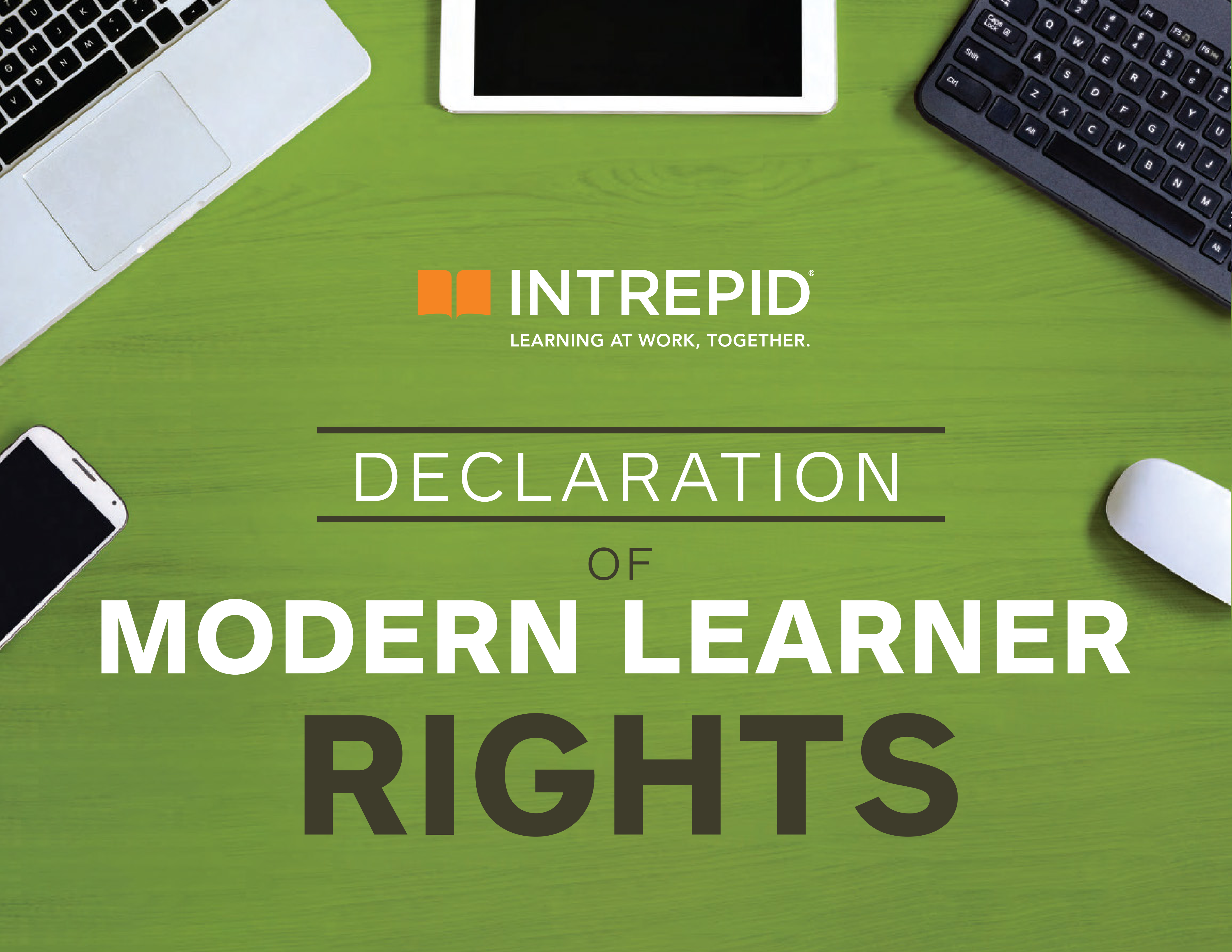

INTREPID®

LEARNING AT WORK, TOGETHER.

DECLARATION OF MODERN LEARNER RIGHTS

INTREPID®

LEARNING AT WORK, TOGETHER.

DECLARATION OF MODERN LEARNER RIGHTS

1. All adult learners are endowed with reason.
2. Ruthless relevance is a justified demand.
3. Expectations shall be clearly communicated.
4. A learner's contributions shall be acknowledged.
5. All learners should be allowed freedom of opinion and expression as it directly relates to professional matters.
6. No learner shall be compelled to do work that does not further the learning objective.
7. Learning does not happen if brains are overloaded.
8. Instructional designers must always ask "why."
9. Every learner has the right to a dynamic and balanced learning experience.
10. No one involved in designing tech-enabled corporate learning shall forget that people are at the heart of it.

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INTRODUCTION *Manjit Sekhon*

You know how sometimes core empowering truths arise out of painful experiences? This is how Intrepid's Declaration of Modern Learner Rights came to be.

I had a conversation once with a couple of course owners. Their level of resistance to design ideas that are core to creating a positive learning environment could only be explained by an inherent distrust of their audience:

"Our learners will never complete unless we make the content required!"

"How can we give them content for a subsequent topic, unless they have passed the quiz for the first one to prove they are ready?"

"Let's not bother with using social features, discussion forums are cheesy and no-one shares anyway. And what if they raise inappropriate issues!"

Oh it made me so mad! I just wanted to yell "Learners have rights, too!"

And so I sort of did yell "Learners have rights, too!"— not during that conversation of course. But I did later to some of my wonderful Learning Experience Design colleagues at Intrepid just to vent, and the idea struck a chord. In the back-and-forth that resulted from my outburst, we came to the conclusion that the corporate instructional design world NEEDS a declaration of learner rights.

