



15 Changes in 15 Years

Leading Learning Podcast
Transcript for Episode 309

Celisa Steele (00:00):

This perceived value of what learning businesses provide and the role that learning businesses provide in society, that value has never been higher.

Celisa Steele (00:15):

I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb (00:16):

I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele (00:26):

Happy birthday, Jeff.

Jeff Cobb (00:27):

Happy birthday, Celisa—though I guess we should really be saying, “Happy birthday Tagoras” since it's Tagoras, the parent company of Leading Learning, that turned 15 years old about a month ago.

Celisa Steele (00:39):

Yes. Hard to believe, Jeff, but you and I started Tagoras in May of 2007. If you've been listening to Leading Learning Podcast for a while, you know that we're big fans of the power of reflection. When we hit a milestone—and I think 15 years definitely qualifies as a milestone—we tend to use the milestone as an opportunity to reflect.

Jeff Cobb (01:02):

Yeah, I would say it is definitely a milestone, and it has been a long journey. That's why we're devoting this episode, episode 309, to 15 changes in the learning business landscape.

Celisa Steele (01:16):

Yeah. What we want to do is share some of what we realized when we looked back over the 15 years that we've been in business as Tagoras. A lot of the seeds that were planted around or not long after the turn of the century really grew and blossomed over that last decade and a half. So there have been some really fundamental changes to the learning business landscape. That's what we want to talk about today. This is not a particularly scientific or heavily data-driven analysis of changes. It really is just us looking back and seeing what are some of the biggest changes that jump out at us as we look over the 15 years since Tagoras got its start.

*This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast
available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode309.*

Jeff Cobb (01:59):

Yeah, it could probably easily be 25 changes. I've already come up with others since we started thinking about this, but these are the 15 that really first jumped out and really have had just a significant impact out there.

Jeff Cobb (02:12):

I'll start out with number one on our list, and these aren't in any particular order, but this was a big one. This has been a huge one, and that is the surge of video. I can vaguely remember back in 2006, about a year and a half after YouTube was founded, Google acquired it for \$1.65 billion. A lot of people, myself, were scratching our head saying, "Huh, that just seems like an awful lot of money for an awful young company that hasn't proven a way to make money yet." But we should've all known that something big was afoot. It would be really hard to exaggerate the impact that the proliferation of digital video has had since that time.

Jeff Cobb (02:57):

A lot of people probably don't know it, but part of our pre-Tagoras experience was with a company called University Access, which later became Quisic. That was a startup that was built on capturing the video of top business school professors and then attempting to distribute that across the Internet, which may sound awfully familiar based on some things that are going on right now. That was in the mid-1990s, though, and that entire proposition was really costly, really time-consuming.

Celisa Steele (03:25):

It meant actually putting video crews on airplanes, flying them to different parts of the country.

Jeff Cobb (03:30):

Yeah. Heavy equipment just to capture the stuff, just to film it, and then actually digitizing it and getting it out to the world. The entire proposition was really costly, really time-consuming. Not surprising that that company burned through all its cash and was one of the dot-com casualties. We were, to put it mildly, a good bit ahead of our time.

Jeff Cobb (03:51):

These days, of course, most of us carry around a high-quality video camera as part of our smartphones, and uploading the video that we capture into a distribution network, whether that's YouTube or Vimeo or one of the major social networks or something else entirely, is just a breeze. As a result, roughly 500 hours of video content were uploaded to YouTube alone every minute in 2020.

Celisa Steele (04:16):

If we think about the impact that that surge of video has on the learning business landscape, a couple things jump out. First, there's just been this huge drop in the cost and the efforts that you have to go through to capture video, to use it to deliver educational content. That means that it's become so much easier for folks to create video content, to use that as part of educational experiences. I would say too that the surge of video really has been a big catalyst for microlearning, which often is video-based.

Jeff Cobb (04:49):

Yeah. Usually when you talk about microlearning, people have in mind those short 5- to 10-minute videos, and making those, publishing those, distributing those is now just incredibly, incredibly easier than it was way back in the old days of 1997 or so.

Celisa Steele (05:06):

The second change we wanted to talk about is the spread of social. If we just look at some of the top players, we have Facebook. It was founded in 2004; LinkedIn, 2002; Twitter, 2006. They were around when we started Tagoras, but pretty much still in their infancy.

Celisa Steele (05:25):

Then since we've been around, sites like Instagram and TikTok have been added—so Instagram, 2010; TikTok, 2016. What's happened over the past 15 years is that social media has become this deeply ingrained part of everyday life for billions of people globally.

Celisa Steele (05:46):

Now, admittedly, that hasn't been necessarily 100-percent a great thing. It's led to a lot of misinformation. It's contributed to mental health issues.

