

>> From the Defense Acquisition University, this is The Learning Circle.

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>> This the learning circle. I'm Anthony Rotolo and our guest today is Doctor Allison Rossett, long time professor at San Diego State University, now retired, and the author of a number of important books on learning and training development. We're excited to have her with us on this, our inaugural episode. Doctor Rossett, welcome.

>> Hi, I am happy to be here. Very happy in fact.

>> Well thank you so much. We're honored to have you on for this, our first episode. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about trends. So, we're recording this episode at the start of 2016 and I don't know about you, I'm still forming the habit of writing those numbers. But, we're reminded at the turn of the year that the only constant is change, and that's true of our industry which lies at this intersection of learning, and technology, and design. Now of course, the tech and the tools are an ever moving target. But with learning, isn't it pretty much the same thing all the time? How are things different today than they were, say, two or five years ago? Learning is learning right?

>> I think that's a far statement, learning is learning. Yeah, sure, it's true that how we learn, it's pretty stable. Humans you know. What do we learn? We learn through great examples, we learn through practice, we learn through feedback. Yeah, that, how we learn, but the business of learning, the enterprise of learning, the kind of things that are influencing what goes on at a place like DAU, that's not the same. It's not the same as it was two, or five, or ten years ago, and let me say a few reason I think. First thing, is that organizations now have become ever more committed to universal standardized development experiences. They are. Executives are beginning to expect, expect this. They expect us, in a learning enterprise, to deliver 7/24 learning support and information perhaps even communities expect it. And individuals seek and even demand everything, when they want it, where they want it, even sometimes personalized for their needs, achievements, and aspirations. Another major change and this affects us, there's no doubt about it. Is that there are new habits of cost avoidance. I'll just say a few words. KHAN, k-h-a-n, Khan, Salman Khan, mooks and webinars, let's just take those things. The Khan academy, mooks and webinars. Their influence on everybody is the same thing. Learning should be free, or very, very, very inexpensive. Wow! That affects us, you know? I guess, two other major things make things different. In the enterprise what is the context and what is expected of us. The third is accountability. Every study suggests that work place learning is still doing most of its measurement as, are you satisfied? What the old Kirkpatrick level 1, not contributions to real meaningful strategic outcomes. What proof is there that investments and learning are delivering value commensurate with cost? What proof? And so, that's the third. And the fourth big influence, I believe, of course it technology. But not just technology for delivery, that's obvious, and of course of great interest. But

also, technology that track engagement, technology to personalize, technology to enable communication, and sharing, and social networks. So, yeah, it's a new world for learning. It isn't the same, no it isn't.

>> Yeah, it really has changed. I think I hear, embedded in that last remark, the idea of big data. I was just wondering if you could speak to that briefly.

>> Sure. We've always gone out, to some extent, collected little data. What do you need? What do you want? But, when we talk about big data, we're talking about the data that, in many cases, already exists in the organization and how can we use it to tease out lessons about who is successful, why they are successful, what they need, where they make errors, and to use the data already resonant in our organization for pictures of opportunities, and of course pain points.

>> As I've been learning about big data, we realize we can track just myriad points of data, just mind boggling numbers of data that multiply upon themselves. And I wonder if the learning industry is caught up to that yet? Do you see that type of intensive data gathering happening yet, in the average organization?

>> No, not in work place learning enterprises. I'm seeing it more now in K12 and higher education. But, not yet in work place learning. But it's coming. Incoming.

>> It is.

>> Slowly, slowly. And maybe KU will be one of those places that does it.

>> Yeah, it's remarkable. On the computer we can track everything. Everything from [inaudible] and habits, and all that type of data, to how people are consuming things. So, yes, this is a remarkable development. So, you've mentioned about the change, but how is learning changing? Where do learning leaders want to go with their organizations?