And of course we have specific reasons why we think these 10 in particular are so crucial. So I hope you will take the ideas expanded upon in the ebook and apply them to your own learning design and and learning initiatives.

THE CASE FOR RUTHLESS RELEVANCE

Elizabeth Pearce

RUTHLESS RELEVANCE: THE CORE OF OUR JOB AS LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGNERS

In my daydreams about a better corporate world, I overhear workplace comments like these:

I just learned the most useful thing in training!
Can we set aside time at the next team meeting for me to share it?

You know that issue we've been struggling with? In training yesterday, I think I found a way to handle it.

There's an easier way to do what you're doing. If you go to that site we used in training last month, you'll find templates and examples.

After all, the reason we learning professionals have jobs is to help people improve the way they work—whatever their work may be—so that organizations can thrive.

And if that's why we're here, then the learning programs we create need to be immediately, recognizably relevant to any and every employee who encounters them. Cutting corners on relevance doesn't just take the wind out of your sails; it makes you dead in the water.

Think about the last time you had an interaction with a person or organization in your own life that left you feeling like they didn't understand you, or what you were asking for. Disappointed? Angry even? For sure like it was a waste of time. You probably felt like leaving and never returning, even though you still didn't have what you need.

And the whole experience did NOT make you feel curious, reflective, collaborative or productive—emotions we need to trigger in learners.

The flip side to the information overload we all have intimate experience with in our daily lives is people's appreciation for the range of knowledge available our fingertips. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, that appreciation is increasing, particularly among those ages 18-64 who use multiple devices (smartphone + laptop + desktop + tablet, etc.). In other words, our workforce is becoming more comfortable with their range of knowledge sources even as they struggle with the work/life implications of the amount of content out there.

But the point is, they know they have choices about where and how they can get information, and increasingly they expect to hop around quickly among those options to get what they need.

On some level, training is just one more information source. If our work doesn't give learners what they need to succeed in their jobs, they will likely leave us for a source that feels more relevant … the same way you wanted to leave that tedious person you met at a conference or on Tinder who kept going on about something you couldn't relate to.

Given all of that, we in the corporate L&D world only stay relevant to our learners if we exercise "ruthless relevance" in what we create for them.

ONE ANSWER TO THE "YEAH, BUT HOW?"

No one sets out to create irrelevant training. It's difficult to create a learning experience that resonates with a wide range of people. Most of my clients work in global organizations with 10,000-100,000 employees and create training programs meant for large swaths of the company like all managers, all new hires, all sales staff, etc. Offering real relevance to so many individual employees can feel unattainable within budgets and traditional timelines.

One of my early teachers, Ann Marsland, was masterful at sparking thoughtful, concentrated learning in young children. She was also a family friend and once offered me this shopping advice: "The best children's toy is one that does nothing until the child does something with it." In other words, require interaction and user input—they'll thank you for it.

But not just any input; it must be relevant. Young children and corporate employees alike will sniff out gratuitous interaction in a heartbeat, roll their eyes and walk away (mentally, if not physically).

We've long known the phrase "use it or lose it," which (in a more complex form) provides a foundation for Plato's Socratic method, constructivist learning theory, the education reforms of John Dewey and the case-based approach of Roger Schank, to name a few. So the impact of interaction and user input on learning outcomes isn't exactly breaking news.

What has been revealed more recently through neuroscience is that asking learners to "use it," repeatedly and over time, actually alters their brains, which is necessary for retention and mastery. If our brain doesn't change, we don't learn well (or not at all). What we communicate to learners needs to resonate with what's already in their brains (like their everyday job tasks and responsibilities) to capture their attention and get them thinking, applying and doing something with it.

Let's recap. We know that:

- Until learners feel some kind of connection to the material, their neural networks will not begin firing.
- Unless they use the new information or skill, they will not really learn it.
- If what we give them doesn't feel relevant, they'll abandon it to go looking among other sources.
- Our project charters and budgets require us to accomplish all of the above for large, diverse audiences with one program, and that's a tough challenge.

The good news is, you don't have to create ALL of the ruthless relevance yourself. Obviously you still need to understand the business and learning needs and details about the audience and their work environment to design a good program. But you only need to create some of the ruthless relevance required. If you give learners just enough to help them bridge the gap between new information and their everyday world, they'll fill in the rest themselves.

So my view is, an instructional designers' real work is building the right context for learners to create relevant content themselves using activities, projects, discussions and all the other great tools at our fingertips.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT:

Manager Training Example (Subject: Coaching Skills)
Questions & Projects to Prompt Relevant User-Generated Content

- What's the best coaching you've ever received? What made it great? What was its impact?
- Describe a challenging team situation in which one member needed coaching. Did they get it? What was the impact on the rest of the team and resulting work?
- Identify upcoming work (e.g., busy season, a difficult project, filling a vacancy) that's likely to create coaching needs. Describe what you can do to prepare.

Sales Training Example (Subject: Customer Analysis)
Questions & Projects to Prompt Relevant User-Generated Content

- List your available sources of information, explaining what you expect to gain from each source. Next prioritize them, explaining your rationale.
- Think about a past analysis project (professional or personal) that took too long and didn't give you the results you needed. In hindsight, what could you have done better?

Change Management Example (Subject: New Process)
Questions & Projects to Prompt Relevant User-Generated Content

- Review the intended outcomes of the new process. What impact will it have on you and the people you work with most closely? Be specific.
- We've created working groups for each part of the process. Join the group associated with the part of the process that piques your interest the most. Work with that group to create a presentation explaining that part of the process to others.
  - ▶ Next visit other work groups to see their presentation and ask questions about what's still confusing to you.
  - ▶ Finally, in your original work group, iterate on your original presentation based on the questions and feedback received.

