



Leading Learning Podcast Episode 262

Nigel Paine (00:00):

I not only know that sector—I actually believe in it passionately, and it tends to be the unloved child of education, formal and informal education. It hasn't got the clout. It doesn't have the profile. But it's quietly gone on and done amazing things and transformed people's lives. I think that its time is coming. I think we're moving into an age where the only acceptable way forward for anyone who wants to stay employed is lifelong learning.

Jeff Cobb (00:32):

I'm Jeff Cobb.

Celisa Steele (00:33):

I'm Celisa Steele, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Jeff Cobb (00:41):

Welcome to episode 262 of the Leading Learning Podcast, the fifth installment in a seven-part series on the surge of the third sector of education, which features a conversation with Nigel Paine. Nigel has led a long career that's intersected with the third sector at many points. He's been involved in corporate learning for over 20 years. From 2002 to 2006, he headed up the BBC's learning and development operation.

Jeff Cobb (01:08):

He's written three books in the last five years, including *Workplace Learning: How to Build a Culture of Continuous Employee Development*. He co-hosts the From Scratch Podcast on workplace issues, and he's a presenter for Learning Now TV, a live-streamed Internet TV channel for those focused on corporate learning and performance. Nigel also teaches in the chief learning officer doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Jeff Cobb (01:35):

So he has a lot to draw on when commenting on the third sector, and he brings a non-US perspective. Nigel is based in London and has consulted with companies, large and small, in over 30 countries. Celisa spoke with Nigel in December 2020.

Nigel Paine (01:58):

I have a mixed life, I think, a very, very complex, sometimes, career. But at the moment, I am an author. I've written three books in the last five years, and no doubt there will be another one coming in the next one or two. I present TV. I present Learning Now Television, and I've done that for three or four years. At the moment, we're producing a TV program twice a month, so every two weeks.

*This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast
available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.*

Nigel Paine (02:23):

Previously it was once a month, but because of COVID, and there's a lot of interest in Learning Now Television. I also do a podcast with Martin Couzins called From Scratch, which comes out every week. We're up to about 175 at the moment, so there's a lot there. The great thing about our podcast is it's mercifully short. It very rarely goes on longer than 10 minutes.

Nigel Paine (02:47):

I also work with companies. I do research. I engage with companies. I speak at conferences. I've spoken at three or four in the last two weeks around the world, mostly US and Europe, but also in Oman. I'm doing some work in the Middle East as well. I have, I think, an interesting life, engaging with organizations and individuals, trying to think, trying to write stuff down, and generally trying to stay on top of this very strange universe that we've inherited and inhabit over the last year.

Celisa Steele (03:21):

Tell us a little bit more about the type of work that you do. You mentioned Learning Now TV. You work with organizations. You have the podcast. Talk a little bit more about what the focus of all of that is.

Nigel Paine (03:35):

That's shifting, and I'm glad it's shifting, in a way. I'm much more interested in—and I seem to be asked to do much more about—whole organization change and less to do with specialists working only with L&D or narrow L&D issues. Because I think the world is changing. I actually think that's a trajectory that everyone will get involved in.

Nigel Paine (04:00):

I'm helping organizations manage technology, encourage and develop more a culture of learning rather than specific learning programs and courses, and help them, I guess, become more agile, become more adept at managing their own change, and help them reassert direction, purpose, and their role in the world, I think, probably would sum it up. So it's bigger-picture, broader, broader activity is how I would see my own trajectory over the last couple of years.

Celisa Steele (04:36):

So you maybe more focused specifically on the learning component, and now you're seeing it expand more broadly into that culture overall within these organizations?

Nigel Paine (04:47):

Yeah. That's my books as well. The first book was called *The Learning Challenge*, which is very much about how you can optimize the opportunities for L&D. The second book was about leadership, and there I was really worried—it was based around a problem, which was why does so much leadership development have no impact whatsoever? Everyone has a lovely time, and we wave goodbye, and nothing changes. So I wanted to find out, pinpoint what makes some L&D transformative and the rest, nothing.

Nigel Paine (05:17):

And so, that took me outside L&D and into the nature of the organization. I tried to identify the factors which make leadership development either likely to be successful or likely not to be.

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.

And then the final book is about learning culture. I realized that unless you actually start fixing things in the cultural environment of the organization, you can kiss goodbye a learning culture. It's just not going to happen. So I stepped right outside L&D.

