

## Council Member

# JOHN COOPER

### **What is your role as a learning practitioner:**

I currently run a small training and management consultancy that delivers primarily skills training – but some technical training - to clients in a variety of different sectors such as manufacturing, telecommunications, e-commerce etc. The company is pretty small – but we do occasionally tackle pretty large projects by using associate trainers – many of whom we have sourced from Trainerbase.

### **What do you do? What does your job entail? What part of your role as a practitioner is particularly special?**

Although it's fair to say I deliver less training personally these days – it's still something I love to do. I think it is a pretty special job... and I certainly get a great deal of satisfaction from meeting people in different roles and, like most trainers, I still get that buzz when you feel you have helped someone in some way in their own personal development.

### **How do you come to be where you are today? What has been your career path? What have been the significant milestones in your life that have led you to here and now?**

I started my career as a Secondary School teacher – mathematics actually, but to be honest it had never been my intention to teach – I had just graduated and jobs were pretty scarce in the North-East at that time (as they are now!). From that I moved back London, worked in Operational Research for British Airways, developed my IT skills and spent a long time in the IT industry. Although not all of my time was spent in HRD and training (I worked in sales, marketing, customer operations – even finance at one stage), I somehow seemed to keep returning to training and development and held some pretty senior roles in this function for companies like NCR, where I was Director of Education and Bull Information Systems where I was Director of Development. I went fully independent in 1995 although I had set Profile International Consultancies up a little bit earlier.

### **What have you found to be the biggest challenges so far and how have you dealt with them?**

I think, like most independent learning practitioners, the biggest challenge is getting the balance right between selling and delivering – you land a reasonable contract – feel you have to deliver it yourself – can't do any selling whilst you're delivering - and then create a kind of 'feast and famine' cycle. This is why I think networking is so important to freelance trainers. If you are part of a network of like-minded trainers and consultants that you've worked with – and you know their strengths, you can tackle much bigger contracts – and, you get work back in return. I know some trainers prefer to work on their own – they do things their own particular way, and that works for them. But I like to be part of a team – you learn a great deal by working with other practitioners, you can share ideas, and definitely, some of my best work has been when part of a team that is firing on all cylinders

**Has anything surprised you about your current role and what successes have you had? Detail any special impacts you have had on the lives of your clients and people.**

I had spent a lot of years as a Training Manager buying in freelance training services – so I don't think there were too many surprises when I decided to change sides, as it were. I think one of the things that has changed is that, as companies have shed their own in-house training functions, they have become more willing to consider small independent consultancies – for even quite big contracts. I think there is some value in working with a small company where you know your contract is going to be given priority – and that the company can call on specialist skills as required through its network of associate trainers. Certainly, on a couple of occasions we have taken on major organisational change projects involving training literally thousands of staff - and we have had considerable success in making a real difference and bottom-line impact for those organisations.

**How do you see your role developing? What sorts of skills do you believe you will need to acquire in the next few years to stay in touch with best practice? How might you acquire these skills?**

With a strong IT background I have, for many, many years believed that we have just been tinkering with computer-based, e-learning, m-learning (call them what you like) technologies. 20 years ago Peter Senge said something in his brilliant book "The Fifth Discipline" which had an immediate impact on me – he said (in a tiny chapter entitled 'Microworlds') that managers in the future would be trained through simulation. I remember delivering a speech at a conference for Training Managers at the time where I mentioned this vision. During the Q&A session that followed I was challenged to explain exactly what I meant (at the time the only recognisable computer adventure game was something called 'Dungeons and Dragons' – a fantasy game involving problem –solving to find hidden treasure). I first asked the audience how many had attended a Health and Safety training course – all the hands went up; I then asked how many had attended an interesting Health and safety course and all the hands went down. Wouldn't it be wonderful, I explained, if two managers meeting at the coffee machine were asking what level each was on in the Health and Safety game rather than in Dungeons and Dragons. How much more motivated could we make our learners if we could harness gaming technologies and simulation in learning and development.

**If here was once there; where is there now? What are your next challenges?**

It has taken 20 years for telecommunications, gaming and simulation technologies to become understandable and affordable for the smaller training and development market. But I really feel we are on the threshold of one of the most exciting shifts in Learning and Development methods for decades. Already our company does as much e-learning and virtual classroom training design as we do classroom based interventions for our clients. Experiments with virtual worlds currently underway by Linden Corporation (owners of 'Second Life') and IBM are just mind-blowing. Already practical applications in schools are beginning to emerge... and this is only just the start!!

As Learning Practitioners we should be embracing these new technologies with real enthusiasm and urgency. Our goal as a company over the next 5 years is to learn and grow as the technological revolution in learning and development unfolds. Whatever it looks like – we want to be at the front!!

**What do you see as the role of the Council?**

I was keen to serve as a Council Member because I believe passionately in the importance of networking for learning practitioners – we need to grow as a profession – embrace ethical and quality standards – put learning and development high on the agenda for business and for the

government. We need to understand new developments in technology, the impact the Internet is already having and how mobile telecommunications will bring a new immediate form of learning and development to workers – and also to many, many underprivileged people throughout the world. I want to help shape the industry – and I believe the LPA can contribute in no small measure to this.

**What of your particular experiences do you think will be pertinent to the role of Council?**

I hope I have an enthusiasm for learning and development that I can bring to the LPA team. I also have a lot of experience in the field (well over 30 years, I'm afraid) – but that does not mean I know the solutions – far from it – I learn every day in this job and I would like to share what I know, my ideas as well as learn from the knowledge and experiences of others in the field.

**What would success for the LPA look like for you?**

Success for me would be when every Member of the LPA enjoys the interaction with other practitioners, benefits from being part of the organisation, learns from it, gets help when they need it and feels they want to share their experiences to help other members. I also want members to feel a sense of pride in belonging to a profession that is making a real difference to people's lives and to the economy.

**If there is one thing you would say to the membership about their engagement with the LPA, what would it be?**

I would ask all members to get involved. I know business is hard – and everyone is having to work harder to even stay in business in many cases. But I know that by putting something in to the LPA, members will get a lot more out of it.

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