



Design Learning for Behavior Change with Julie Dirksen

Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 382

Julie Dirksen: [00:00:00] I work primarily in adult learning, and, in those cases, we almost always have a behavioral outcome that we're looking for.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:10] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:11] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:19] Learning businesses that look for results strive to change behavior. They want to develop and deliver learning experiences that support learners in doing something new or better. But designing for behavior change requires a specific focus and understanding of how learning works. Luckily, Jeff gets to talk with an expert in designing learning for behavior change in this episode. Julie Dirksen is a learning strategist who has spent much of her career helping people with domain expertise understand and apply core principles of instructional design so they can design and deliver better learning. Julie is the author of *Design for How People Learn*, which I talked with her about back in episode 78. Julie has more recently written *Talk to the Elephant: Design Learning for Behavior Change*, which is the focus of this episode, number 382. Julie and Jeff talk about behavioral science, brain evolution, interrupting automatic patterns, conscious and automatic motivation, implementation intentions, other techniques that can help facilitate behavior change in the context of a learning experience, and, of course, elephants. Jeff and Julie spoke in October 2023.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:45] That new book, that will probably be most of the focus of our conversation today—*Talk to the Elephant: Design Learning for Behavior Change*. Presumably, all of us want to change behavior. Even a change in knowledge is, I assume, going to usually lead to some sort of change in behavior with what we're designing, but I think it probably often doesn't happen. So can you tell us a little bit about the basic premise for this book, why you felt it was so important to write about this. And, while you're doing that, tell us a little bit about that title, *Talk to the Elephant*.

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Julie Dirksen: [00:02:18] Yes, absolutely. Well, I sometimes describe the use case for this particular book as they know what to do, but they still aren't doing it. So anything where people already have the knowledge or even the skill in the area, and yet, for some reason, the behavior is not happening. People aren't wearing their safety goggles. Or people know they should save more for retirement, but they aren't. Or people know that they should wash their hands for 20 seconds, and yet we're lucky if we get five seconds. Any of those behaviors where we know the right answer, but often we still struggle with it. I've got several behaviors that I know I should be doing. We should all be eating better, exercising more, not looking at screens right before bed, and all sorts of things that I also struggle with myself. So very, very sympathetic to this. But I work primarily in adult learning, and, in those cases, we almost always have a behavioral outcome that we're looking for. Except for things like a community ed or something like that. We really don't have a knowledge-for-the-sake-of-knowledge thing in most...whether it's workplace, whether it's professional development, or even in higher education. You may have some stuff in colleges and universities that's learning for the sake of learning, but there's still often some behaviors that are associated with it.

Julie Dirksen: [00:03:31] And so, because that's my audience, one of the big question marks that I've always had is, when people do the right thing, even if they know the right thing, why aren't they always doing the right thing? And it's an interesting and complicated answer to this because our answer to it a lot of times is to tell people louder and more emphatically that they should do the thing. And, as you've noticed, that doesn't always work. And so it really became an interesting question to me, what does work? The origin story of this—and I've got it right at the beginning of the book—is my first really deep dive into this, the place where I really got interested in it was in AIDS and HIV prevention curriculum. They were moving a face-to-face intervention to an online environment, and we were looking at this. They had a very sophisticated model for how they understood this. But fundamentally it wasn't telling people that condom usage is important to prevent the spread of HIV. I don't know, this is maybe 2005 or so, mid-2000s. By that point, most people knew that. They had gotten that message. And so then it becomes this issue of, okay, what else is going on? And the answer of what else is going on turned into many years of trying to understand the science better.

Julie Dirksen: [00:04:47] There's been a lot happening in behavioral science. How do we bring it over into learning and development, curriculum design, or any of those kinds of things? But the title of the book is *Talk to the Elephant: Design Learning for Behavior Change*. And the elephant is from a metaphor, a model that was coined by Jonathan Haidt, who's a psychologist, in a book called *The Happiness Hypothesis*. He talked about how our brains were like a rider and an

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elephant. And so, if you think about the oldest parts of your brain, there are things that control breathing, heart rate, and reflexes, and usually a lot of that stuff is based down right at the base of your spinal cord. These are parts of your brain that have existed the longest, from an evolutionary point of view. And we get a lot of things that control how you sense the world—vision, hearing, and then a lot about how you operate physically in the world. So gross motor control, fine motor control. We also have a big area in the middle of your brain, the limbic system, which is your amygdala and your hypothalamus, and it gets into things like emotional regulation, fight or flight, and all of those kinds of things.