Nigel Paine (05:45):

That was my own movement over the last five years. In the current climate, I've spent lots and lots of time with L&D leaders saying, "Do not just see this as an opportunity to shovel more courses down people's throats. Take a holistic view. What is going on inside your organization? How can you help? How can you partner, work alongside, advise, guide? Not control your own little domain."

Nigel Paine (06:14):

So that's been my journey, and I've got a lot of people, I think, coming on it with me. One of the joys of my life is that I teach at the University of Pennsylvania on a doctoral program that I actually helped create more than 15 years ago. So I've been with it for a long time. It's designed for those involved in learning in organizations. Over the years, it's gone from being very specialist to chief learning officer to having a range of people who touch on the talent agenda in organizations, big and small, the military, not-for-profits.

Nigel Paine (06:48):

But it's a doctoral program that's unique because it engages with that diversity of need for human development, essentially. One of the things I've learned from that is that if you think you've got it—"I understand this sector. I understand the issues."—then you're being naïve. Because every time you think you've got it nailed down, some other dimension appears.

Nigel Paine (07:13):

Luckily, the program has been innovative enough to reflect those needs and to keep evolving. We iterate the curriculum every time we run any of the tool blogs, and the research that's come out of it has been absolutely fascinating, very, very varied. But there's a kind of lesson there, that if you see that CLO doctoral program as a kind of ecosystem in its own right, the lessons from it have been that you stick to the knitting.

Nigel Paine (07:44):

It is a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. That is a driving force and a driving motivation for many of the students. But in order to get there and maintain that faith with your community, we've had to learn, relearn, evolve, and try to anticipate what people really want, rather than assume that we know. "We are the University of Pennsylvania. We know." That is naïve and would be ridiculous.

Nigel Paine (08:14):

So I think that's a general lesson there for me, that I approach the world with humility and with a readiness to learn and with a belief that, if you take my three words—if you listen, understand, and act—you will deliver something better than if you just simply assume, act without thinking, and insist that everyone comes along with you. These things are very important—and increasingly so. This program will change faster as it goes forward, not slower, because that's the nature of the world.

Celisa Steele (08:57):

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.

You and I are talking as part of a podcast series that we're doing on the third sector of education, that sector that's made up of the providers who serve adult lifelong learners after they finish their formal, degree-granting education. And so, I'd be curious to know, where do you interact or have you interacted with that third sector of education professionally and personally, if you'd like as well?

Nigel Paine (09:26):

I'll tell you a little secret today, Celisa, and that's where I grew up. I grew up in that sector, so I spent a good few years of my life working in university extramural, what would be called community college education in the US, plus in voluntary organizations. So I engaged with individuals and communities in a way that I haven't done for a large number of years. I not only know that sector—I actually believe in it passionately. It tends to be the unloved child of education, formal and informal education. It hasn't got the clout. It doesn't have the profile, but it's quietly gone on and done amazing things and transformed people's lives.

Nigel Paine (10:13):

I think that its time is coming. I think we're moving into an age where the only acceptable way forward for anyone who wants to stay employed is lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is an interaction between formal education, as in school, college, and informal education, as in me and you talking together and learning, but also into those providers who can offer something outside the workflow that will help individuals engage more accurately, give them the tools and the mindsets to build their own careers inside organizations.

Nigel Paine (10:55):

Without them—without those organizations, individuals, small companies, voluntary organizations, charities, whatever they might be—without them very, very active, we will never get to that goal of building universal lifelong education because most people don't work in large companies that have got huge learning infrastructures. The truth is that most people work in very small organizations who don't have those resources. Where do they turn? This is your third sector. It's very important.

Celisa Steele (11:29):

And so, that third sector, as you were just talking about, is made up of many different types of providers, those associations, the corporate L&D, the academic continuing education units, training companies, solo edupreneurs, all of those folks. And so, if you could imagine a continuum, and at one end we have *hodgepodge* and at the other one we have *partnership*, what's your sense of the third sector's image of itself? Are we aware of the other players in there? On that hodgepodge-to-partnership spectrum, where are we?