In each case, learners are taking advantage of materials provided in training to create new content that is highly relevant to themselves and their colleagues in the training. In fact, they're creating volumes of content that would have taken you months of effort. But because they are creating it themselves, their understanding and retention is exponentially greater than if you handed it to them, fully vetted and in hi-res.

Our call to action is to hold ourselves accountable to ruthless relevance. I hope this post has gotten your neurons firing about some ways to leverage the modern world of training to make it happen for your learners.

RUTHLESS RELEVANCE PUTS REG CC IN CONTEXT

Judy Albers

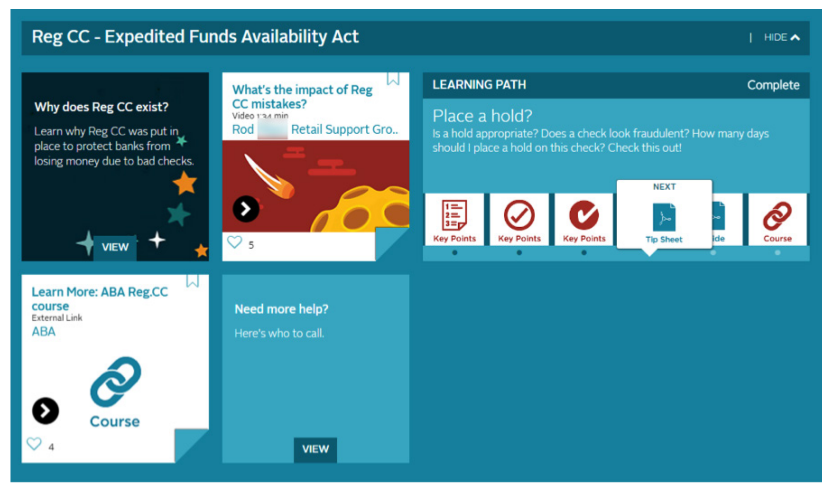
Capital City Bank of northern Florida has a great example of Article #2 of Intrepid's Declaration of Modern Learner Rights in action. One of the (many) problems with compliance training is that you are taught the rules but not the application, not the stories, not the impact of making mistakes—not the ruthless relevance.

I worked in banking for 17 years before coming to Intrepid, and when I was a baby banker, I had to work at a teller window before I could train tellers (great idea, by the way!). One of the most obfuscated and hard-to-learn regulations is Reg CC, which is all about placing a hold on someone's check.

Denise Wilson, CLO of Capital City Bank, puts it this way, "Reg CC is probably the most dificult thing to train. In our live teller school we spent ¾ of a day on this and yet I would still get phone calls from managers saying we didn't do enough training on Reg CC! Even though we were doing live training it still wasn't enough."

So, we added some Ruthless Relevance to Capital City Bank's online learning experience (known as the Teller Hub) around the existing Reg CC e-learning course from the American Bankers Association, which is required to prove that your tellers have been trained on Reg CC. **But have they learned Reg CC?**

Teller Hub homepage



Reg CC Learning Path

To make sure new tellers had really learned it, we took that mandated Reg CC e-learning course and put it in context. We told a simple story about Priscilla and cousin Larry and that $500 he owes her.

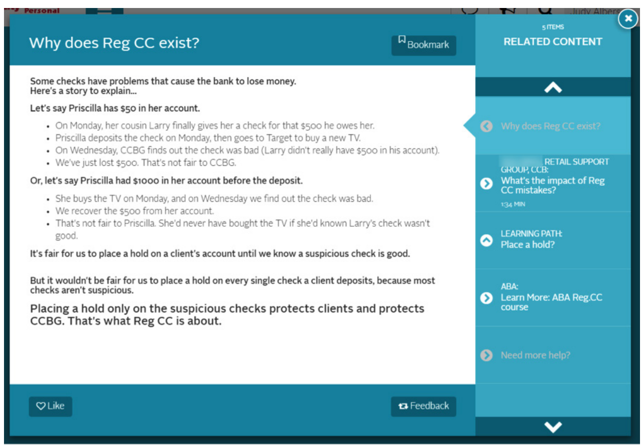
And in 20 seconds you now understand more about Reg CC than I did in my first 2 years in the banking industry! That covered “Why does Reg CC exist” in a way that makes the details of the regulation make sense to the tellers.

The other part of ruthless relevace is “Why should I care?” So we walked learners through what happens if you make a Reg CC mistake. And one of the things that happens at Capital City Bank if you made a mistake on Reg CC is you’ll get an email from Rod in retail support. So the Capital City Bank designer took her iphone and went to Rod’s office and shot a one-and-a-half minute video of him explaining what happens when people make mistakes – things that go wrong in real life stories. He had some great stories and it was so much more effective than just repeating back the dry regulations!

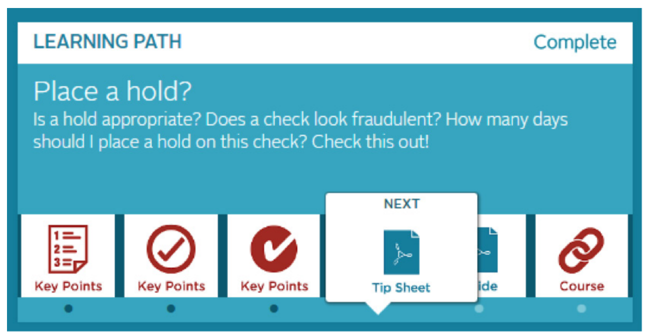
Because you should know why a law exists in addition to what the law is. Added to that, a Learning path with the 3 key things you really need to know about Reg CC to reinforce the e-learning course’s content and boom boom boom, a compliance regulation in context.