Julie Dirksen: [00:05:51] And then, right up behind your eyes, you get this area called the prefrontal cortex, and that is arguably considered to be the seat of things like logic and reasoning, impulse control, projecting out into the future and planning, and things like that. And so I'll disclaim I'm grossly simplifying brain regions, so take this all with a grain of salt. But the idea behind this that Haidt was talking about is we have this little rider who's saying, "Hey, logically, we should do this," sitting on the back of a big elephant that's like, "But this feels better than this, and this is where I am right now, and this is my whole sensory perception of the world, and this is what I feel." All these kinds of things. So all the physical, visceral experience, feeling, and emotions is an elephant with a little rider on the top going, "Hey, exercising now will give you more energy later," where your elephant's like, "But the couch is right here, and it's comfortable, and it's delightful, and we could just lie down." That is often this binary model of decision-making.

Julie Dirksen: [00:06:56] And a lot of the behavioral science—people thinking fast and slow—uses something similar to it. There are other versions of the compartmentalized decision-making, your impulse decision versus your well-thought-out, rational decision. You get people like Joseph LeDoux, the neuroscientist, who talks about high road versus low road cognition, which is also related. They're not exactly identical, but they're all in the same space and the idea that you have what logically you know you should do versus what feels right in the moment. And the elephant is what feels right in the moment, and your rider is what's logically making an argument for future benefit or things like that. We have a very strong tendency, in most education, to talk to the rider. We talk to the rider; we make the logical argument; we give the facts; we give the information and then send them off into the world and then go, "Hang on, they're not doing the thing." And the reason that they're not usually doing the thing has to do with all these factors that influence the elephant. So intellectually I know that I should wash my hands for 20 seconds. In the real world, where I'm really doing things, I don't always. I don't always do it.

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Celisa Steele: [00:08:14] 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. 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: [00:08:49] I'd be interested to hear—I love that metaphor about the elephant and the rider. I find it very useful. How do you think of that concept and this book in relationship to your previous book, which I feel is really nuts and bolts, here's how you really design learning that works? Is this almost providing the bigger context for *Designing for How People Learn*? Or how do you think about the relationship between the two books?

Julie Dirksen: [00:09:17] Yes, I think it does. In the first book, I was kind of the basics of learning design, and I talked about how do you design learning if information transfer is your goal? How do you design learning if skill development is your goal? How do you design learning if habit formation is your goal? How do you fix the environment rather than trying to fix the person? How do you fix the things around them to increase the likelihood of performance? And then chapter eight in that book was "Design for Motivation," which is really the short version. The rider and the elephant show up in that chapter as well. Once I dug into it, there was so much more to talk about there, and also having a really systematic way of tipping through our understanding of these things because we, as designers, often have an impulse about what we think is needed. I just need to convince them that it's super important—like handwashing is super important. I just need to convince them of that. And that's great. Sometimes we're right about those things, but it can create a bunch of blind spots around oh, well, actually, it might be much more effective to make handwashing easier in the environment than it is to try to really convince people that handwashing is super important. Or it might be more important to give them the visceral experience of what happens rather than the intellectual experience of what happens when handwashing isn't done right, something that has more of that physical, emotional appeal.

Julie Dirksen: [00:10:45] So there are a bunch of reasons why we need to be careful because, if you're solving the wrong problem—you've decided the problem is to convince them that something's important. Well, there are lots of things that I know are important. Doesn't mean I do them. And so, if you've decided that the problem is they don't understand that's important, then you're going to be all in on that problem. But, if you have some good methods for really understanding where the learners are coming from and what things they care about, and, yes,

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they already believe it's important, but they also believe that it's really hard to do in this environment. Or they believe that it's important, but they believe it's less important than these 16 other things. Trying to understand how people understand value, what motivates them—I was reading an article, I think, just a few days ago, where they were talking about messaging around climate change, and I'm absolutely somebody who believes that climate change is an important issue to talk to people about.