Nigel Paine (12:05):

Well, I think it's actually a highway, and we're driving from hodgepodge to partnership. Again, I think that there's a massive incentive now, and organizations who didn't see that sector as having anything to offer are trying to build relationships. And individuals who didn't see that as being helpful for them are starting to engage. So I think that it's like the pieces are starting to align. If we've thrown them up in there and they've landed anywhere, they're starting to move under their own steam, and we'll end up with a pattern of much clearer provision.

Nigel Paine (12:43):

Because one of the problems with this sector is that, for many people, it looks totally confusing. Where do I start? Who do I trust? Everyone wants your money, but what are you going to get for your money? That's where we need to put some effort—is not to create lots of new providers but to organize and build partnerships and build standards and build acceptability in terms of how you approach the role, the terms and conditions that you offer learners, and all of those things.

Nigel Paine (13:17):

So accepted, approved direction and an alignment around the different strengths and weaknesses of providers so that, for an organization employing people or for individuals in work, they can see opportunity everywhere and not just confusion everywhere. It's a very important trajectory, I think.

Celisa Steele (13:38):

I think that point about needing more clarity and really helping learners navigate that sector really makes a lot of sense to me.

Jeff Cobb (13:49):

If you're looking for a partner to help you help learners navigate the sometimes confusing lifelong learning landscape, check out our sponsor for this series.

Amanda Davis (13:58):

For nearly 20 years, Blue Sky eLearn has been transforming the way organizations deliver virtual events and educational content. Blue Sky's customized, cutting-edge solutions connect hundreds of organizations to millions of learners worldwide. These include their award-winning learning management system, Path LMS, Webinar and live streaming services for short events to multi-day virtual conferences, and learning strategy and development solutions. These robust, easy-to-manage solutions allow organizations to easily organize, track, and monetize educational content.

Jeff Cobb (14:37):

We're truly grateful to Blue Sky eLearn for helping to make this series possible. We encourage you to find out more at blueskyelearn.com. Now back to the conversation with Celisa and Nigel.

Celisa Steele (14:52):

Our view at Leading Learning is that this third sector has been growing in size and importance in the relatively recent past. If you agree with that assessment, what do you think is contributing to the growth of the third sector?

Nigel Paine (15:08):

It's basically need. There is an enormous pressure now on people who left school without qualifications, who are in a workplace where it looks like their job is going to come to an end sooner rather than later. Those people, there is a thirst and a craving to acquire new skills that will keep them employable. There are lots of opportunities for people who are maybe even post-workforce to keep their brain active, to learn new things.

Nigel Paine (15:42):

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.

For people who are in mixed mode, they may have children at home, they may have a part-time job, but the third part of that is acquiring new knowledge and new skills and new competence to get them back into the workforce at a certain time, there's, I think, an acceptance, finally, I think, and the discarding of this crazy idea that you stopped learning at 18 or 21 or 23 or whatever it might be, and for the rest of your life you're lumbered with the portfolio that you acquired in those years.

Nigel Paine (16:15):

There's a general belief that we can learn; we can change; we can acquire new skills and knowledge. It's partly a social pressure. It's partly an economic and technological pressure, the fact we all have access to everything. You and I are talking across thousands of miles as if you're in the same room as I am. I think that's absolutely wonderful. But there's also a realization through the work of neuroscientists and through people like Robert Kegan that adults continue to develop.

Nigel Paine (16:48):

You don't stop developing at 18. Adults continue to develop. And if they want to really fulfill their potential, their potential is always, always tied up with learning, and learning more, and learning different, sometimes discarding old assumptions and old ideas in order to embrace what's new and exciting and what points them in the right direction.

Celisa Steele (17:13):

You were just speaking to the fact that there's a great need for this third sector that's really driving the growth there. And so, if you think about the major opportunities that are there, that are available for those working in the third sector, what do you see as those major opportunities?

Nigel Paine (17:32):

It depends what the needs are. Basically, whatever need there is, there is an opportunity sitting there somewhere. But one of the problems is trying to find that opportunity and align it. But if you look at technology, the number of people doing things that used to be called MOOCs (but we don't really call them that anymore, it's become such a generalist term), but basically people who learn online asynchronously or synchronously, the opportunity to go to places—well, in the days when you could actually work together, and we will be able to do that at some point soon—but to go together to different kinds of spaces.

