TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING SOLUTIONS

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INVERTING THE FORGETTING CURVE
CHRISTINE KHOR

A BALANCED LOOK AT USING CHATGPT IN TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT
KAREN KIPLING

FRONT END LOADING
NEIL VON HEUPT

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FRONT END LOADING

BY NEIL VON HEUPT

I love this profession. We don't just design learning, we make rocket fuel. We can change people's lives.

When someone's performance improves, they feel good, they go home happier, they're easier to work with, their business or organisation performs better—all of which is good for the economy and for the world. The work undertaken by Learning and Development (L&D) professionals is exceptionally valuable, and the range of roles we adopt contributes to this value. I don't think that the designer is more important than the developer, or the L&D manager more important than the graphic designer. Everyone makes what we do happen. It is only together that we can change people's lives.

But, L&D professionals don't always reach this high ideal. The budget is too small, we don't have the right resources on our team, the subject matter experts give us too much content, the legal team says that we can't say that, the approvals process wipes the script of anything that resembles a human.

At one level, that's OK. It's OK that on some days we just produce good work. Not ground-breaking or award winning work. But, we can work at doing what we do better. So, I want to take you through six ideas that will stack the deck in your favour, position you for success and make the design process easy and effective. I've dubbed these six ideas 'front end loading', because they all happen before we even get to design or development.

IDEA ONE: GOOD DESIGN REQUIRES EMPATHY

My wife is an empath. She'll call out to me 'I need a hamburger with pineapple, and chips'. I'll respond 'What are you watching?', because I know that someone in that show has just eaten a burger and chips. We have some close friends going through a messy separation. When she hears what's going on, she's offended. She's distressed. She doesn't just feel those things for them, she feels those things herself, with them.

If you want to do good design work, you have to develop your empathy. It's not just a technical skill that you apply. It means bringing yourself into the room and being with the other people who are there: the project leads, the subject matter experts, the other designers, the end-users.

You have to slow down to the speed of presence. Empathy isn't something that can be rushed. There's a risk to empathy's popularisation, particularly through the Human Centred and Design Thinking models. Empathy can become commodified; something we do, rather than someone we are. Whilst empathy is one element of Design Thinking, it's the foundation of Human Centred Design. If we want to create truly transformative learning experiences, empathy has to be there from the get go.

When you're creating your personas, dig

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deep. What do these people drink? What do they do on the weekends? How do you want them to feel? Once you think you've nailed it, step back. Consider who you've missed. Who are the outliers and misfits that will also use what you create?

IDEA TWO: EVERY PROJECT EXISTS IN A CONTEXT, AND IS FRAMED BY THAT CONTEXT

Lift your eyes above the immediacy of the project and see where the project fits into the organisation. What business needs will be addressed by the project, and what are the drivers for it? Scope out what it is that the client is trying to achieve. Sometimes it's as simple as a compliance module. There is legislation that says they have to do it. But if you're just capturing that mandatory tone, then your design might have less impact.

Start with the end in mind. I've always argued that the Katzell–Kirkpatrick evaluation model is best used as a design tool. If you start a project by thinking about what impact (or, dare-I-say return on investment) it will have, then you're well on your way to understanding its context.
- There may be particular pain points that you'll discover. You may even discover that the issue doesn't require a 'training' solution!
- There may be data available to inform your design.

- There may be constraints that you need to know about – technology and infrastructure limitations. What won't work on their system? What's a deal-breaker for their people?

IDEA THREE: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE IS BEHAVIOUR

I want you to imagine that you've engaged me to complete a project. It's six months down the track and we're sitting next to each other at the end of year celebrations having a drink. You're stoked with the performance changes that the project has achieved. What will you be talking about?

You see, the difference between learning and performance is behaviour. You can know all about weight lifting, what sort of diet you need to create bulk, what sort of lifting regime you need to build strength. Too often, L&D professionals think that our role is complete when someone has learned something. We measure it by their ability to say it, to describe it, to list it, to blooms taxonomy learning objective it.

Instead, you need to measure your success by what people do. What is the observably different behaviour? How will you design a learning experience that will actually result in workplace behaviour that is different from what you're seeing now?

I'm not saying that learning objectives are wrong. They're just not enough. What I'm proposing is that we take it up a level—connect the elements of what we're doing into something more cohesive, more woven together. By doing so, what we do will be stronger.