Julie Dirksen: [00:11:45] But one of the things that the article author was talking about was how a lot of the messaging was about how terrible everything was. Well, one of the problems is that if you focus entirely on how terrible everything is, it creates—and, regardless of how you feel about climate change, I think this is a principle for a lot of things—if you're constantly bludgeoned with messages that "It's terrible; it's terrible. It's hopeless, it's hopeless," then instead of being like, "I'm galvanized into action," you go, "I'm just going to go lie down again on that same couch because I think there's nothing I can do." And so there's no point in exerting effort. We're starting to get into places where you can really carefully understand what the issue is. So, if the issue isn't people need to believe it's important, the issue is people need to believe that there's some action they can take, well, those are two very different messages. And, if you're leaning into it's important because bad things are happening rather than leaning into, yes, it's scary, but there's so much you can do, then you're going to potentially have not only no effect but potentially a negative effect on the actual behaviors that you're hoping to change.

Jeff Cobb: [00:12:49] I know that's something you emphasize from the very beginning of the book—that if you're going to change behavior, you really have to understand the needs and challenges of your audience first so that you're able to provide the right learning experience to change that behavior. And I personally find that often gets glossed over. I guess it's supposed to be part of that analysis phase of the classic ADDIE-type model, but a lot of times we don't go in-depth enough. And I think we'll understand the rider, but we don't understand the elephant necessarily when we're trying to design. So you've talked about it a little bit, but what else or what more can those who are trying to design for behavior change, how can they get at what the real needs and challenges are and consistently identify those so that they are able to address what matters to the elephant? They understand the elephant, and, I guess, at the same time, you can't forget the rider. You have to understand the rider as well.

Julie Dirksen: [00:13:47] Right. The model that I lean on pretty heavily in the book is a model called COM-B, which is part of the behavior change wheel, and this is a model that was developed by Susan Michie and her colleagues at University College London, Centre for Behaviour Change. And what they did is they were seeing a lot of motivational behavior

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change models popping up in different domains and in different disciplines. There's a lot of work that we pull on from public health, but there's also behavioral economics. There's also general psychology. All of these kinds of things. And so what they did is a survey across a bunch of these models and brought it all together to try to make something that was a bit more comprehensive because you could really be working on habit formation over here, but then you need to work on bigger-picture motivation issues over here to try to have something that was a comprehensive model. And COM-B, which sits within the behavior change wheel, is capability, opportunity, and motivation, which sounds really simple. And it's great. Is the person capable of making the change? Do they have the opportunity to make the change? And are they motivated to make the change? But once we start to dig into these, we get a lot of depth in the model. So capability, we look at things like physical capability. If you need nurses to turn patients who are in danger of getting pressure ulcers, they physically need to be able to do that activity of turning patients and things like that.

Julie Dirksen: [00:15:06] Then they need to have the psychological capability, which is often the knowledge or the skills, but it also may be the ability to stick with it. If the behavior is doing a highly detailed thing over and over again and just staying focused for large periods of time, that ability to stay focused may be something that we also need to develop in the learners in order to do it. So that's what we would look at for capability. Within opportunity, there are two main areas. One is does the physical environment support it? Compliance with handwashing guidelines in healthcare practitioners went up significantly with the introduction of alcohol-based hand rubs. So being able to move away from purely soap and water to achieve the handwashing goals but actually to use the alcohol-based rubs. And certainly most modern healthcare facilities in the U.S., where I live, are focusing a lot of the design of the environments to better support handwashing behaviors. If you have to go to a different room to do it, you're going to decrease the likelihood. If it's awkward even in the space to do it, it's going to decrease the likelihood. So there's been a lot of science and a lot of work looking at how do we structure our environments. I use handwashing because it's such a universal example. I use it a lot as a way to talk about these things.