Nigel Paine (18:08):

There are lots of third spaces, new kinds of work-learn spaces, emerging in all our cities, that allow people to come together in different kinds of community, and the flexibility to combine what time you have with the opportunity that is open to you. I can see a world where people do learn online on their own. They read stuff. They engage in discussions and forums, and they partner in small teams. I can see people going to a center and reinforcing that learning.

Nigel Paine (18:42):

So I think it's a very mixed mode. I worry sometimes when providers lust after single-mode learning. I think you've got to get into multi-mode learning, whatever you do and however you do it, because that is the nature of the world. Also, everybody is better equipped. I don't know anybody, apart from my brother, who has not got a smartphone, and I can't believe that anyone

who's got a smartphone hasn't seen that change their life and put them in touch with opportunities, ideas, ways of doing things that they couldn't have done before.

Nigel Paine (19:22):

So you need to galvanize that for learning. I think I can see a lot more apps that work on your phone, work on your iPad, work on your laptop, sync seamlessly, operate in real time to keep you informed. You and I can talk now. I can walk out and go somewhere else, open up my phone, continue the conversation, record. You send me a recording on my laptop. I go and pick it up on my iPad. I do some editing on my iPad, get back on my laptop. I send it to you. All of that in real time.

Nigel Paine (19:56):

Those are fabulous opportunities, I think, for creating a way of stimulating and satisfying curiosity. Because, I think, if we can create a world of curious people, our problems are over because they will work out their own way to meet their curious needs, to satisfy that curiosity. The problem is we've got far too many people who see curiosity as something dangerous or something that is scary and something that isn't really for them.

Nigel Paine (20:26):

I think we will have to encourage people to be more curious and begin to meet their own learning needs because the other point that relates directly to what you're saying is no provider can come up with all the answers. It's got to be individuals saying to providers, "This is what I want. This is what I need." They will take what they need, not have stuff pushed to them that they may or may not need.

Nigel Paine (20:50):

It's a very much more exciting environment than when I started working, where I was delivering classes in communities face to face because there were no other options. If people are on shift work or they were sick, then they missed it all. I began in the '80s with packaging learning. I was one of the early pioneers in what we called in the UK open learning. That went online as quickly as it was possible to do so. I was one of the early workers, not with e-learning as such, but of the learning online before the concept of e-learning even came together.

Nigel Paine (21:28):

I saw then how important that was going to be once the machines were fast enough, capable enough, that they were ubiquitous enough to allow them to offer real choices to people. I had to wait maybe 15 years or something for that to happen, but it's certainly happened now. So I'm very optimistic about the possibilities going forward.

Celisa Steele (21:51):

Well, I hear your passion and your enthusiasm and your own curiosity coming through. And so, that's all on the opportunity side. In terms of the threats to the third sector, what do you see as the major challenges or threats that exist?

Nigel Paine (22:11):

Well, I think there are big players who would like to gobble it all up. I'm not going to mention names, but there are private universities, large companies who really don't want small organizations nibbling away at their business, and they will try to become ubiquitous and

universal. I think we do need big players, but I also like to have an ecosystem where there are small providers because small providers have got first advantage. They're the ones who move quickly, see opportunities, rush in.

Nigel Paine (22:44):

If someone rushes in, finds a great medium, only to be eaten up by one of the big people 18 months down the track, I don't think that's a particularly healthy way to go forward. You could argue that the market is growing at a pace beyond the capabilities of any handful of organizations to manage, and I hope so. But I think there are dangers. If we look in social media, for example, we can see how very, very big players whose names will be completely off my lips but maybe begin with F and B, that they have gobbled up the biggest competitors and got even bigger as a result of that.

Nigel Paine (23:25):

I wouldn't want that to happen in the third sector. I really want plurality and choice because I think it's very, very important. I don't think we can anticipate people's needs going forward or the challenges of this world going forward. We need operators to see something move fast and have first-mover advantage. It's very, very important.

Celisa Steele (23:50):

I think that's an excellent point, this idea that we have such a diversity of needs that learners are going to be bringing and looking for solutions for, that it's very hard to find those answers for learners in a single entity—or it does seem dangerous to potentially have it all locked up in a few big players. So it's a very interesting point. What do you see as the future for the third sector? Do you think it's going to be continued growth, disruption, whether that's positive or negative disruption, waning importance, something else? How would you characterize it?