“The way that we explain the Teller Hub to people in the bank,” says Denise Wilson, “Is it’s like our Google. If you need to figure something out, this is our internal google for our tellers. Take another day-to-day example, say the lead teller is on vacation and you need to balance the vault and you’ve never done it before. You can go into Managing Vault and watch one of our lead tellers show you how in short videos, so you don’t have to try to look it up in that big thick manual, and try to interpret the dry words.”

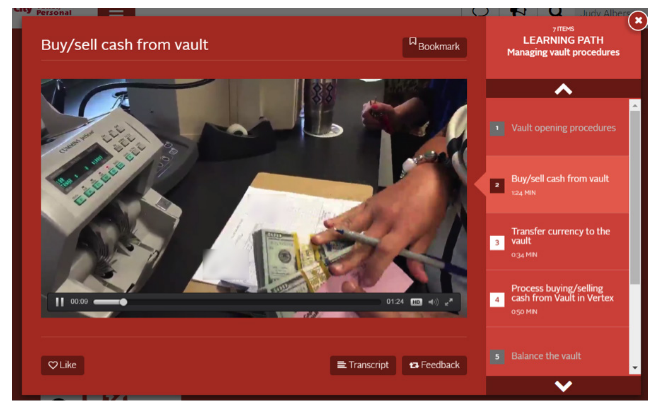
Now how’s that for ruthlessly relevant?!



The story of Larry and Priscilla and the $500 check



Learning path showing key points from Reg CC e-learning course



Video explaining balancing the vault

5 WAYS TO LOWER THE BARRIERS BETWEEN YOUR LEARNERS AND LEARNING

Manjit Sekhon

There are a lot of barriers to getting actual learning done if you're a modern corporate learner. First, there's all the overwork and distraction and lack of time in the day to fit it in—all of which has very been well-documented by just about every infographic and article in the last couple of years it seems! (Us too.)

And if a learner does manage to log onto their intranet or LMS for some traditional e-learning, there's the barrier of an underwhelming user experience. Or a forced learning path which ignores their existing knowledge. Or patronizing 'forced fun' gamification that de-motivates instead of encourages. All of which can be drop-out points for learners.

But there are a few barriers that are really easy to knock out of your learners' way for any type of online or blended learning program. A good first place to start is: clearly communicating what learners are expected to do within a learning program. Put yourself in the learners' shoes and imagine their frustration at thinking they've completed all the requirements for a week, only to get an email from their manager chastizing them for being behind!

HERE ARE 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE YOU COMMUNICATE TO LEARNERS:

- How many hours per week the work is expected to take, or how long the course experience will be open
- Whether all content is required or only some
- If you are using points or badges, how to get them, and what they mean
- What happens if a learner doesn't meet the expectations of the course
- Where a learner can go to find out how they're progressing so far

A COUPLE OF REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES:

> *One of our clients handled the "only some content is required" issue by separating required vs. optional content on separate course pages. Another kept all content together so that it made contextual sense, but used a "required 'flag'" in the title of required items to prompt the learner to not skip those.*
>
> *Another client ensured that—apart from just telling people once at the beginning of the course how many points and badges they could earn—they also put in reminder notes at the end of every week's content. This helped learners doublecheck for themselves if they had collected all the points and badges available up until that point.*

There are lots of options for "What happens if a learner doesn't meet the expectations of the course" aside from a simple pass/fail:

> *One client running a corporate MOOC reduces the points available for a week for those learners who didn't complete that week in time. This prompts learners to stay more or less in sync with each other. The course admins put reminders of this rule in multiple places in the course experience – in the course overview, in reminder emails, on home page announcements, etc.*
>
> *The same client had a peer-reviewed project capping off a course that was also counted towards course completion. If a learner kept up with the content, yet failed the final project, they were welcomed to participate in the next run of the class by just doing the project without having to do the course work over again.*

The fewer unnescessary barriers there are to learning, the more you can concentrate on truly motivating and engaging employees, instead of just reacting to their frustration and anger arising out of confusion or boredom.

WHAT TO WORRY ABOUT WHEN MODERATING, AND WHAT NOT TO WORRY ABOUT!

Catie Bull

It is key to keep engagement high in an online learning experience. And it's up to both learners and course owners to contribute to a dynamic experience.

"A Learners Contributions Shall Be Acknowledged" ensures that no learner is left feeling as if they are wandering a great void, wondering when—or even whether—another person will ever stumble upon their contributions (be they learner, moderator, facilitator or curator), and therefore have made making them worth the effort.

(You know that feeling, you've been there with the crickets after posting a Facebook update you thought was great, admit it!)

SO: THAT MEANS MODERATORS.

Here's what to worry about, and what not to worry about, when it comes to successfully moderating an online learning experience (with one moderator or several):

> **Worry about making sure your learners know who the moderators are,** what their role is, and how to get in touch, right from the beginning—in your pre-course communications and easily findable somewhere within the course experience.
>
> **Don't worry about being a constant 24/7 presence.** Be available, and check in, but—just as with micro-content and short-form for learners—moderators can do the work of moderating in 10-15 minute chunks too.
>
> **Worry about threading opportunities for discussion and interaction throughout the course content where it makes the most sense for people to deliberate on an issue together,** in order to internalize the information as a group. So really, the very first step in moderation is in the course design, long before a moderator might even be selected. Design spaces where learners can respond as a group to create a shared understanding of critical concepts.