Jeff Cobb (05:56):

Democracy issues, perhaps?

Celisa Steele (05:58):

Yes, but there's also been a lot of opportunities for meaningful connections, for fostering communities where skills and knowledge can be shared in ways that they couldn't be shared before social made it easy to interact, especially with folks who you might never meet in person, who might be on the other side of the globe.

Jeff Cobb (06:19):

Yeah. That's had a huge impact on the learning business landscape. Obviously, social learning preexisted social media. We are social learners as human beings. Informal learning preceded social media as well. We've always had the water-cooler learning that goes on in various forms through our lives. But what social media did was just to explode the potential for those things. As you were saying, Celisa, the connections that you can then have are global. You can have that social learning, have that informal learning with people you would never have been able to do that with before.

Jeff Cobb (06:53):

Learning businesses really have an ability now to reach learners in different ways than they ever could before. I think that really still has not been truly, fully, deeply appreciated and capitalized on in the way that it should be. That's an area of growth going forward still for learning businesses.

Celisa Steele (07:11):

The third change we'll mention is the growth of mobile. We've already talked about the spread of video, the growth of social, and the fact that those are often combined. That's all gone hand in hand with this widespread use of smartphones, the ever-increasing speed and reliability of mobile communication networks.

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Celisa Steele (07:34):

At this point, I think smartphones, tablets, they're so entrenched in our lives that it's actually hard for me to remember that the iPhone wasn't introduced until 2007—in fact, about a month or so after Tagoras was founded.

Jeff Cobb (07:47):

I do vaguely recall that I had one of those Motorola flip phones at one point. I can't even remember what you called the little thing that had a stylus with it that you used as your personal note-taker or whatever. I can't remember what those things were called.

Celisa Steele (08:01):

Was it a Blackberry?

Jeff Cobb (08:01):

It wasn't a Blackberry. It was something else that was out at that time. I'm going to have to go look it up now. But the iPhone came out and then—PalmPilot, that's what it was.

Celisa Steele (08:08):

PalmPilot.

Jeff Cobb (08:08):

It was a PalmPilot. Yeah, I had a PalmPilot back in the day.

Jeff Cobb (08:12):

But I remember the iPhone came out, and then, roughly a year later, the App Store was launched, and really the rest is, as they say, history. Most of us now carry around a huge amount of computing power compared to what was possible even in the '80s, much less the '50s or something like that, just a huge amount of computing power along with the ability to consume massive amounts of digital media, to play games, to interact with people around the world in myriad ways.

Celisa Steele (08:41):

The impact on the learning business landscape of this growth of mobile is that we have anytime, anywhere learning. It's feasible. The learning isn't always necessarily packaged as well as it can be, but the fact that people can pull out their phones and look something up or make use of the five minutes while they're waiting for a bus to actually engage in a learning experience, that's huge. That's because of this growth of mobile.

Celisa Steele (09:12):

It also has facilitated the growth of informal learning because, again, a lot of what people are doing on their mobile devices is not necessarily that formal six-week course, but it might be connecting with someone on social media, asking a question, doing more of that informal, peer-based learning.

Celisa Steele (09:33):

There's just a lot of access to learning opportunities that people who in the past didn't have that access now have because maybe they never had a computer. Maybe they never had a wired Internet connection at their house. We've had a lot of leapfrogging folks who skipped over some of the interim technology and went straight to having that mobile phone in their pocket, and that has opened up a lot of opportunity for those people.

Jeff Cobb (10:02):

Yeah, I think particularly, if you look at what's happened with the e-learning across the continent of Africa, a lot of that has been driven by mobile devices, as opposed to traditional computer networks because a lot of the traditional computer connectivity wasn't there or didn't come along as fast as it did in other parts of the world.

Celisa Steele (10:21):

At Tagoras, we're experts in the global business of lifelong learning, and we use our expertise to help clients better understand their markets, connect with new customers, make the right investment decisions, and grow their learning businesses. We achieve these goals through expert market assessment, strategy formulation, and platform selection services.

Celisa Steele (10:42):

If you are looking for a partner to help your learning business achieve greater reach, revenue, and impact, learn more at tagoras.com/services.

Jeff Cobb (10:56):

We've talked about video. We've talked about social. We've talked about mobile. Number four is what we're calling the SaaS explosion. Software as a service, or SaaS, was certainly established well before 2007. Salesforce, the company that really put SaaS on the map, was founded in 1999. We were actually Salesforce users at our previous company. But it really took a while for the impact of SaaS to be felt broadly, and I think that was particularly true in learning businesses.

Jeff Cobb (11:28):

I don't know if you remember this, Celisa, but, back in our earliest learning management system selection projects, whether to host LMS software yourself or have the vendor host it was still a legitimate question.