Julie Dirksen: [00:16:20] But then also the social opportunity. Do you have social support? Do you see the behavior being modeled around you? Do you believe that it's part of the social norms in the group that you're operating in? I was talking to somebody, and she works at a social services organization, and she was talking about how the new people coming into the organization keep getting underwater and won't ask for help. And she's like, "It's really frustrating. We keep telling them it's okay to ask for help." And I'm like, "Well, do any of your experienced people ever model the behavior of asking for help? Or are they all so experienced

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that they don't need to do it?" And she's like, "Oh, okay!" And we talked about, well, maybe they're going to have to model it sometimes. They're going to have to show that even if you're an experienced person, it's okay to occasionally stop and say, "Hey, I think I've got too much on my plate. Can we talk about strategies?" so that the new people coming in genuinely believe that this is an acceptable social norm within the environment. Because if everybody who's experienced and senior doesn't do it, then what the belief is it's not really okay. And then the last one is motivation. And we look at two different kinds of motivation there as well.

Julie Dirksen: [00:17:29] One is our conscious motivation. What are my stated goals for something? How do I define my values? How do I define my identity? How does this behavior match up to those things? One of the challenges we have in a lot of compliance-based learning environments is the stated goal: "Just get it done." Not "Do this because it makes you a better doctor, engineer, construction worker, banker, or whatever it is." The goal is "Get it done because we need it for a legal accountability issue. We just need it for compliance check-off." Well, if that's the stated goal, people will figure out how to do that goal, but they may figure out how to do that goal in the most efficient way possible, which could be letting the screen play and clicking the next button when the screen runs out while you're making dinner or something like that, as opposed to engaging sincerely with the material. These are often people who are good at their jobs and are sincere about their profession. But we've managed to disconnect a lot of compliance training from the actual purposes of it and the reasons that it's part of you being a better nurse, accountant, banker, or whatever it's associated with. And, as long as that's the case, people will figure out what's the most efficient way to do the thing, if the thing is checking the box as opposed to having some more meaningful purpose to them.

Julie Dirksen: [00:18:50] And then the last part of motivation is that automatic motivation. So it's our habits, our biases, our feelings. It's all of that visceral elephant stuff. Because one of the things that I see a lot in learning and development is we talk about WIIFM (What's in it for me?) and making the case to learners for why—why this is important. And you should absolutely do that 100 percent. I do not disagree with the idea that you should tell people the what's in it for me, but I actually think that's often not enough because what we're saying is, "Hey, this is important." Well, at any given day, there are about 37 different things I should be doing with every minute of that day. So it's not enough to tell me that it goes on the list. It has to be up in the top five, or it's not going to happen because I've got 32 other things that are also on that list. And this is one of the universals. There are two things that I see as universals for most of these behavior change challenges. One is competing priorities. We're all just real busy. We've all got a lot going on. We all have to pick. And so, even though often, as a learning designer, I think this is super important, once it gets thrown into the mix for nurses working in an emergency room

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or something like that, well, of course, my training on pressure ulcer prevention is good and useful, but it may not make it past item 30 of 37. It may not because they've got a lot of other stuff on their plates.

Julie Dirksen: [00:20:15] And so that piece of it, for the motivation, people have to feel that things are important. There's good evidence that, if we're not having some kind of emotional, visceral impact on something that acts as an actual cue to our brain, that thing is maybe not very important. And so learning that's designed to be abstract and conceptual and factual and not have any of the things that tie us into the stuff that's compelling for the elephant, which is the physical world that we're in, or things being immediately important. One of the things about the elephant is it's very present-biased, so it's very much what seems like the best choice right now versus considering what might be the best choice a week from now, a year from now, 10 years from now, or things like that. And most of those personal habits we struggle with, whether it's making healthy eating choices or not smoking or exercising more or whatever, that's almost always something where the effort gets expended right now, but the benefit doesn't show up for a while. Or where, if I have a negative consequence, I get the pleasure of doing the behavior, but the punishment doesn't show up for a while.

