



# COMMS

## Take the Plunge: A Fresh Start for Learning in 2023

*Now's the time for learning and development professionals to take stock and re-set learning programs. Here's what you can do to start the year ...*



**Simon is presenting a seminar for CLEAA on Wednesday 15 February 2023**

*Wayfinding - Digital Strategies for Effective Workplace Learning*

**Members: FREE    Non-Members: \$50    [Registration and more information here.](#)**

*As we embark upon the year ahead as Learning and Development professionals, it feels as if the time for action is here. We need to dip our toes in the water, taking what we have learned and using it to stimulate change, growth and a shift towards planning, testing and learning together with calculated risk-taking (with or without the data sources we'd love to have) to start bringing our new ideas into fruition.*

*Read on for our thoughts on setting up the new year for success.*

## Take The Plunge: A Fresh Start for Learning in 2023

**By Simon Dewar, Managing Director, BSI**

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Earlier in the year, In early 2022 our predictions and event around digital fatigue and overwhelm struck a chord with many of our clients and followers. As we peek around the corner of winter in the Southern hemisphere, the concept of “emergence” and coming out of

a dark place is revealing itself in our lives, and more broadly, in workplace learning. There's a sense of needing to find new ways to navigate and find direction in this world fraught with uncertainty.

How do we personally pick up the pieces of our lives, establish our position and set a path forward into a new future? And what does this mean for business, leadership, and learning as we kick off the new financial year?

## **An Uncertain Environment**

In Australia, COVID-19 continues to create uncertainty in the way we live our lives. Vaccine-resistant strains amidst our recently regained freedoms require us to now use our own personal judgement to gauge what is safe, how to protect ourselves and our families, and how to continue to run our businesses and support the learning of our people.

The landscape of the workplace is forever changed. Hybrid work is now a reality, despite some employers attempting to bring their teams back into the office – with varying degrees of success \*cough\* Elon Musk \*cough\*. Employees, however, are embracing greater workplace flexibility in order to balance their working and personal lives in new and more fulfilling ways.

From an organisational learning perspective, leaders have recognised that digital is the future and digitally-supported training offers many benefits in terms of costs, flexibility, consistency and reusability... in addition to business and learning continuity.

Learning teams have now begun to consolidate their online and onsite training calendars, with a new digital blend of learning deliverables ensuring continuity for employees who may be stuck in their homes at a moment's notice.

As a new financial year begins, learning teams may well be thinking – where do I invest my budget to provide greater “learning certainty” and what tools, systems, strategies and platforms will help to ensure this?

Enter the concept of Wayfinding. Part science, part intuition, part extrapolation of current state - to visualise a direction and a path through a set of potentially unknown obstacles in our path.

***"Wayfinding is described as the process or activity of ascertaining one's position and planning a route and following it to one's destination" (Oxford dictionary)***

We love this definition at BSI, as it speaks to understanding where we are (and clearly defining our current state) before moving forward.

Wayfinding speaks to the idea that we might need to use a range of sources, our experience of having been somewhere before, and our intuition, to guide ourselves to a new destination in learning. And whilst it may at odds with the way we are trained to think in business, trusting in some of our deepest instincts as learning professionals; using the data we have to validate our decision-making; and adjusting our course as we make our way on this journey are all skills we believe learning teams of the future will need to invest in.

**So what are the skills of wayfinding? Wayfinding is like being an explorer who:**

### **1. Triangulates to establish their position**

When explorers get lost, they climb to the highest vantage point, and determine their current location based on the position of multiple other distant known points. In leadership,

sometimes determining your next step into unknown territory is easier when you first get a fresh perspective by taking stock of what you *do* know.

As a leader, you can identify new opportunities for growth by evaluating and building on your existing business strengths.

## **2. Looks Up To The Stars And Imagines The Future**

Sometimes trying to lead a team is like trying to find your way in a deep forest with many unmarked paths. There's so much ambiguity, and it's hard to get a sense of which way to go. But if we can look up more broadly to our higher visions and goals and tap into our values and sense of purpose, we can gain greater perspective that can guide steps in the right direction.

We could just wander aimlessly, but as Canadian author Brian Tracey, says, "the future belongs to the risk-takers, not the comfort-seekers". It's important to take those steps, even if we're not totally clear on the path or even the destination.

## **3. Finds Water In The Desert**

In every culture, water is a symbol for life and feeling. To find water in the desert in our lives means metaphorically 'digging deep' down into ourselves to search for our inner sense of purpose and creativity. This is essential work, because, just as all living things need water, having access to our inner purpose is the source of our energy to progress, achieve and create new things in the world.

An explorer who's skilled at finding water in the desert is hyper aware of the tiny outwards signs of life that indicate hidden potential- it might be as small as a single tiny plant peeking through the parched earth. Then they dig down and down, until they reach the source.

As leader of people, this involves observing employees and understanding what makes them 'tick' – finding out what motivates them, what they enjoy and what really gets their creative juices flowing.

Reaping the rewards of this requires providing multiple opportunities for them to shine and bring their potential to light.

## **4. Course Corrects As They Move Forward**

An explorer knows that not every path that's taken is the right one. There's no point in despairing when we get to a dead end; re-evaluating, back-tracking and altering direction are just part of the process.

Learning leaders need to use an Agile approach to the design and development of learning solutions. When enough time– and budget – are allowed for prototyping new designs and learning concepts, the results better meet the needs of learners.

Explorers also keep a close eye on the weather, know how to respond to hostile conditions and are prepared to change course or take shelter as required. In the same way, leaders need to be abreast of changes in the economic, political and social climates to anticipate events that may impact upon their plans.

Learning leaders need to monitor a range of areas that impact upon their team, including changes in legislative requirements and broader organisational strategy.

## 5. Map Their Experience

Explorers record fieldnotes and make maps of their route so that others can follow.

Workplace documentation of innovations and new initiatives, and disseminating lessons learnt across the organisation, is essential to enabling organisation-wide innovation and change.

## 6. Ensures The Health And Motivation Of Crew For The Journey Ahead

Explorers bring others along with them on the journey, making sure no-one is left behind and everyone stays strong for the duration. Each person brings their strengths and talents to the group, and individuals will vary their contributions during different stages of the journey.

In organisations, good leaders understand the unique contributions that individuals bring to their work team, recognising that diversity is strength and that everyone will struggle at some point (including themselves). Flexible work arrangements and organisational policies that encourage workplace equity help make the workplace more diverse.

### Some Two Final Questions To Ponder:

- Which Wayfinding skill is more relevant to you in your work right now, and why?
- How could you inspire others to adopt a Wayfinding attitude in their work?

### About The Author



Simon Dewar is Managing Director of [BSI Digital Learning](#), an award winning digitally focused learning consultancy focused on blended, digital and eLearning for a wide range of private and public sector clients.

Simon was a speaker at CLEAA's [2022 Annual Conference](#).

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