Celisa Steele (11:40):

Oh, and people invested some blood, sweat, and tears in making that choice there.

Jeff Cobb (11:45):

Oh, yeah. The IT teams usually were adamant about wanting to host it themselves. More than a few of our clients did choose to host the LMS software on their own servers, usually alongside their AMS or their CRM software. I can't remember the last time that that happened. Most LMS companies don't even make that an option anymore. It's hard to find one that would actually make that an option.

Jeff Cobb (12:08):

As SaaS has grown, the ability for platforms to communicate with each other across the Web, across the Internet, through standards-based application programming interfaces, or APIs, that's also grown, and it's made it much easier to leverage what typically gets called best-of-breed software to address specific business requirements, rather than having one piece of software that's expected to do everything.

Celisa Steele (12:34):

When we think about the impact on the learning business landscape, the growth of SaaS means that, for learning businesses, it's gotten dramatically easier and less costly to integrate key systems. You might have the integration between your learning management system and other platforms, like a customer relationship management system or an association management system, a Webinar platform, or even marketing automation systems. That used to take a lot of coordination, a lot of back and forth, a lot of conversations. Now, because of the APIs, because of SaaS, it's gotten just so much easier and so much less costly, so much faster to handle those integrations.

Celisa Steele (13:17):

I think that the SaaS explosion has also driven the evolution of e-learning standards. SCORM was introduced in 2000. That's giving way, maybe somewhat slowly, but it's giving way to xAPI—or Tin Can, the experience API—and other standards that really provide for handling data that's generated outside of a specific learning management system. That has just helped, again, with the integration and knowing that if you take a SaaS approach, in general, you're going to be able to make the systems talk that you need to have talking and get data out of them in a usable way.

Jeff Cobb (13:53):

Yeah, and, of course, that's leading to things like learning experience platforms, where you can take some of that social, some of that video, some of that mobile experience that we were talking about earlier, and that stuff all becomes trackable, even in informal situations that don't happen within the structure of a learning management system. We haven't reaped the rewards of that revolution yet, I don't think, but that's coming. That's big news.

Jeff Cobb (14:16):

Number five, I think we have to talk about the cost, the effort that goes into creating e-learning and how that has changed during the past 15 years.

Celisa Steele (14:26):

Yeah. We're calling this the e-learning cost cliff. We don't have specific data—we haven't been able to track that down yet—that shows how the costs of creating online learning have dropped over time. But we can speak from our own firsthand experience and say that, back in the mid-1990s when we were involved in this, high quality e-learning courses could easily cost well over six figures. That's just not true anymore.

Jeff Cobb (14:57):

Yeah. It's still possible to definitely to spend quite a bit of money on highly interactive e-learning courses.

Celisa Steele (15:03):

Well, and I'm sure someone will take your six figures if you wanted to—

Jeff Cobb (15:06):

Oh, yeah. Yeah, gladly. But it's become rare, I think, to see e-learning courses surpass or even come close to the \$50,000-per-hour mark. When you combine the built-in tools in most off-the-shelf e-learning authoring packages and course platforms with what it's now possible to do with video, it's relatively easy to produce an hour of reasonably high-quality e-learning content for well under \$10,000 an hour. Depending on who you talk to, some people will tell you that definitely way, way below \$10,000 an hour. I know there are going to be professional instructional designers and developers out there who are going to object to that assessment and say the figure's much higher, but it's just undeniable that the drop in cost has dramatically changed the e-learning landscape.

Celisa Steele (15:55):

When we think about the impact, this huge drop in cost is really one of the main factors fueling the growth of e-learning and the ability of more learning businesses to provide e-learning.

Celisa Steele (16:09):

It's also one of the main factors that has made it possible for organizations to pivot their education and events online. When you think about the pandemic hitting in full force in the U.S. in March 2020, all these organizations had to pivot really quickly. Because of the reduced costs, they were able to do that.

Jeff Cobb (16:29):

Yeah. Could you imagine mid-1990s, the pandemic comes along, you have to move everything online? It would've been an utter disaster. I just don't know what would've even happened then.

Celisa Steele (16:40):

Absolutely. I think that we also have to take this drop in costs—there's a positive side that it makes it more affordable for learning businesses to put out content. The reduced costs also are a reduced barrier, which means that more people can produce e-learning. You don't necessarily have to have a big budget or specialized skills to create e-learning. That means that there's been some pretty poor-quality e-learning put out.

Jeff Cobb (17:16):

An understatement in many cases.

Celisa Steele (17:16):

Even when it's not poor-quality, it's just meant that there's more competition across the board in many markets because of that just reducing the barriers so that folks—solo edupreneurs, for example—who would not have been able on their own to produce e-learning in the past can now suddenly enter and be a viable option for learners.