Jeff Cobb: [00:21:43] In general, when you're dealing with busy adults who, as you've said, just have a lot of other things going on in their lives, and, sure, it sounds good to learn more about this or to change this habit or behavior, but really grasping the value of that, internalizing it, and making it something that's going to be a priority is just so hard. It's so hard to get people's attention in the first place, much less have that sort of connection around value. So what practical tips might you have around communicating value effectively so that people will say, "Yes, this is something I'm going to put in that top five," as you put it, "and I'm going to actually take some action on?"

Julie Dirksen: [00:22:18] Yes, immediacy is probably, I think, one of the most neglected ones sometimes. The reward for learning something is usually getting to use it. And so, if I'm telling you now about a practice that you're not going to get to use for six months, it is going to be harder for you to allocate your attention to it versus.... One of the things I hear from clients and people in the industry a lot is everybody wants self-directed learners. Well, there are 9 million hours of informational things on YouTube that get used all the time, but they're almost always being used by people who are like, "I want this information right now." One of the things I'm working on today is my lock. The lock on my back door is broken. And so, if I'm pulling up a YouTube video, it's because I have a clear and immediate need to deal with the fact that my lock is broken or that my faucet's dripping or that I want to know how to cook this thing for

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dinner or whatever it is. And so one option is to create a sense of immediacy by not asking people to learn the thing until they actually need it.

Julie Dirksen: [00:23:20] And that's great. But a lot of times that's not our world or our situation. Sometimes you can't ask people to watch the video on how to evacuate the building when they're supposed to be evacuating the building. And you can't have people learn about the signs of money laundering when they see a sign for money laundering because, if they don't know what the signs are, they won't know to recognize it and stuff like that. So there are scenarios where it just doesn't work to wait until the point of use. Now, what you're supposed to do when you see a sign of money laundering, that could be something that, "Oh, I've seen the sign. I learned about that a while ago, and now I finally ran into one. Now, what do I do about this?" That could be a resource that you just use right there. And so one of the biggest issues, if we can't move the point of learning closer to the point of use so there's some urgency, we can create learning where there's something to do with the thing that you're learning while you're doing it. Can I create a situation or a scenario or some problem I'm trying to solve immediately with the thing that I'm learning? Because that gives that feeling of immediacy.

Julie Dirksen: [00:24:24] Even if it's constructed. We do willing suspension of disbelief for all sorts of stuff, mostly entertainment-based, but we can do it for our learning too, where, if I can create some kind of immediate challenge or problem that needs to be solved with the thing I'm learning, it's much easier to allocate attention. And, as we move more and more learning online, we've lost the attention bubble that we used to create around people when they'd go off to a classroom or a workshop or a seminar, and they're often not leaving their workplace with all the things that they're supposed to be doing sitting right there while they're learning, the more we push into these virtual environments. And so we need to be even more mindful about learning, helping people with some strategies around that but also creating something that creates a feeling of immediacy, like there's something I'm supposed to be doing with this information while I'm learning it, because that's really very much where the elephant likes to live.

Jeff Cobb: [00:25:22] Right. Now, I'm sure folks are listening to this and saying, "Great. We get it. Behavior change. We'd like to be able to create that. We're going to take some of this advice around communicating it effectively. We're going to make sure we understand the learner's circumstances and, therefore, be able to create the right type of solution." What's the nitty-gritty here? What are some techniques that we can actually employ as we are creating learning experiences that are going to help to facilitate behavior change? And you go through a number in the book. I'll say it's a very rich book. We're only scratching the surface here obviously. But,

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even if you could talk about a couple of those techniques and some of the examples that go with them, I'm sure listeners would be very appreciative of that.