Don't worry about responding to every single discussion post. Think of the moderator as a presence whose job is to keep interactions moving forward smoothly, but not someone who has to be super chatty all the time themselves. When they do seed or react to discussions, it should be to make sure the discussion is ruthlessly relevant to the course and the job.

Worry about making sure your moderator understands the course materials and content, so they can answer questions (or forward the question to a SME and post the response) and direct learners to key resources when needed. One way to do this after you've run the pilot is to recruit course alumni as moderators. They know the course material, and lend some 'oomph' to the urgency of the learning for the next round of learners.

Worry about listening to your learners! The moderator is in a great position to curate common themes, problems, and tacit knowledge, as well as to report on the "pulse" of the course to course stakeholders. Moderation is also the logical first step of curation, highlighting discussion remarks or assignments that are trending or exemplary to enrich the learning experience.

Don't worry about engagement. Don't worry about it, that is, if you thread thought-provoking questions through the course. You can also loop in senior people in the organization to participate as moderators. For example, you can have a VP or C-suite member of your organization's leadership be a "guest moderator" for a week—the opportunity to have comments seen and responded to by senior people increases engagement. After all, one reason learner engagement can be low in online learning is that it can seem to the learner like the organization mostly cares about "ticking the box" on social (i.e. throwing in a discussion forum so the claim of social learning is valid without really making the effort to keep the social aspects dynamic and relevant to business imperatives).

So if senior folks are in the learning experience, the learners get a very strong message: 'This is worth the company's time.' And that acknowledges the learner right from the start.

3 GREAT REASONS TO USE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Summer Salomonsen

All learners should be allowed freedom of opinion and expression as it directly relates to professional matters. Do you agree with that?

This article, all learners should be allowed freedom of opinion and expression as it relates to professional matters, ties to that sometimes thorny but definitely necessary aspect of effective modern learning: the discussion forum.

Now, discussion forums can make some people uneasy. I can almost see you crossing your arms and making up your mind, but allow me to convince you.

Across thousands of users and hundreds of courses, we have found very little unprofessional behavior. Consider: a virtual learning experience is in a professional context after all, and the learner's name and photo displays right there along with what they posted. Highly unlikely your learners will take that risk.

To discourage inappropriate posts, you might link to your company's honor code at the beginning of each discussion. This tells your learners, let's keep it clean, productive, and lets them know that you're asking them to bring some gravitas to the experience.

It's up to you to create great discussion forums that are ruthlessly relevant. Set the right context, and your learners will follow suit.

Now that we've got that out of the way, I'm going to share my top 3 reasons to use discussion forums in an online learning experience.

REASON #1: GENERATE INSIGHT

Push participants to think further, more, deeper, about what they've been given. Avoid the lame questions that sound something like, *What did you think?*

Instead challenge your learner to apply learning to their context.

In a Microsoft MOOC, we added the discussion forum after a series of videos, which were essentially a deep dive into the topic of macroeconomics. Really heady stuff. We could have asked a softball question like, *Are you seeing this with your customers?* but instead we asked them, *Is this the end of laissez-faire capitalism?* And you can't give a response to a question like that without having done the work. In addition to which, people responded from all over the world which broadened the scope for other learners. Questions like that say to the learner you too can think about topics like this and generate insights.

REASON #2: GATHER YOUR LEARNERS' IDEAS
Put discussion forums to work for you. Silence the naysayers by asking people to share who they are and what they already know about a topic. Consider this example from Capital City Bank – in a virtual teller training, we asked learners, after watching a series of videos about vault management, what questions they thought should be in the quiz about vault management! The results were surprising. We elicited answers we never thought to ask that contributed to a more meaningful and relevant quiz for future participants.

REASON #3: GROW YOUR LEARNERS' NETWORKS
When you have a big class, you need a functional way of breaking down moderated discussion threads. Consider initiating threads that correspond to industry sectors or roles or geographies, and prompt learners to post in their corresponding thread. This gives you curated responses, and simplifies the context for learners.

You can also use forums to reinforce offline group work, capturing group ideas, meeting notes, or insights. Get your learners to share back with the virtual community what they're learning outside of the platform.

I encourage you to add meaningful discussion forums to your next virtual training. It's well worth it.

THE AGES MODEL & MORE COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Judy Albers

