisers, whereas I'm in the office trying to advocate and make things better, I want them to know that I so appreciate what they do and the impact they have for the patients.

### **Sarah McVanel**

Yeah, what I would add to that is, I hope that people are recognising their leaders who are advocating, such as you, Lisa. Don't forget to recognise the people who are behind the scenes supporting you.

And I would also say, let's not forget to recognise the people who share something negative or unpopular, who push something that is the right sort of thing, even if the delivery mode is not positive, we shut it down and don't want to hear it. A complaint is merely a poorly worded request.

Unless you have true cynics, the people for whom nothing you say or do could ever be right, most people don't get up in the morning to do harm or make people miserable.

So, I know that if there's something there that is actually a shared belief, yeah, we both want people to follow the policy and it's frustrating that every staff meeting the eyes roll, you think "actually, it's a good point." We all care about quality. So, let's do a quick quality minute. Let's start the meeting off with, what are we doing really well, and what policies do we need to do a better job of following?

Listen to people. That's part of recognition too, I care about that. And it will allow people to channel what would normally have been negative, because they felt that was the only way to get it across, into something constructive. If it's hard and negative, and you as a peer or as a leader hear it and say, I value you, I see you, and then you acknowledge it and then people don't have to show up quite so negatively anymore. And that's that big shift that I think Lisa was talking about. So, I hope folks think about it, when somebody is critical, if they're not trying to be harmful, recognise the greatness behind that negativity. And then you'll be able to get more of what works, and they'll be able to bring more of their best.

### **Michelle Parry-Slater**

Wonderful and thank you. I'd like to recognise both of you for staying late at work to have this conversation and also for sharing all of these fantastic ideas. I think there's such crossover between the work of L&D and what we're trying to achieve, and how you can do it through this wonderful gift of recognition. If people would like to get in touch with you, Sarah, Lisa, is LinkedIn okay? And Sarah, do you want to share how people can find out more about Greatness Magnified and the **FROG** framework?

### **Sarah McVanel**

Yeah, for sure. Come on over to [greatnessmagnified.com](http://greatnessmagnified.com). The medical device reprocessing story is actually in my first co-authored book, Forever Recognize Others Greatness, written with

Brenda, who is one of the amazing folks who was working with the MDR team. And the book is available around the world wherever you buy books.

**Michelle Parry-Slater**

Wonderful. We will make sure that the show notes have got links to the books and links to both of you.

So, listeners, if you've enjoyed this episode, please leave a review, it helps others find the Learning Uncut podcast.

And it will also help us if you let us know who you want to hear from, and which stories might solve some of the problems you're facing in your work.

Do get in touch with me on LinkedIn and we'll be able to bring you new guests who are answering the challenges that you have.

But for our guests today , Sarah, Lisa, wonderful. Thank you so much.

**Sarah McVanel**

Thank you. Lisa, thank you for sharing.

**Lisa Anstey**

Thanks, everyone.

**Contact today's guests using the following links.**

[Sarah McVanel \(LinkedIn\)](#)

[Greatness Magnified \(Website\)](#)

[Forever Recognize Others Greatness \(Book\)](#)



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Please note my working hours may differ from yours; there is no need to respond outside of your regular hours.

## Learning Uncut Episode 187: Recognition as a Learning Tool – Sarah McVanel & Lisa Anstey



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