Julie Dirksen: [00:26:06] Yes, absolutely. One of the things about it is that, when we've looked at this, and we've done our COM-B analysis, and we've figured out, okay, we have some capability. We've got some motivation. We've got a little bit of opportunity. An opportunity like the physical opportunity is always one that I emphasize because that's almost never wasted effort. If you can make the behavior that you're trying to see happen, if you can make it easier for people to do, that's almost always going to pay off. There's some other stuff, which may or may not have an impact depending on your audience, but making it easier is always good. And a lot of that goes to things like user experience, design of systems or environments, or things like that. There's a lot of useful stuff in those disciplines that can help with that. But the other thing that I've been looking at, with the COM-B analysis, what they do is map over to intervention domains, and they have this whole taxonomy of behavior change techniques. I think there are 93. Something like that. I didn't put every single one in the book because some of them just aren't relevant for people who are more in the learning and development or curriculum design vein. And I grouped them a little bit artificially into some different categories.

Julie Dirksen: [00:27:14] One is the things around how do you create support materials? How do you create that environment that supports the behavior as best as you can? Another one is looking at things like identity and values. Somebody came up to me at a conference and said, "How do you change people's values about," I think it was "the environment?" And I said, "Well, you don't. You show them how the behaviors associated with what you're trying to do accord with values that they already have." And there's good science on that too. If you understand what values people have, and you can talk about the new behavior in terms of those values, there's research that suggests you're going to get better uptake on it and things like that. Also, I spend a lot of time with self-determination theory, which is a model I like, and people who've read Dan Pink's book *Drive* are probably familiar with that. But how do you help people foster a sense of autonomy? The feeling that this isn't something being done to them; it's something that they're participating in and doing. How do you foster a sense of mastery, accomplishment, competence, and things like that? How do people feel like they have some success and that they're getting better at it and things like that? And how do you foster a sense of relatedness? So how do you connect people or show how this connects to their peer group? And the primary researchers behind self-determination theory, Ed Deci and Rich Ryan, will talk about autonomy support.

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Julie Dirksen: [00:28:37] You can't motivate anybody, but you can support people's motivation in ways. So how you talk to them—do you talk to them like they need to get yelled at? One of the things I did when I was doing the book is I pulled a compliance course off of OSHA and did a word cloud analysis or something, and it was *must, should, have to, regulation*, all of these command-and-control words. It's full of it. And I get it. It was something about asbestos removal. And we want people to be safe. They must do these things in order to be safe. But it is this thing that can produce that reaction. If you're talking to people with a lot of knowledge and expertise, acknowledging their knowledge and expertise and speaking to them like they're not children but full adults who should be respected, that's part of it too. Talking about "Here's how you can protect yourself" as opposed to "You have to do this thing." That provokes a very different reaction.

Julie Dirksen: [00:29:34] Or "You have expertise in this. Here's how you add to that expertise. How do you build it and develop it?" So that goes into things like values, identity, and all that kind of thing. Some of it is reducing the cognitive load of what we're asking people to do. The more complicated and the denser we make it, the more likely they are to have to exert a lot of effort to engage and understand. So that's part of it. But, yes, there's this whole litany of things around helping people formulate goals. One technique I really like is implementation intentions, which comes from a researcher, Richard Gollwitzer, and he looks at a really simple "If X, then Y." So I'm going to identify what the trigger is in the environment that tells me I should use this behavior. If I'm frustrated with this patient who's not listening to me as I'm trying to counsel them about their own behavior change, medication adherence—let's say they need to take their medications, and I feel myself getting frustrated with this patient. I'm going to stop and ask the question, "Tell me again what you think is causing this to be an issue?" Or something like that. So that might be "If the X," if I'm feeling myself getting frustrated with this patient, I'm going to have one or two questions that I'm going to stop and ask them so that I don't wind up yelling at this patient because that's the behavior I'm trying not to do, is to scold them about not taking their meds. I'm going to stop and ask questions.

Julie Dirksen: [00:31:00] So, if X happens, my frustration, Y, is stop lecturing them. Ask a question. That kind of thing. I think in the Behavior Change Taxonomy they refer to it as "action planning," but the term for it in the research literature is "implementation intentions," and having those in your head before you go in so that you can remember to do it or recognize the cue when it's happening and respond with the appropriate behavior. Because a lot of times, the real challenge for people is interrupting a lot of automatic patterns that they already have and recognizing, "Oh, I need to stop when I get to this point, and I need to do this thing over here." And being able to set that little cue marker for yourself so it pings when you bump into it, and

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you go, “Oh, wait, this is what I’m supposed to do, that other thing. Okay, I’m going to stop and do the other thing.”