Nigel Paine (24:38):

I would see continuing growth and massive disruption. I don't know whether I can have my cake and eat it in answering your question, but I absolutely see the needs. It will be accelerating as AI comes into the workforce, as we find not only new ways of working but new products. Whole new sectors would emerge, and we will need people who can do the jobs of the future. Not necessarily the jobs of the past. They will need new skills, new attitudes. They will need to enable themselves and feel confident in their ability as learners.

Nigel Paine (25:13):

One of the things that, for me anyway, the absolute heart of a growth mindset is "I can learn," that belief that you can learn. Once you've got that belief, then your needs are insatiable. There will always be things to learn and always providers. But I do think that, if the disruption will occur, that we need more regulated, ordered, clear opportunities laid down, so we know where to go, there are some standards. We can get rid of the cowboys if they're there, the corruption, the people who just want your money and offer you nothing for it.

Nigel Paine (25:50):

We have to clean it, clean up the environment so that it is ordered but still full of opportunity and still available for entrepreneurs and first movers. I cannot believe that in 10 years' time, we'll be talking again, and we'll say, "Well, we got that wrong, didn't we? The whole sector's disappeared." I don't believe that. What would our world be like? Where will the jobs come from in 10 years' time? Neither of us know. But if we have that growth mindset and the

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.

providers who can help people make the leaps going forward, then we'll have a healthy world, healthy society, and a healthy amount of learning in 10 years. So that sector is absolutely critical for all our futures, essentially.

Celisa Steele (26:41):

What words of advice—could be of caution, or it could be words of what to pursue—what would you think that those in the third sector should be doing to thrive?

Nigel Paine (27:00):

I'll give you three things that I think are absolutely fundamental. The first one is think mindset...oh, sorry, think ecosystem. Think, "How can I build together components that will meet the needs of my learners?" And some of those will be new components. Ecosystems are really important, and we operate in an ecosystem. Our lives are increasingly based in ecosystems, and therefore we don't want just one product that tries to do everything for us.

Nigel Paine (27:30):

The second thing is help that growth mindset, so help people believe in themselves as learners, and spend a little time enabling people to learn, as well as giving them things to do. I call that the balance of productive skills and generative skills. Generative skills are the core skills that help people learn other skills that are crucial to them and give them the confidence to move forward. Curiosity sits there in the generative skills category. So recognize that generative skills are just as important as productive skills.

Nigel Paine (28:08):

The third thing is I've got this set which says, "Listen, understand, act." Get out there, listen to what people are saying. Try to understand where the needs are emerging, and then act on that intelligence. Don't say, "I've got a neat little operation here. It's doing quite well. I'll just be happy with that for the next 40 years." That is dangerous, I think.

Nigel Paine (28:34):

You in the third sector have to evolve and change and rethink and be disrupted and be able to deal with that disruption, just like everyone else. You are not somehow exempt from all the flows in the rest of the world. So jump in to the flow, and embrace that, and it will carry you forward, and it will help you stay successful, maybe doing some things that are quite different to what you would have done before but nevertheless will help you be more successful, bigger, more enduring, and it will help you stay relevant going forward. So they will be my three tips, and I think that they're quite important. They're quite fundamental tips.

Celisa Steele (29:18):

I love, especially, your distinction between the productive and generative skills. And I do think that it makes a ton of sense for providers working in that third sector to really focus on both because, like we were saying, there's so much confusion, because there are so many options out there, just helping learners even navigate the space, that seems in line with those generative skills, the curiosity, getting clear on what it is you need to learn, so that then you are equipped as a learner to better evaluate the options that are out there.

Celisa Steele (30:00):

I know that learning technologies and technology's role in supporting learning is an area of expertise for you. And so, I'm curious to know, how do you see learning technologies shaping the third sector now, and how might future technological advances shape it in the future?

Nigel Paine (30:21):

Well, I think that's the million-dollar question. Technological advances are shaping that sector. Absolutely, certainly, they are shaping that sector from every dimension. From reaching out to your customers, meeting their needs, assessing their competence, maybe certifying or credentialing those individuals, continuing to develop learning products, working on the curriculum, working on instructional design—every single one of those areas is completely disrupted by new technologies.

Nigel Paine (31:05):

I would say, again, look at the main trends, and look at how you can adapt what you're doing to take advantage of some of those main trends. I've already mentioned, for example, apps, that people live in an app world now rather than big software packages. People do not want to spend their time on a desktop when they've got a phone and a tablet and everything else. They want to be able to work seamlessly between all three. If you can't do that, start getting worried.