IDEA FOUR: A MINDSET OF TRANSFORMATION

How many of you have worked with someone who has all the knowledge and skills they need to do their job, but their career is totally stuck? How many of you work with someone who can't read the room or even the other person in a conversation? How many of you work with someone where what they do for a living just seems completely out of sync with their values? How many of you work with someone who eats rubbish food, smokes, doesn't do anything active, and is always tired? How many of you are these people?

We design learning for real people. Not the ones you see in the stock photos. We may not be able to address ANY of those other things that impact what it means to be human. Our brief, our job description, our KPIs may be locked into skills and knowledge and capabilities. But, if you consider the *whole* person in learning, then you may see things that you wouldn't see if you were focused solely on skills, knowledge and capabilities.

A mindset of transformation can push our designing to connect with the *whole* person. If you can do that, if you can somehow get people to experience learning as transformational, then you'll be able to create learning addicts who can't get enough of what you have to offer.

IDEA FIVE: INVEST IN YOUR TOOLBOX

My son is a marine mechanic. I have to do five minutes of stretching and warm-ups before I attempt to pick up his toolbox. I'll be getting frustrated trying to do something on my kombi, and he'll come over and hand me some obscure tool with a casual 'try this'. Suddenly, my life takes a turn for the better. Even when things are going well, he'll have something that makes it faster, or less messy, or achieves a better result.

So, invest in your toolbox. You won't need every tool for every job. Sometimes storyline will cut it. But the trick is to have a massive toolbox, to keep it up to date and—most importantly—to take your toolbox with you.

When a client asks me to develop eLearning for them, before we get into the process, I take them through all the tools we have. There's job aids, podcasts, virtual reality, simulations, curation, augmented reality, videos, micro-learning, mobile, coaching, project and change management,

collaborative forums, apps, gamification, AI semantic text analysis and action plans. When I do that, and then we get into the project, their thinking has shifted. They start to consider what tool will work best.

If all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. You can design better learning experiences, if you take your whole toolbox with you.

IDEA SIX: DESIGN FROM YOUR OWN TRANSFORMATION

The best way to create transformative space, is to design from a place of having experienced transformation yourself.

Bring your best game. You spend all your days designing professional development experiences for other people, but in my observation, we often neglect our own professional development. We train others on how to do their job better and faster, but neglect our profession and our career.

As you experience transformational learning for yourself, you bring that spark to your designs. You bring a contagious, infectious enthusiasm and energy to the table that will help clients and students see what you're aiming for.

So, that's the theory of front end loading. A silence of the lambs level of empathy, a focus on context to expand your view and your impact, behaviour as the link between learning and performance, transformative learning that looks beyond the immediate to the *whole* person, investing in tools to widen your options and bringing your best game. All BEFORE you get to doing any design work. All that will position you to do better design work. Front end loading.

THE FRONT END LOADING ORGANISER

Step 1. Shade in the sections of the circle to indicate how important you think each idea is. You may think that some are important, and others less so. Show that in your shading. I won't be upset.

Step 2. In each section, draw a line going from the centre out to indicate how well you think you currently perform in that area. Don't put an arrowhead on the line just yet.

Step 3. On the end of each of those six lines, indicate if you think you are getting better (arrow out), or falling behind (arrow in). There are only two options because there is no such thing as standing still. The world of work is constantly changing. If you're constantly getting better, all you're doing is keeping up. If you're not keeping up, then you're falling behind.

Step 4. Make a plan to improve. It might be one simple thing. Once you've made the plan, put it in your calendar on your phone.

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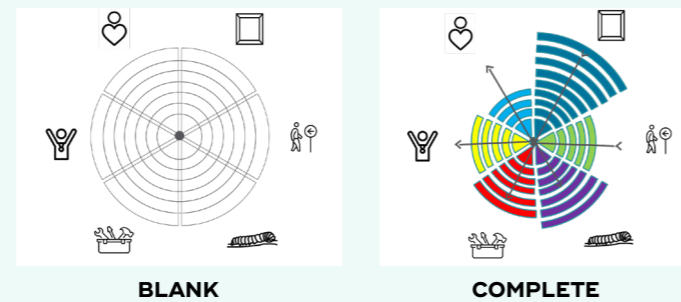
NEIL VON HEUPT

Neil has an awesome kombi, he does fire spinning, African drums and social media marketing for circus people on the side. Why does that matter? Because good learning design requires thinking outside the ... cliche. That's the place where Neil lives and designs from – learning experiences and ecosystems – nothing boring, no #clickeration snooze-fests – purposeful, engaging, collaborative, practical experiences that deliver performance and business outcomes. Neil is a Fellow of AITD. He's also an occasional blogger at https://divergentlearning.wordpress.com and would love to connect on LinkedIn.