Jeff Cobb (17:37):

Yeah. Speaking of those lower costs and those lower barriers to entry, that leads us to number six because, really, all of the factors that we've been talking about here so far have contributed to the emergence of what typically gets referred to these days as the creator economy. That's our number six, the creator economy, which is basically a technology-enabled business environment in which individual creators or very small groups of creators are able to generate revenue from their content. That content may include everything from social media posts to on-demand and livestream videos to podcasts to e-books to, of course, online courses and much more.

Jeff Cobb (18:20):

While much of this content is purely intended to be entertaining, and a lot of it really is entertaining—we often get shown videos by my son that you can understand why these people are getting millions of followers, definitely. But a large percentage of it, maybe even the majority of it, is actually educational in nature.

Celisa Steele (18:39):

The impact on the learning business landscape of this creator economy is very similar to what we were talking about with the e-learning cost cliff. What this means is that you have more competition. You have more content. You have the rise of these solo edupreneurs. So you can have that YouTuber—singular YouTuber—who's out there making a good living producing content because of something like the creator economy.

Jeff Cobb (19:05):

This, of course, is the segment of the learning business landscape that we really focus on in our Learning Revolution channel, which is a sibling site to Leading Learning, where we provide resources for experts who want to take advantage of this creator economy, want to be able to monetize their expertise by providing learning experiences to their audiences.

Celisa Steele (19:30):

The seventh change we'll talk about is, well, Jeff, you dubbed this the algorithm-data dance. I like that.

Jeff Cobb (19:39):

Yeah. Had to give it a sexy title, heading there, whatever. Largely because of the proliferation of software and connectivity across the Internet, the things we've been talking about already, there's been a tremendous surge in the amount of data we generate. When we go online and do all these things, we're creating data as we do that. But, more importantly, there's been a surge in the amount of data that we're actually able to capture and analyze as a part of that. Then, at the same time, we've had major advances in machine learning, in artificial intelligence, and other algorithm-driven forms of computing. So these two topics, data and algorithms, we could easily talk about those separately. They would merit that, but we feel like it's really in combination that they have the most power and they've had the most impact.

Jeff Cobb (20:34):

Machine learning and artificial intelligence give us the power to harness and make use of all the data we generate. Then, in the process, they continue to generate and learn from the new data that is created.

Jeff Cobb (20:48):

Of course, there are all sorts of potential issues with this that we, as a society, are wrestling with and will be wrestling with for years to come, from privacy concerns to concerns about biases in algorithms. But, even so, the potential to effectively process, analyze, and take action based on very large sets of data just really has enormous potential for helping us to address huge issues like climate change and global pandemics, for example, and for enabling machines to do work that humans simply can't do or don't want to do.

Celisa Steele (21:23):

When we think about the impact on the learning business landscape of the algorithm-data dance, the headline of the impact is personalization. A major upside for learning businesses is that if you have the right data and you have these algorithms using that data, you can then offer highly personalized learning experiences that really help individual learners with their individual learning needs.

Celisa Steele (21:52):

Now, there are potential downsides. You already mentioned some of them, Jeff—privacy and bias issues. But I think one of the other downsides is that this algorithm plus data combination is responsible for what could be called the Amazon effect.

Jeff Cobb (22:09):

Yeah. It may not be so much a downside as just a challenge or an opportunity for learning businesses. But we hear again and again, when we go in and we're involved with technology selection these days, that what they want out of a platform is what Amazon does, which is it basically personalizes the experience to every shopper. When you get there, you're recommended things that reflect what you've done before and take you down a channel towards purchasing the things that you want to purchase or maybe you never knew you wanted to purchase.

Jeff Cobb (22:41):

In learning experiences, we're often looking for the same thing in personalization. We want to recommend to people the things we have in our catalog that are going to appeal to them, that are going to guide them down a personalized learning path.

Jeff Cobb (22:54):

The challenge right now is the Amazon effect has created expectations that a lot of learning businesses just can't live up to at this point. I think that's going to be a challenge for years to come.

Celisa Steele (23:09):

The eighth change that we'll mention is the eXtension of reality. It's easy to think, "Okay, metaverse, that's a relatively recent phenomenon." But if you think back, Second Life was introduced in 2003, and people talked about that as a metaverse at the time.

Jeff Cobb (23:29):

Yeah, and efforts in virtual and extended reality actually date back to the 1950s, but still it's pretty hard to argue that any of those earlier efforts, even Second Life, were very satisfying. I

can remember trying to move around Second Life, and it was a little awkward. It wasn't really until advances like Oculus Rift, the Oculus Rift headset, came along in 2010 that truly immersive virtual reality experiences started to seem like they could be reality. Of course, Facebook stepped in and acquired Oculus in 2014, which was the steppingstone to Meta and the metaverse. Google introduced Google Cardboard, which is basically a no-cost virtual reality headset, in 2015.