>> Yeah, I've actually done some study on this, so let me talk about some of the major trends that I see occurring. And this first one is, is, I think, maybe a little different, and that is that the learning organization is taking – Well, being asked, is being looked to for more intentional contributions to the culture. That learning and continuous improvement will now be embedded in the culture and that that will be a significant manifestation of the culture of the organization. You can be a person in your difficult, political, changing, regulated environment, without continuously improving, the people who do the work, both the military and civilians. So, a roll in culture. That's enormous. So, I'd say that's a key trend, and I guess another piece of the culture side is that the line and learning enterprise become really, truly, partners to make learning and knowledge sharing happen. I mean, that's a nice sense, but it's a critical reality. And, when I work in organizations, and I do, you know, all over the world, when they are successful, when the learning enterprise is successful, it is because they are really, truly, devoted partners to the line in many ways. So,

other things that I think are happening. You mentioned it before, but data are collected and are used to focus, tailor, and improve programs. To focus, tailor, and improve programs, and to report on what's happening, what's working, what difference is being made, we need to be on the dashboards. Another thing, and I've been talking about this for 20 years, maybe longer, solutions that we deliver go beyond the classroom to where people work. You know, people in your world, in the DAU world, are everywhere, they're everywhere in the world. We absolutely need to deliver to them, where they are, when they need it, and in smaller, of course, bites. Another piece of the practice that I think is important is the constant striving to be better at the work, and I'll talk about that a little bit later. But, our world is changing so fast, you can't be the learning professional, the learning and performance professional that you were in 1988, or 1992, or 1998, when you got your degree, no matter how high that degree was. More aspirations and more trends, but I think we are hard on their heels. More digital, more mobile. Who doesn't want it, when they want it, where they want it, and DAU people want it when they want it. [inaudible] A recent ATD study found that instructor lead training is still number one, 70% of what is delivered. Do you believe it? I believe that change is on the horizon. It will be more digital, more mobile, smaller in size, so the commitment in time is smaller, but targeted to what it is that needs to be done, and hopefully intelligently crafted. Some of it to memory, so practice over time and space, but some of it just to reference and performance support. And you know, that's one of my interests and has been for years. The book that I wrote on job aids and performance support, and my earliest book back in the, oh gosh, it got to be early 90s called The Handbook of Job Aids. I've always been interested in that mixture of what we need to know in our mind, heart, and belly, by heart, and what is it we can reach for at the moment of need, and I think we've got to be ever more mindful of that. More individualized, self-directed, and technology enabled. And when I asked – And Jim Marshall and I did a study that was actually on the front page of the ATD journal, it was ASTD journal then, a couple years ago. And we asked hundreds of learning professionals what they're doing now and what they're top aspirations were. And their top aspiration was individualization and personalization. In other words, being better at delivering two people, what it is they need in particular? I mean, that's a really big deal. So, I guess those, I think, are the main things coming to us that we're talking about, more personalization, more individualization, more technology enabling, and we're talking about learning and reference assets. Learning and reference assets, performance support assets, job aide assets, check list assets, things that help people be better at the work in small sizes targeted to the problem they're trying to solve.

>> Do you see a lot of that personalization as an automated adaptive function that technology takes care of?

[ Laughter ]

>> Well, eventually technology will aid and abet it, but it needs a human brain

to figure out, first of all, what do we mean by goodness? If we're talking about completing tasks, acquiring something, doing quality control, vetting a vendor, retirement specialist, find a project with retirement specialists. We had to be clear about what it is that retirement specialists knew at the most basic level, all the way up to very complicated and complex retirement problems, where people were retiring in foreign lands after divorces, you know really complicated. And, so somebody's got to be clear about what goodness looks like. They have to create assessments and self-assessments that enable people to look at themselves in light of those standards and then they have to produce assets, learning and reference assets. Learning and reference assets that are keyed to those deficits that will emerge, those needs that will emerge. So, yeah, technology has role, it's critical. It's going to serve up those assessments. It's going to present those standards. It's going to serve up the assets that match, but it's a human brain that's going to make this happen.

>> You mentioned a couple of times about duration and shorter durations, targeted materials. Do you see that as merely the growing up of the Sesame Street generation now distracted by technology and notifications going off, or are you speaking to just getting more efficient and targeted? I'm just wondering what factors go in to that.

