

Council Member

MICHELLE MCARTHUR

Your role as a learning practitioner:

I am the managing partner in a small learning and development consultancy. There are two sides to my business, along with a team of 6 training partners, we design and deliver bespoke learning solutions to clients within a variety of sectors from education, local authorities, emergency services to financial, hospitality, and retail. We also have a proprietary discovery tool which we license through our global partners.

What do you do? What does your job entail?

My current role involves me having a hands on position within the business. I spending about 80% of my time delivering and designing learning events and the rest of the time, I spend developing new products and managing the business.

What part of your role as a practitioner is particularly special?

I love meeting and working with people from all walks of life. I love learning about different jobs and industries. What makes my job really special is helping individuals overcome the “my job is different, we couldn't possibly do that, our industry is special,” syndrome to realise that yes they can do it or that lessons learnt in other industries and sectors can be transferred.

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 working aged 13 as a part time waitress. From the age of 3 I had only ever wanted to do one thing, work in the hospitality industry. After leaving school, I went on to study hospitality management and took my professional management qualifications. I have done just about every job possible from serving early morning tea, in a holiday hotel (and I could tell you a few tales about that) to cooking a 8 course VIP Banquet for 300, to being Director of Sales for an award winning country house hotel.

After spending 30 years in the hospitality sector, I was ready for a change and when a friend approached me with an opportunity to start our own business, I jumped at the chance. Training had been one small part of several of my previous roles and I had also been involved in delivering learning events for an international charity. Before embarking on the business I went to Huddersfield University to study for the CIPD. I was also studying with the Open University for a certificate in sociology and a degree in psychology.

In September 2001, along with my now business partner, I started the business which is known today as Jigsaw@work.

Some of the significant milestones in my career within learning and development have been:

- Developing the Jigsaw@work® discovery tool and launching it at the HRD exhibition
- Moving out of a home office to our current offices on the Nostell Estate in Wakefield
- Employing our first team member
- Establishing our first international partner in the Gulf
- Winning our first major tender
- Joining Trainerbase
- Becoming a Certified Learning Practitioner

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

As a small business with limited resources, I have found it very difficult to get the business to such a level where I can start to step back a little from working in the business and start to work more on the business. This is the stage I am currently at and it has taken a long time to get here. It is very difficult to get the right balance between time spent marketing, designing and delivering programmes and developing new products.

Without having the luxury of being cash rich, we could not just recruit an experienced salesperson, we have had to grow the business organically, by earning and reinvesting which has taken us longer to do but it has meant that we are not in a position of having huge business debts in the recent financial crisis.

We have had to find alternative ways of getting people involved with our business; hence we now have a network of licensees and training partners.

Has anything surprised you about your current role and what successes have you had?

We were not prepared for the success of the Jigsaw@work® discovery tool. When we exhibited for the first time at HRD, in London, we had not even dreamt about the possibility of licensing the product, it was just something we had developed to use within our own learning programmes. Within 10 minutes of the show opening we had received our first genuine enquiry about licensing the product. It was this enquiry which resulted in our setting up a partnership in the gulf region.

One of the great rewards for me of working in learning and development is when I hear of how the work we have done has had a positive impact on the lives of individuals or on the success of an organisation. I am very fortunate because of the nature of the work we do that I get to hear of lots of successful outcomes. However there is one very special difference which I made upon one person's life which I will always treasure and still brings a tear to my eyes. I did some work with a group of 11 year olds, one of the children when telling me of her aspirations in life, said that she expected to marry a burglar, as it was the only real way she knew of being able to afford to live. I remember looking into her eyes as she told me, and there were just two black holes, there was no soul or spirit behind them. A chill went down my spine and for several months I could not stop thinking of the incident. The work came to an end and I hoped that I had made a difference to at least a few of the children. At the end of the school term, I received a letter from the year tutor, who informed me that my little friend had settled down at school and has produced some very good results. The little girl concerned had decided that she wanted to have a career in Nursing and was much more optimistic about the future. WOW how good did that make me feel, the thought that I made a real difference to a very special young girl.

If you could change or are looking to change any aspect(s) of your current role/job/practice, what would they be and why?

Over the next year, I am going to spend more time working on the business and a little less time delivering learning. During 2009, we have expanded our team to enable me to step back a little. I

will always continue to deliver some programmes as I would miss not being out amongst the people, but I want to secure the long term future of the business, by spending more time developing new products and markets.

How do you see your role developing?

The next big development for me and the business is optimising our use of IT and technology within the learning environment. My belief is that organisations will always require face to face interventions but they will be looking for a more flexible approach to how learning packages are delivered. As my IT skills are basic to say the least, my personal development goals are focused around developing my IT / technology knowledge and how it can be used effectively within a learning programme. I realise that I am a long way behind many in L&D technology revolution, but I believe that it is imperative for the long-term future of the business that we get on the bus and not miss it!

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

My next challenges are:

- Embracing learning technology, before I get left behind
- Developing new products to meet the future needs of our clients

You role as a Council Member

What do you see as the role of the Council?

I believe that as a council member I have a duty to represent the membership, by being open to the views and opinions of others and contributing to discussions to enable relevant information to be considered.

Our role as a council is to support the directors of the association in the promotion of ethical and quality standards, marketing of the products and services of the association, working as an ambassador for the association and generally enhancing the status of the learning profession.

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

I am passionate about the development of the profession and consider it a great privilege to be a council member. I am more than happy to give my time to further the development of the profession and the association. I bring all of my many varied life experiences to the role.

What would success for the LPA look like for you?

Success for me would mean that we have an active membership, who participate in events and make full use of the services and products of the association. It would mean being able to wear / display a badge which was recognised and respected both within the profession and in the wider world of business and government.

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

You have to put in before you get something back. Since joining the former trainerbase, I have made the effort to attend as many events as I can and to take part in online discussions etc. As a result my membership has more than paid for itself many times over, not only in business gained but in the professional support and resources I have been able to access.