Jeff Cobb (24:16):

But virtual reality still has not really gone mainstream. That said, it's definitely making significant progress, and the tools and skills needed for creating VR experiences are becoming much cheaper and easier to use.

Celisa Steele (24:31):

Well, yeah, and you have e-learning authoring tools like Adobe Captivate, Articulate Storyline, Lectora, these kinds of tools are starting to incorporate options for creating augmented reality and virtual reality experiences. As those mature and people get more familiar with them, you can imagine how this is going to lead towards like what we talked about the e-learning cost cliff. I think we're going to see the cost of XR and VR and AR come down, and people are hopefully going to be finding meaningful ways to apply that to learning experiences.

Jeff Cobb (25:07):

Yeah. I suspect that we're going to reach a tipping point on that more rapidly than people realize. Suddenly, we're going to wake up one day and just be aware that there is virtual reality and other forms of extended reality going on all around us.

Jeff Cobb (25:21):

Of course, the potential impact on learning businesses is huge. We know that practice and being able to apply new knowledge and skills in context are really key to more effective learning. Extended reality provides opportunities for immersion and for real-time application that would often be risky or expensive or simply not possible in "real life."

Celisa Steele (25:49):

Number nine, the call of alternative credentials. When we think about so many of the changes that we've been discussing here, a lot of what's underlying that is some of the shift in the nature of work and what it means to be prepared and stay prepared for gainful employment. That shift is one of the key factors that has driven interest in alternative credentials.

Celisa Steele (26:19):

Another factor is that there's a lot of criticism about the cost of traditional higher education, four to six years and how many hundreds of thousands of dollars to come out with your undergraduate degree. Then, even when you have that and you've spent that time and money, there's a lot of doubt and a lot of actually data that students coming out with that aren't actually all that well prepared for work.

Jeff Cobb (26:45):

Yeah. Of course, credentials like certifications and certificates have been around for a long time. They're mainstays with a lot of the learning businesses we work with, but there's now rising

interest in them as approaches that do in fact require less time and cost significantly less than traditional degree programs.

Jeff Cobb (27:06):

It's interesting that Google, for example, has introduced a portfolio of certificate programs designed to get potential job candidates up to speed quickly to meet the needs of the technology industry, and not just for Google itself but for the entire industry. These are valuable to employers in that world.

Celisa Steele (27:26):

Traditional certificates and designations that go along with those, they're not the only way that a learner can signal that they have specific skills and knowledge. In September of 2011, the Mozilla Open Badges initiative was launched. Just since that launch, digital badges have evolved pretty rapidly, and they've become an important part of the credentialing landscape at this point in time.

Jeff Cobb (27:52):

Yeah. I think they're another phenomenon, concept that there's still a lot of growth potential in. I think most learning businesses have not fully come to grips with what digital badging can do for them and haven't fully put it into practice across their portfolio. So we expect to continue to see significant growth with badges.

Celisa Steele (28:13):

Well, because they have that built-in ability to verify in real time that someone actually does hold that credential, that it's still valid and accurate. Sometimes, depending on how the digital badge is structured, you might also be able to actually see some work product that the learner did to earn that digital badge.

Jeff Cobb (28:33):

Of course, blockchain factors into all of this. That's something we probably have not or are not going to say quite enough about in this episode. But, when you're in the world of credentialing, something like blockchain, where you have this verifiable, trackable path that people go through to acquire their skills and knowledge, that's very, very powerful. Again, it's one of those areas where, with respect to digital badging and other forms of credentialing, there's still a lot of growth and evolution that's going to be able to take place in the learning business world.

Celisa Steele (28:59):

When we think about the impact on learning businesses of this call of alternative credentials, it really has to do with the fact that credentials are valued. From our earliest days of doing research at Tagoras, we know that learning experiences that are associated with a meaningful and valued credential, they attract the highest level of demand. That's what learners want. They're going to opt for that rather than the alternative.

Celisa Steele (29:29):

When you have folks already gravitating towards a learning experience that comes with a credential and then you have the current demands for these alternative forms of credentialing,

there's just huge opportunity for learning businesses here to really think about what are we offering and then how do we provide our learners with that symbol, that designation that they really do have the skills or knowledge that they say they have.

Jeff Cobb (29:55):

Yeah. We've talked about credentialing in general and some about alternative credentialing a lot lately. We'll definitely be sure to link to some of those episodes and resources.