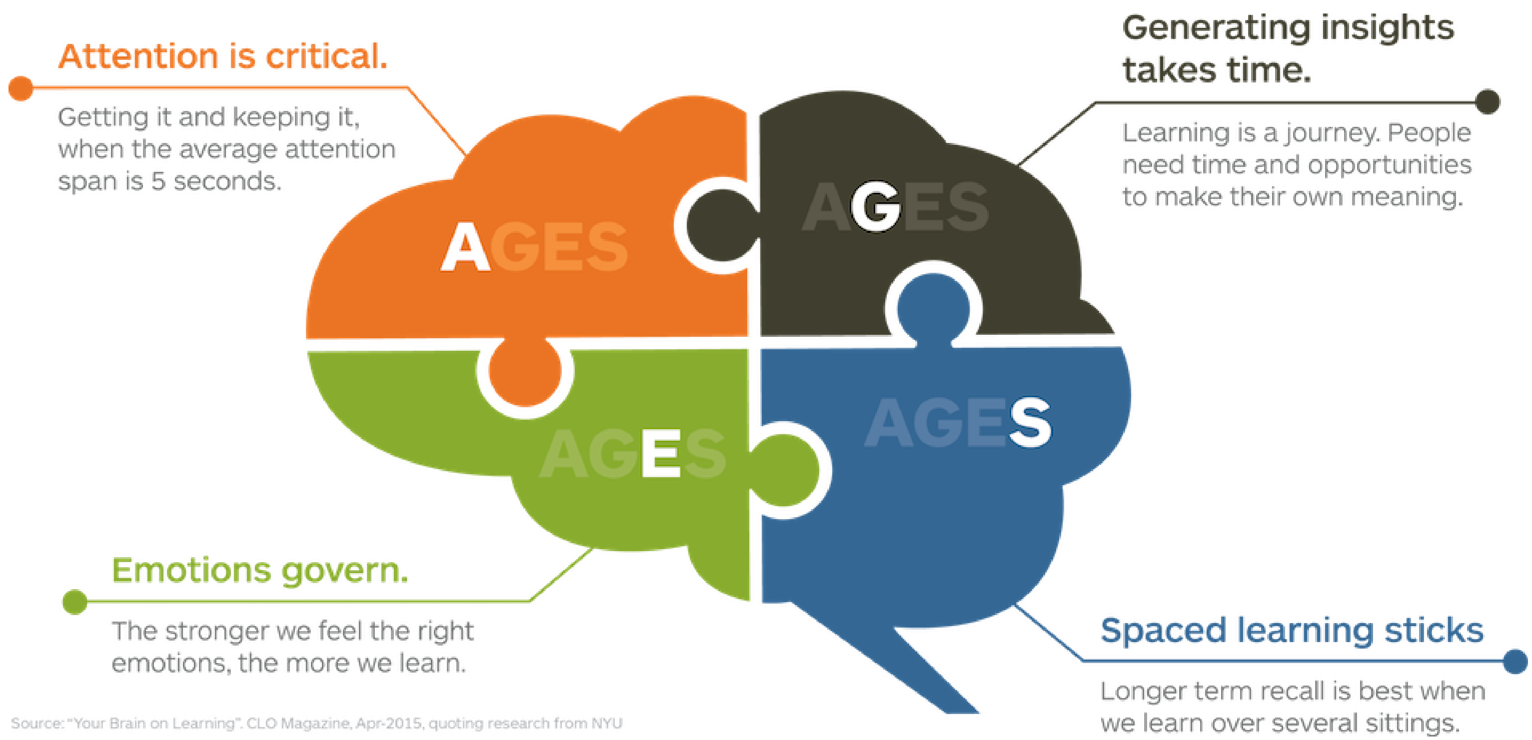
My favorite article of the *Declaration of Modern Learner Rights* is the one really clearly backed up by cognitive science, don't overload people's brains. It makes a good pair with "no one involved in designing tech-enabled corporate learning shall forget that people are at the heart of it."

Put together that means let's design learning for people—and that means designing for how people learn.

There's been an explosion of brain science in the last 10 years and there's a really good model called the AGES Model that I think you should know about.

Get their attention. Allow them to generate their own original insights. Leverage their emotions. And space it out.

So let's talk first about getting and keeping people's attention. People only learn when you have their attention (duh). One of my favorite resources for that is the book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* by Jonah Berger. He studied the most popular New York Times articles and came up with the reasons content goes viral—i.e. gets people's attention.



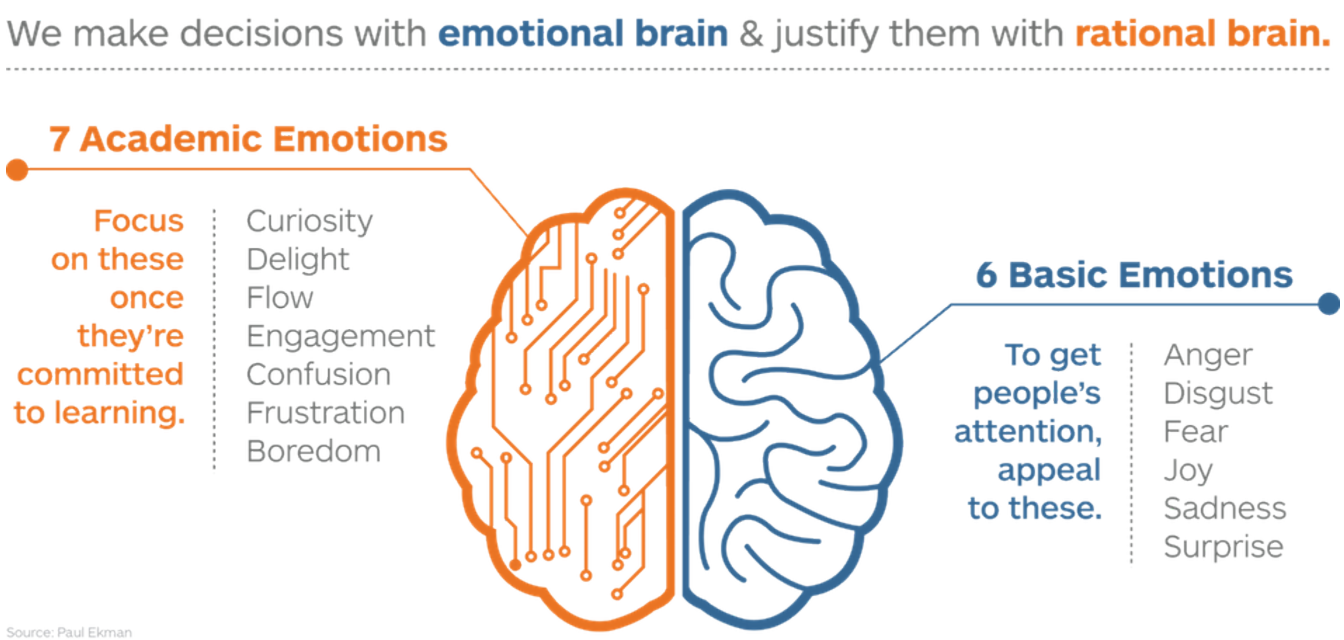
Generating insights. One of the things I love about the learning experiences we design at Intrepid is that people have an opportunity to absorb a little bit of content, stop and think about it, reflect on their own personal experience (and review the experiences of others), and then articulate their own original insight. When people can generate their own insights, they learn.