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:50] So much, of course, comes back to what we talked about earlier on, about really understanding what the actual needs and challenges are of the people that you’re trying to impact with learning, that’s going to change behavior, and then employing the appropriate techniques for doing that. Again, we’ve just been scratching the surface here. You’ve got a wealth of different techniques you talk about. You go into depth around everything we’ve talked about much more in the book. So I definitely recommend that folks check out *Talk to the Elephant*. It is something we all need to be thinking about and implementing ourselves in the design of the learning experiences that we’re providing to our learners.

Jeff Cobb: [00:32:32] As you may know, because you’ve been on the show before, all the way back in episode 78, we like to ask people about their own approaches to lifelong learning, which we, I believe, have asked you about before. So I’d like to change it up a little bit this time, given the context of this new book that you’ve written and talk about behavior change in your own life. Are there lessons you take from the book? How do you approach behavior change in your own life? Because all of us, I think, probably have our goals with respect to behavior change, and so it’d be nice to know where you’re finding some success in your own life.

Julie Dirksen: [00:33:05] Yes. One of the important things to mention is that absolutely none of these are magic bullets. What you typically find in most of these approaches to behavior change is you wind up with an accumulation of methods to try to move the needle because maybe each one is going to have a little bit, but, if you can stack up the different methods and have them be something where the learner can make some choices and things like that, it can be more effective. So, for my own purposes, yes, I think I’m much more active about the habit-formation piece and specifically do use the implementation intention idea. I have certain things, like whenever I’m looking for something, and I can’t find it, one of my implementation intentions is, when I do eventually find it, when I put it away again, I don’t put it away where I eventually found it. I put it away where I first looked for it because that’s apparently where I think it’s supposed to go. So that’s just a tiny example of trying to create or recognizing something like...because I’m not a naturally tidy person, and so I’m trying to find habits around it. Or recognizing, “Hey, a bunch of this stuff is accumulating because there isn’t a right place for it to go. Maybe I need to stop and create places for certain things to go in order to do that.”

Julie Dirksen: [00:34:27] In my own behavior and practice, I’ve definitely found one of the things about writing a book is your elephant shows up in all sorts of fun ways around procrastination

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and reasons to not get started. And so trying to find some very deliberate habits around things that seem to work in terms of being able to sit down and focus on something like actually writing and identifying: “Okay, if it’s not working for me, what do I think is not working in this particular environment? What do I need to do to change it?” Okay, it’s not working for me because I’m distracted, or it’s not working for me because I know that the deadline that I set for myself isn’t quite real. Or how do I make these things more...? I’m always fine-tuning those processes with not-perfect success because, again, competing priorities are still a problem. But figuring out all these little tricks to optimize, “Can I increase the likelihood that I floss by keeping flossing stuff right at my desk?” Or “Can I come up with strategies around e-mail management, task management in general, or things like that?” And it’s a process, not an outcome. But you practice these things on yourself, and then you can internalize it and then think hopefully, clearly about how do we leverage these.

Celisa Steele: [00:35:53] Julie Dirksen is a learning strategist, instructional designer, consultant, speaker, author, and someone committed to using learning to support behavior change.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:02] If you’re looking for a practical way to better understand how learning can support behavior change, we recommend her book *Talk to the Elephant: Design Learning for Behavior Change*. In the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode382, you’ll find links to her Web site and that book.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:20] Jeff and I would be grateful if you would rate the Leading Learning Podcast on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you find the show valuable, because ratings help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business.

Jeff Cobb: [00:36:33] And please spread the word about Leading Learning, whether in a one-on-one conversation with a colleague, a personal e-mail, or on social media. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode382, you’ll find links to connect with us on X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Celisa Steele: [00:36:50] Thanks for listening, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by DanoSongs, www.danosongs.com]

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