Jeff Cobb (30:05):

The whole idea of driving demand, which credentials can certainly do—that's one of the reasons they're very valuable in the business context of learning—makes me think of our number-10 item here, which is really all about demand. That's the maturing of marketing. Really, so many of the changes discussed here have had an impact on the world of marketing, and by extension those changes have impacted learning businesses. Marketing today is simply not the game it was back in the *Mad Men* days.

Celisa Steele (30:39):

No.

Jeff Cobb (30:39):

I think people think of presentations in smokey rooms and "Let's come up with the slickest advertising we can." That's not the deal anymore. Marketers now have to have a deep understanding of how social networks and search engines work and then how to leverage them through approaches like content marketing and other ways to connect with users. Marketers today need to understand much more deeply than their predecessors the subtleties of human psychology, of influence and persuasion and how to provide for a user experience and a customer journey that's going to lead to initial conversion of prospects into customers and then retain those customers over time.

Celisa Steele (31:19):

Yeah, I'd say, in short, it's a much, much more sophisticated practice than it was in the past. As a result, we've seen the rise of the chief marketing officer in the corporate world. This is a position that now is equal to or even outranks the top sales position.

Jeff Cobb (31:37):

People may be thinking, okay, marketing has evolved, but what does that have to do with the learning business landscape? What's the impact there?

Celisa Steele (31:44):

Well, the evolution of marketing impacts learning businesses in at least two ways. First, as marketers become better and better at what they do, organizations that don't have good marketing resources are going to find it harder and harder to compete.

Jeff Cobb (32:02):

Then, second, as we've said again and again and again and again, marketing has a lot in common with education. Both are fundamentally about creating behavior change. As a result, much of the skills and knowledge that marketers have developed is equally applicable to

educators, and trends in the world of marketing are very often a bellwether for changes in the learning business landscape.

Jeff Cobb (32:25):

I'll note too that, with something like content marketing, so much of marketing has become educational. It's about delivering educational value as a way to establish a product's value, a service's value, a company's value with customers to then bring them into that customer journey and that user experience that's going to convert them into a long-term customer.

Celisa Steele (32:51):

The 11th change that we want to talk about is what we're calling the leap in learning science. I would say that interesting things have happened pretty much every year of our 15-year history, but for us 2014 stands out.

Jeff Cobb (33:08):

Yeah. That year saw the publication of *Make It Stick* by Henry Roediger, Mark McDaniel, and Peter C. Brown.

Celisa Steele (33:15):

Roediger.

Jeff Cobb (33:16):

Roediger. Sorry, I always get that name. Peter's been on the podcast. We'll be sure to link to that. It saw the publication of *Make It Stick* and also of *How We Learn* by Benedict Carey, who's a very popular *New York Times* science writer. Those were two very popular books that focused on how human beings learn most effectively.

Celisa Steele (33:36):

Well, and 2014 is also the year that Barb Oakley launched her massive open online course, her MOOC, called "Learning How to Learn," that is still on Coursera. It's at this point enrolled more than 3.2 million learners. Of course, I had the opportunity to talk with Barb Oakley for the podcast, so we'll make sure to link to that in the show notes for this episode.

Celisa Steele (34:01):

But when you think about these books, you think about that MOOC and how many millions of learners have taken it, it just seems like learning science has hit the big time.

Jeff Cobb (34:11):

Definitely. That number has grown because I can't remember what it was when you talked to her, but it was well below 3.2 million at that point. So it continues—

Celisa Steele (34:16):

Absolutely.

Jeff Cobb (34:18):

—to grow. Of course, in many ways, this was really the culmination of work that started decades before with people like Ruth Colvin Clark and Richard...is it Mayer or Mayer? I always forget that one.

Celisa Steele (34:31):

Mayer.

Jeff Cobb (34:31):

Mayer. They published the first edition of their classic *e-Learning and the Science of Instruction* in 2002. It wasn't like learning hadn't been studied even before that, but wider dissemination of knowledge about learning and popular interest in it has really only taken off, in my opinion, in the past decade or so.

Celisa Steele (34:51):

Well, and I had the opportunity to talk with Ruth Colvin Clark on the podcast, so we'll make sure to include that in the show notes. But, yeah, I mean e-learning had been studied, the science of instruction had been studied, but part of what someone like Ruth and Richard are doing is they're translating these studies. It's a meta study, where they're looking at cross different data points to really see what is effective, and then what can we take from that so that we can build ever more effective learning?

Celisa Steele (35:20):

I think part of what's also driven the popularity or the growing awareness of learning science is that you have folks like Dan Pink and you have events like TED, and that's just tuned us all into social and behavioral science-type topics. Those have become more popular, and they, of course, sit there nicely beside learning science.