>> I think both. I think both. I'm not the Sesame Street generation.

>> I am.

>> Well, I'm not. But, I want what I want when I want it, and I want it in a tasty morsel, that enables me to do what I need to do. I'm doing something new next week. I'm going to the Sundance Film Festival and, you know, there's a lot involved in this. First of all, I live in San Diego, so there's all this concern about the weather and what kind of things I need to protect myself. In fact, I'm writing right down that I have to get those wool socks, and I literally went online to look at what kind of things one needs in this kind of weather. You'd think I hadn't grown up in the east, which of course I had, but it's amazing how much you forget and I don't have most of those things. So, I mean, and then how did I find out about the films? And, I found an app, and there's certain things that the app delivers and there are certain things I've been using a coach for. We have several people we know who've been to Sundance and they're coaching us. I mean, it's not a small matter. I don't want a dissertation on this history of film and I don't even want a dissertation on the history of Sundance Film Festival. I want to know what I want, when I'm working on that particular thing.

>> Yes.

>> And, so, I'm not Sesame Street.

>> No.

>> But, I'm still amazed. I had grad students sit in classes for 30 plus, plus years, and those classes were two hours and 20 minutes, 30 minutes. I don't

know how they endured it. I mean, I managed to endure it because I was, you know, in to it but, wow! How did we do that? And, of course, one of the ways that I did it was I broke it in to pieces and parts, and we worked in one thing, and then we worked on another. You know, but, it was an awful lot, and who the heck can remember it? There's that too, the issue of transfer.

>> It's true. I've puzzled over this because I see some counter intuitive trends where, you know, in publishing a lot of novels and books are actually getting longer. Movies, we have a lot of movies that are two hours, three hours, and it's just interesting to see what kinds of material people will give their attention span to, and that's the key. It's that scarce commodity of attention, and so, on the one hand we don't want to underestimate learners and at the same time we want to use their time very well. And I suppose there's a different, also, between the extrinsic and the intrinsic need to learn these things as a factor. But, I see those two a little tension there that I haven't quite resolved in my own mind.

>> You know what, I actually think that's a really good point you made. Because I am reading longer and longer novels, I am now in a quadrilogy by Elena Ferrante, it's an Italian author, translated in to English of course, and I'm on the second book. I mean, this thing goes on, and on, and I'm loving it. This is, I really like it. I like the length of it and you're right, I'm going to go to Sundance example I used before, and I'm going to go there and sit in two hour, two and a half hour films, no problem.

>> Yeah.

>> No problem. So, but let's talk about what it is that, you know, the kinds of performance DAU is talking about, and I don't need to remember everything about the Ferrante novels, or the films I see at Sundance, I don't. Best not because I don't remember much. But you need a certain level of performance from you DAU people.

>> Yes.

>> They can't sort of remember the jest and then wing it. So, not only do they need to learn in small bites, they need to be able to refer to a check list that helps them handle it well, to a certain standard. My knowledge of those films are the Ferrante novels. Let's be honest, not to a certain standard.

>> Yes.

>> [inaudible] different story, I think. But, you have a point, is an interesting one and maybe it's like everything else, the things in the middle are falling away. We're wanting longer stories of our own discretion that we've chosen. But, we're wanting shorter morsels of learning in reference.

>> Yeah, I thought about this because you may recall that article that came out, 'Is Google Making Us Stupid and –

>> Yes, I remember it and used it with my grad student's way back when, yeah.

>> And this concern for degradation of attention span, can we sit through long form reading? But I read that and I actually got worried and I'm thinking, I better sit down with a, you know, a Dostoevsky novel or something, and just train my brain to do that type of discipline. So, yeah, based on something you said a little bit earlier, I remember you gave a talk about five years ago, I'm harpooning back to your mention of performance support, and I'm thinking about the role of mobile. You gave a wonderful talk at George Mason and you told about how you've tried and failed to learn about wine, and you've taken wine courses.

>> Ah, yes.