Emotions. Emotions rule. A good resource for this one is Dan Ariely's book *Irrationally Yours.* It's a really good book and is about how we make decisions with our emotional brains and we justify them with our rational brains. So, you want to be able to capture people's emotions, and you need to recognize that people have a lot of very specific emotions when they are learning.

Some emotions are good for getting people's attention, but when people are already committed to learning, you want to focus on their academic emotions. Things like confusion, frustration, boredom—or better yet, curiosity, delight, and flow.

And the last thing is Spacing. I've developed a lot of learning experiences in my time that were self-directed where we put all the content out there for people and we didn't make it time-bound or give them any structure at all. More often that not, as is human nature, we found that people just waited until the very end and then crammed it all in at once—and cramming doesn't work. Spacing does. (Check out Will Thalheimer's work on research into spaced learning).

So that's a quick overview of the AGES model. I suggest you check out more through the resources I've mentioned to and try applying it to your own learning design.



WAYS TO ASK "WHY?" AND WHY YOU NEED TO

Summer Salomonsen

I want to say a few things about my favorite article in our Declaration of Modern Learner Rights. Simply put, Instructional Designers Must Always Ask Why.

Sure, we know we should always ask why. We may even know why we should ask why. But so often this simple process gets clouded by company culture, "the way we've always done it," and even constraints that may even turn out to be make-believe, based on massively outdated assumptions.

There's no point in creating learning until we've asked and understood, why.

So why do people and companies struggle with this question? It can feel confrontational. It can even feel challenging and flat-out disruptive. But don't let those momentary pushbacks dissuade you. Consider using these activities in your quest for the why—learn from the best.

5 WHYS

Consider the 5 Whys method of Six Sigma famously used by Toyota. Essentially the 5 Whys is an interrogative technique that helps you examine the cause and effect relationships underlying a particular problem. You start with the problem as you know it now, and repeatedly ask the question "why?" in order to arrive at the root cause. The challenge? Making sure the answer to each consecutive "why" is directly related to the previous statement. There's tons of resources on this activity and I challenge you to implement it the next time you're pretty sure there's a deeper problem than the one that's on the table.

6 HATS

Consider the 6 Hats Activity developed by Edward Debono. Basically this is a method to drive group thinking and decision making by framing the problem with a common lens. As indicated by the title, each member of the group

“puts on” different hats which you use to approach the problem at hand. Six hats, each with
a different color:

- The white hat is only interested in the facts
- The yellow hat explores the positives and looks for the benefits and value
- The black hat is all judgement (consider this role the devil’s advocate)
- The red hat relies on feelings, hunches, intuitions, reactions
- The green hat emphasizes creativity, new ideas, possibilities
- The blue hat guides that conversation and keeps things moving (I love that blue hat)

Use this approach with your team when facing a common problem. Like, when you experience pushback on design decisions. Or the process of including or excluding specific types of content. Challenge yourself to look at the problem differently according to the hat you put on.

Asking “why” in my experience is the root of all learning design. If I miss this, I end up creating a learning opportunity that has no foundation, and believe me, learners will notice this! Take the time to identify the why. Challenge your team to engage in these thought-provoking activities and establish a design that resonates with your learners and earns their trust.

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING ENGAGEMENT TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Catie Bull

The idea is simple: engaged people apply more focused energy to achieving goals, they perform better, are more productive, dedicated, and resilient contributors. That's the essential importance of employee engagement to professional learning and development. But how to get it to happen?

SOME BACKGROUND

In Arnold Bakker's *Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement, "engaged workers are proactive job crafters who mobilize their own job challenges and job resources."* It is characterized by a positive work related state that *"combines high work pleasure (dedication) with high activation (vigor, absorption)."*[1]

Engaged employees derive higher satisfaction from what they do, supported by resources that help them succeed in the higher demands of their work, and—big bonus—tend to transfer higher engagement to those around them.

This is where learning & development flexes its motivational potential.

Highly relevant learning resources that are available at the right time, and deployed in the right context are motivational engines:

- Motivates and sets individuals up for success
- Increases their sense of impact in their work
- Enhances their confidence to take on challenges
- Creates positive gains in performance and creativity
- Improves well-being and positivity which can transfer to others across the organization
- Drives individuals to be proactively involved
- Leads to immersion and meaningful connection their work

Job resources are extrinsically motivating—promoting willingness and dedication to tasks.

Higher engagement means enhanced focus of efforts on tasks. This leads to more successful completion of goals.

The more successful people are, the greater the chance that their dedication will spread across your employee roster.