Celisa Steele (35:44):

We've also had significant gains in fields like neuroscience, where we can now clearly see what's actually happening because of better imaging techniques, what's happening in the brain as we learn.

Jeff Cobb (35:57):

Then I think we've also just seen broader appreciation for lifelong learning that's accompanied that shift in the world of work that we've talked about. I think that's also had an influence on this. Whatever the cause is, it seems clear that many people know much more now about how learning actually works than they did 15 years ago.

Celisa Steele (36:17):

I think the implication, the impact for learning businesses is probably pretty self-evident. As people who develop and deliver learning experiences, if we have a better understanding of how learning works, we're going to be able to create better learning experiences. If the learners who participate in what we offer, if they have that same understanding, they're going to be able to get that much more out of those learning experiences as well. So it's just a tremendous asset for both the learning business and the learner.

Jeff Cobb (36:46):

We need to continue our efforts to make sure that learning business professionals know about learning science and learners have an appreciation, even if it's unconscious, of learning science and how they can be better learners. But, of course, for people to know about those things, they have to be paying attention, and that's an issue.

Celisa Steele (37:03):

Because our 12th change that we want to highlight is what we're calling the attention crisis. When you take some of the things we've already talked about—dropping costs, quantity of content, so you have greater content, lower cost—that means there's just that much more out there. That then makes it that much harder to first gain and then maintain learners' attention. Then, once you get that attention, you got to keep it so that you can form meaningful relationships. That is all working against this highly transactional world that we're living in that really seems to prefer convenience and these frictionless exchanges, as they're called.

Jeff Cobb (37:47):

Of course, so much is free now too. We've talked about cost drops, but in terms of stuff getting put up on the Web for people to access, not just video, but full-blown courses and all sorts of topics are available out there.

Celisa Steele (38:00):

Well, the Barb Oakley MOOC—

Jeff Cobb (38:03):

The Barb Oakley MOOC, yeah. When you're out there competing for learners' attention, you're competing directly with competitors, but you're also competing with all this other content out there that could be pulling them in other directions. How do you manage to do that?

Celisa Steele (38:17):

Then with COVID, we've seen life expectancy drop for the first time in decades. I think there's a renewed, palpable, justified sense that time is short. People are very busy, and that's a huge barrier to learning because now they have to spend more of their limited, precious time than ever before choosing among all these options because there are so many more options than ever before.

Jeff Cobb (38:46):

Yeah. The impact here, and this may be another one where it's self-evident, but it's definitely worth talking about. There's a popular meme out there that we all have the attention span of a goldfish. That's not really true. That's been debunked. But it's clear that we do have to take into account the many demands that learners have on their attention. That applies not only to the delivery of learning experiences but also to the marketing of learning experiences. In fact, it may be even more important there in many ways. If we can't effectively capture attention and then build that into interest and motivation to take action, then we're not going to get prospects to enroll in, much less engage with, the learning experiences we offer.

Celisa Steele (39:30):

The 13th change is what we're calling the rise of big learning.

Jeff Cobb (39:36):

There have historically been businesses like, say, The Teaching Company (which is now called The Great Courses) or The Learning Annex that have marketed courses and seminars to adult learners. That's been out there before. We've had learning businesses that we like to talk about. But the maturing of the Internet and of digital technologies has really just created a whole new level of opportunity that we're characterizing as big learning.

Celisa Steele (40:05):

We've seen the emergence of companies like Udemy, and that was in 2010 they started. Masterclass started in 2015. We've seen the emergence of massive open online course providers like edX and Coursera. They both came along in 2012. We have bootcamp providers like Codecademy. That started in 2011. Then you can also include in this list Lynda.com. That's now LinkedIn Learning. Lynda was acquired in 2015 for \$1.5 billion.

Jeff Cobb (40:37):

That \$1.5 billion, I think, was a little like the \$1.65 billion acquisition of YouTube. You had to perk up and say, "Hmm, there's definitely something going on here."

Celisa Steele (40:46):

Yeah. You mentioned The Great Courses, even that's now primarily online, and it's rebranded its streaming offerings as Wondrium. This is just scratching the surface. These are just the names that occurred to us as we were talking about that. But, in general, it seems clear that learning has become big business.

Jeff Cobb (41:08):

Yeah, and we do have a post, and I think we did an episode too, on learning from big learning, some lessons that can be extracted from that, so we'll be sure to link to that.

Jeff Cobb (41:17):

But just right here, as far as the impact on the learning business landscape goes, big learning is obviously a source of competition. We just talked about attention. Whether it's direct competition or indirect competition, it's out there and could be claiming the attention of your prospective learners.

Jeff Cobb (41:34):

Then, perhaps more importantly, the big learning businesses are really changing the expectations and standards for online learning experiences.