Nigel Paine (31:37):

Use those technologies—like the one we're using at the moment, Skype—use those technologies to full advantage, and they're getting better, and they're managing groups of people as well as one-on-one individuals so much more professionally and technologically, competently than they were before. So I just can't imagine that you can do what you do much longer without embracing those technological changes.

Nigel Paine (32:06):

You might feel that you're much more comfortable sitting in a room with a group of people. There's nothing wrong with that. But don't see that as the beginning, the middle, and the end of what you do. The more you can extend that, the more you can create learning opportunities going forward, the more effective your output will be, and the more engaged your learners will be with you.

Celisa Steele (32:27):

I'd like to ask too about data and data analytics for organizations in the third sector that are really serious about showing the value of their offerings. What would you recommend? What are some of the key activities in terms of evaluation to help demonstrate that impact?

Nigel Paine (32:51):

I think data analytics are really important. Anything you use will have data coming out the back of it. There's probably more data than you can shake a stick at. But the problem is that most people don't really know what to do with that data apart from in very crude and clunky ways. They collect number of hours, who completed this, and what time. They're almost irrelevant, those things. What you need to do is use data to focus on levels of engagement and impact going forward.

Nigel Paine (33:21):

So I think you need to work out the actual difference you make in the world, and that is easily doable now. You can track that, and you can monitor it, and that's what you should do. But there's also a huge amount of opportunity. For example, Google's analytics on Web sites, that is free. That data pours out. Someone said only about 9 percent of sites use Google Analytics; the others just don't switch it on. That's crazy. I hope it's more than that now.

Nigel Paine (33:55):

If you look at the data coming off the back of things like Microsoft Teams, huge amounts of data. Even if you look at the Microsoft Office suite and the amount of analytics that now relates around the Microsoft apps, they've done that because they see the advantages of making sure your Outlook links to your Word, links to your PowerPoint, and bring all that together so you can create dashboards, and you can monitor your learners in a way that isn't spooky.

Nigel Paine (34:29):

There are some dangers, which I completely accept, but monitor, and therefore to be able to accurately work out what works and what doesn't. Work out how you can help your learners be more effective. Often in advance of them even realizing it, you can deal with and obliterate any problems. That's the real world. You've got GE engines flying in airplanes (when airplanes used to fly—you remember those days? whoa, wonderful!)—

Nigel Paine (34:59):

those GE engines are pouring so much data back to GE that they can tell before there's a failure, and they replace the part before it fails because they've got the data to know when the part is about to fail. Now we need the same thing. If they can do it for jet engines, we can do it for human beings. Before someone gets in difficulty, we need to step in and correct, not after they've had a miserable time or, even worse, after they've failed because that will seriously damage them psychologically, often.

Nigel Paine (35:31):

I think data analytics—everyone has to become familiar and understand the amount they can do with very little effort. You don't need to be a data scientist to make use of these things. Now they're all there for you. They lie there waiting for you to grab them. The sad thing is not enough people reach out and grab them.

Celisa Steele (35:53):

I appreciated the comment about the use of data analytics, potentially, to help rescue learners who are in need. I think so often we can focus on after the completion of the learning event and looking at what happens after that point, but this idea of it really being a potential for course correction, so that then that learner...

Nigel Paine (36:16):

Yeah. The old model was wait until afterwards and go, "Oh, that was a disaster" or, "Half of them have failed." And we shrug our shoulders and move on. Or maybe we do something for the next group. The real test and the real cutting-edge stuff is looking at the data as it's coming out in the middle of everything and being able to make those small corrections. And often, it's only small corrections, and that will help people come through seamlessly, almost without them realizing that there's been a little bit of manipulation in the background somewhere. A few wires being tied together or cuts, wherever it might be.

Nigel Paine (36:51):

That's how it should be. Just as when we use products, we have no idea what's going on in the background to seamlessly make them work for us. We just accept that they work. It's like learning has to catch up. We spend a lot of money on a phone, and we expect it to work, and we expect everything to integrate. We get very impatient if teeny things go wrong with the interface. And yet learning, we accept colossal things to go wrong all the time as if that doesn't matter.