In addition, employees gain from the enhancement of confidence in their own ability to perform and succeed in tasks or execute a course of action: aka self-efficacy. Bolstered by their increased facility of personal resources such as autonomy and sense of impact, this is most evident under high-demand contexts because resources become most salient to individuals and *"gain their motivational potential when employees are confronted with high job demands (e.g., quantitative, emotional, and cognitive demands)."*[3] *In other words, the harder or more complex the task an employee learns to accomplish, the more motivated they become to accomplish more.*

"Results showed that engaged people are highly self-efficacious; they believe they are able to meet the demands they face in a broad array of contexts."[4]

Engaged people exhibit better daily performance, are able to create their own resources, and in turn promote further engagement for positive gain.[5]

Increased engagement brings positive experiences and positive emotions, leading to better health and well-being, which enables people to commit full focus of their skills and energy at work. Engaged people tend to transfer engagement to others in their environment, improving collaborative efforts and team focus.[6]

Engagement is associated with both positivity and proactive change, as engaged people are more motivated and self-directed to both identify job resources and focus concentrated efforts on challenges. Engaged people assign meaning to selected tasks and thereby stimulate constructive influence on their own job fit—experiencing more meaning in the work they do.[7]

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

Engaged employees learn, feel better about themselves, spread that feeling to others, and increase business results as a result. Employee engagement and learning engagement are intrinsically linked, and that's good for business.

If you're interested in the research backing up these ideas, check out:

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PEOPLE, PEOPLE

Catie Bull

I read an article on LinkedIn by one of NPR's digital product designers about using "stress cases" to design their products. "As a digital product designer for news organizations," Libby Bawcombe writes, "I've often focused on user experience and visuals—and not enough on an individual's personal circumstances that may affect how they perceive and comprehend the news."

Bawcombe quotes the authors of Design for Real Life: "You can't always predict who will use your products, or what emotional state they'll be in when they do. But by identifying stress cases and designing with compassion, you'll create experiences that support more of your users, more of the time."

How neatly Bawcombe's thoughts intersect with mine when it comes to this article of Intrepid's Declaration of Modern Learning: "No one involved in designing tech-enabled corporate learning shall forget that people are at the heart of it." I had a few reactions to this as Intrepid Learning's marketing lead, both the learning part and the marketing part.

There's a lot of crossover between corporate learning and marketing. Marketing skills are required to get people to want to take voluntary courses. Making sure they know about them: that's marketing. Keeping a learner's interest in what's next in the online learning experience with visuals and titles: that's marketing. Making sure each course or online program has a personality, well that's pretty much the same as brand voice in marketing. Or to put it another way, the marketing part is about getting learners' attention, and the learning experience design is all about making sure you do positive things with that attention once you've gotten it.

My colleagues will tell you that learners (and of course at some of our client organizations, that can mean over 100,000 people at once) are a diverse lot to design for even when the audience is narrowed to strictly Sales, or just newbie high-potential leaders. And the main point of corporate learning programs is to improve the corporation—through the individual.

You can't predict everything, but you can try to at least do some design team brainstorming about what different emotional states your different learners may be in when they come to your site. For instance, a learner 'stress case' might be "I am used to doing things a certain way but market forces are changing everything. So how do I know what I need to do?" Let's call them Learner A. But Learner B in the same program might be saying "I know all the theory, I only need to learn this one thing. I don't have time to go through every video." Designing with those people in mind in addition to the perfect, chipper, has-all-the-time-in-the-world learner, makes it a better course for everyone on the spectrum.

How? Take for example a performance management course that includes the topic "Feedback as a performance management tool" that covers the 5 Ws and 1 H of feedback as a topic. You and your team put together learning content in a well-structured path that explains the relationship of the previous content to the next content. This covers the "So how do I know what I need to do?" Learner A.

But you can also create a space where the same content is presented as answers to questions where learners can find the same content categorized under "I have a difficult feedback conversation coming up, how do I prepare?" You might not include all the content presented in the prescribed learning path, but pull out a job aid or a how-to video to help Learner B find just what they need in that moment of need.

Another idea—Learner C might be coming to a course that supports a new process that was recently rolled out in the organization. They've been told they have to change the way they've been doing things. Stress! So rather than have the course jump straight into what to do and how, perhaps include something that addresses concerns about change. Because everyone has some stress around, and resistance to, change. So, you can have a short video from a senior leader talking about the 30,000-foot business level changes requiring a new approach, or even audio of a customer talking about the impact of existing approaches on their lives and decisions. Even just that level of context is sometimes enough to overcome initial resistance and help learners keep an open mind about the content.

Similarly, in regular ol' marketing, this concept means making sure the content is interesting and on-target to the people I want to speak to. Because if it's not, then the digital strategy technology-related numbers don't do me much good when it comes to qualified leads and sales. And that's why content marketers too must always remember they're ultimately talking to people, not just to search engine algorithms.

Libby Bawcombe closes her article with the following: "Let's treat our users as the humans that they are and design experiences that thoughtfully consider imperfect circumstances. Designing with empathy will make the delivery of news better for everyone."

I think you can swap in both "learning" and "marketing" for "news" there. No one involved in designing tech-enabled anything should forget that people are at the heart of it.

CONCLUSION

We don't claim these to all be great secrets or hitherto unknown truths, but they are ideas that we think have been lost in the modern corporate learning world in the noise—the noise of compliance requirements, the speed of changing learner expectations, and L&D's attempts to catch up with different technologies available for learning.

We hope that you will keep these tenets, and their implications, in mind when you are designing online learning experiences at your organization.

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