Celisa Steele (41:43):

Yeah. They're driving that bar ever higher, so those learner expectations are going up.

Celisa Steele (41:55):

The penultimate change we want to talk about is what we're calling the second migration. It's unfortunate that tragedy is often the catalyst for major change. That has certainly been the case in the world of online learning. If we look back, one of the first big migrations that pushed folks

online came in the wake of 9/11. That's when people were afraid to travel, and travel, with the creation of TSA, started to become much less enjoyable.

Jeff Cobb (42:28):

At that point, Webinars in particular surged. I think that's when Webinars really took off after that tragedy. We don't have hard data, but the recent COVID pandemic we think likely had an even more dramatic impact. Pretty much all learning businesses were forced to move their events and educational programming online. That included businesses who had previously resisted making virtual a substantial part of their business or a part of their business at all.

Jeff Cobb (42:58):

At the same time, people who may have been resistant to e-learning and online events in the past or who maybe participated in them only sporadically, they were pretty much forced online.

Celisa Steele (43:09):

The impact on learning businesses is that, of course, many learning businesses were forced to do what they arguably should've done before the pandemic, that is, move a substantial part of their offerings online.

Celisa Steele (43:24):

Then the potential challenges are that a lot of what was moved online was not of high quality. It was a speed thing. We had to get stuff out there, and so quality suffered a bit sometimes.

Celisa Steele (43:37):

Where we are now is that a lot of what got moved online probably needs to be reexamined as the pandemic wanes. As we were just talking about, those learner expectations, because of big learning, expectations are higher now. So I think more people have had a chance to experience online learning and online events, and so they have a clear idea of what they want from them, what they want that experience to be.

Jeff Cobb (44:06):

Of course, some of them have that better understanding of what makes for effective learning that we talked about with the leap in learning science. So that's informing expectations as well.

Jeff Cobb (44:13):

Also, there's just the fact, and this leads to number 15 in our list, that lifelong learning has become mainstream. So we're calling this the mainstreaming of lifelong learning. As many of the previous points suggest, the concept of lifelong learning has really gone mainstream. That's in combination with tightly related buzz terms like *upskilling* and *reskilling* that you're often hearing used in combination or as a substitute even for *lifelong learning*.

Celisa Steele (44:45):

Well, and one example of this is back in 2017, and it caught our eye back then, but the venerable business publication *The Economist* ran a special report with the headline "Lifelong Learning Is Becoming an Economic Imperative."

Jeff Cobb (45:02):

Yeah, we scratched our head and said, “Hmm, ‘becoming’? I’m not sure it’s becoming.” We thought it already was an economic imperative at that point.

Jeff Cobb (45:10):

But what was really more important was that a major global publication saw the need to highlight lifelong learning as a major societal issue.

Jeff Cobb (45:19):

You also now regularly see, for example, columnists and major media outlets like the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* or some of the big magazines argue for the critical importance of lifelong learning in all of its various forms.

Celisa Steele (45:35):

The impact on the learning business landscape is that this perceived value of what learning businesses provide and the role that learning businesses provide in society, that value has never been higher. It’s important, though, that leaders of learning businesses really embrace and take advantage of this shift, this newish focus on the importance of lifelong learning.

Celisa Steele (46:03):

As we’ve noted, there are some players in the learning business landscape who aren’t really embracing this moment, taking this advantage of the value of lifelong learning, because there’s actually some resistance to even owning the term *lifelong learning*. They prefer maybe to talk about *continuing education* and *professional development*. But in our books, of course, those are just flavors of lifelong learning.

Jeff Cobb (46:31):

Yeah. This is definitely a *carpe diem* moment. If you’re in the learning business, if learning is a part of your business, like it is, for example, for most trade and professional associations, the opportunity to step up, to be visible as an organization, as a business that’s providing value not only to your members and customers but to society as a whole, this is the moment. Leaders of those businesses really need to seize it and give their stakeholders that sense of vision for what they’re actually doing.

Jeff Cobb (47:10):

Those are the 15 changes that we’ve seen in the learning business landscape over the past 15 years. For a recap of the 15 changes we talked about, be sure to check out the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode309.

Celisa Steele (47:27):

At leadinglearning.com/episode309, you will also see options for subscribing to the podcast. We hope you will subscribe if you haven’t yet. We appreciate subscription numbers because they give us some visibility into the impact of the podcast.

Jeff Cobb (47:43):

We'd also be grateful if you'd take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcast, especially if you enjoy the show.

Jeff Cobb (47:49):

Celisa and I personally appreciate reviews and ratings, and they help the podcast show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Just go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a rating.

Celisa Steele (48:01):

Lastly, please spread the word about Leading Learning. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode309, you'll find links to connect with us on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb (48:13):

Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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