Nigel Paine (37:21):

It does matter. It has to be a seamless, quality experience, just like increasingly every other experiences in our lives. Just look at the big players and their obsession with getting it right for the customer. I think learning has to be obsessed with getting it right for the customer too.

Celisa Steele (37:51):

I'm based in the US, as are most of the organizations that I end up interfacing with and working with. I know you're familiar with the US, but you're based in London. And so, I'm particularly interested in your non-US perspective. Are there any footnotes or nuances you might add to earlier comments about how the third sector looks different outside of the US?

Nigel Paine (38:19):

It does. It depends, again—there's no way of saying there's the US, and there's the rest. Each country is different. For example, in Germany, where they have a very much more advanced, controlled, regulated vocational education, it looks very, very different from the US, as it does from the UK, and every shade in between Germany and the US model. But I think that once you get outside the US, what you do see much more is government intervention and regulation, much more an attempt to ensure standards, clarify, set competence frameworks, and skill profiles that are universally accepted and are the currency for moving forward for individuals and organizations.

Nigel Paine (39:06):

That's not so evident in the US but tends to be state by state, often company by company. Companies drive standards in many sectors, and you can see that. So I'm not saying that one is good, and one is bad. It's just different. I don't really see them coming together. I think that in the face of the disruption, which is on its way, those countries where there is a large government sector intervening, they will intervene more to make it work.

Nigel Paine (39:34):

In the US, where there is less government intervention, they will encourage companies to get their act together and meet the supply needs and to meet up with the demand. I think there are big differences, and there are very few global players. There's a lot of local players. People you work with all work in the US, don't tend to go outside. Maybe even work—and you're in North Carolina—and maybe they don't work in other states because US is huge, and you can live pretty well concentrating your focus on North Carolina, for example, which is a highly industrialized and advanced state and in other parts of the world would be a country and could be a country.

Nigel Paine (40:20):

Now, I think, if California was independent, it would be the eighth largest economy in the world. So there's a difference in scale, but everyone faces the same problems. Now I don't know any country now trying to put up barriers and say, "Well, we'll just control, regulate, exclude. That's how we'll survive." No one's saying that anymore because it's not true. The waves of change and disruption are global waves.

Nigel Paine (40:48):

We can have presidents and prime ministers, and all of that can say, "We come first, put our country first." But the truth is that the vast, vast majority of countries rely incredibly, profoundly on everything working together. We're enmeshed in this network of technology and skills and production, and we can't manage without each other. I think that most countries, most organizations, and most people in the third sector will see that need, that what they're actually doing in their different ways are preparing people for the global competition and global movements and global trends. I think that's inevitable.

Nigel Paine (41:34):

We're not going to go back to small countries or small states, although there have been some tendencies in that direction in the last year and particularly brought on by the pandemic. You can either pull up the shutters or embrace the world. I think embracing the world is always going to be more successful in the long run than pulling down the shutters.

Celisa Steele (41:56):

Well, wonderful. Thank you so much for your generosity with your time and your expertise. I really enjoyed the insights you had to share.

Nigel Paine (42:04):

Celisa, it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you. I really appreciate the opportunity to engage with you and to engage with your community. Long may you flourish.

Jeff Cobb (42:22):

With over 25 years of experience in corporate learning, Nigel Paine is a regular speaker, writer, and broadcaster on the topics of development, technology, and leadership. His company focuses on building great workplaces. You can learn more about Nigel, his work, and his company at nigelpaine.com. He welcomes connecting with Leading Learning Podcast listeners through e-mail, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Celisa Steele (42:48):

You'll find links to Nigel's Web site and his social media accounts in the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode262, along with the transcript and other resources related to this conversation.

Jeff Cobb (43:02):

You'll also find options for subscribing to the podcast at leadinglearning.com/episode262. To make sure you don't miss the upcoming episodes, we encourage you to subscribe. Subscribing also helps us get some data on the impact of the podcast.

Celisa Steele (43:18):

This transcript accompanies the episode of the Leading Learning Podcast available at www.leadinglearning.com/episode262.

We'd be grateful if you would take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcasts. Jeff and I personally appreciate it, and reviews and ratings help the podcast show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a review and rating.

Jeff Cobb (43:35):

We encourage you to learn more about the sponsor for this series by visiting blueskyelearn.com. Lastly, please spread the word about Leading Learning. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/262, there are links to find us on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Celisa Steele (43:53):

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

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