>> But, but, nothing succeeded like having that personal side kick of a wine app. I just wonder if you could touch on that briefly.

>> Yeah, that's absolutely true. I am, you know, I'm good at drinking it, but not so good at recommending it, or selecting it. But, I'm much, much better since I got the app. But, let's also recognize that I had taken the half day course, I had looked at some students, my students had built some online modules on wine. Before I'd gone to the – And I'd gone out with many friends who knew a lot more than I did, so I'd had some coaching. But, it's the app that enables me to handle the task in the context of the store. So, when I – Or in the context of the store plus whatever it is that I'm serving. So, I want a wine to match the food, sort of, kind of. So, I had a knowledge base. You know, I know white, and red, and rosa. I know that rosa is on the upswing, I know some things. I have some scaffolding, then I use an app. I don't know if I were a total wine virgin, come to San Diego from Mars, if an app would be all that helpful to me. So, again, it's that combination of things. I can't – the app that the Army captions built for Iraq, I think it was Iraq, maybe it was Afghanistan, it doesn't really matter. I don't think I could use their app. I don't have any scaffolding. So, it's very often it's a marriage and on my website, Allison Rossett.com, I have an article I wrote about blending performance support and learning. That might be worth taking a look at. It's easy to find Allison Rossett.com and just throw in – You'll see a word cloud on the right and you can just, you know, pick performance support and it will take you to some things that I've written about it.

>> Excellent, I will do that. I have a final question for you, Doctor Rossett. We spoke about the trends and this amazing time of change, and where leaders want to go with their organizations. What barriers stand in the way of change and reform, and what can we do about it?

>> Yeah, fair question. Well, I'm going to use some data that I saw from, I think it was the Center For Training Associates, but also my own experiences on this. Center for Training Associates, I think, asked CLOs, and I of course talk too many, many of them, they're all old buddies. So, what do I think? I'm going

to say that the – I’m going to put it on us. I’m going to put it on workplace learning professionals. You could say we lack technology but, you know, I’m going to use a – I did a government study. Now, this has got to be six or seven years ago, for a government agency that I won’t name, but, I mean, with an end of more than 3,000 anonymous, and the learning professionals had said to me, “We can’t,” this is now a few years back. “We can’t do it because we don’t have the technology.” So, we asked the line and the line was all over the world for this organization. It was not DAU. And so, we asked them. Overwhelmingly they were reported, they had access to the technology they needed, and this was six or seven years ago. So, it’s not the technology. I’m going to put it on us and say that, first thing is, we lack sufficient proof of results to garner the support that would make us the advocates and partners in the line that we need to go forward with some of these reforms and changes. So that’s one thing. Next thing, I think we lack a vision, a dream, a plan, for pilots that will attract those partners and advocates in the line, to work on meaningful problems in these ways. Do you know their aspirations? Do you know where the blood is on the floor where they have pain points, what wakes them up at night, so that you can come to them with an idea for a pilot that won’t cost everything, but will help them maybe do some less training, more combination of training and performance support, maybe some use of online coaching, etcetera, etcetera? I think to some extent people always say, “We can’t do it, we don’t have time.” Well, to me, the lack of time is really a lack of our skills and knowledge, maybe a little lack of our courage. We have a preference for the familiar. I have a preference for the familiar. We are human for sure. But to say we’re human and thus we prefer the familiar, certainty, you know, our brains, they like certainty, they like the familiar, they like to know how it’s going to come out, and this is risky. This is risky business, especially if we actually measure it. So, we are human for sure, but that’s just not a good enough excuse. So, I guess, what I would say is, I encourage you to study up on these possibilities. To commit yourself to working on how could social networks, how make a difference at DAU, how could more critical inquiry built in to the curriculum, how can you change those classes to encourage more transfer in to the field, how can you provide more materials to which they will reach at the moment of need, how can you personalize and individualize? And that’s a big project, that’s not a small project. How can you take advantage of their digital and mobile devices? Either the ones you’ve given them, or their own. I guess I just leave you and say, “What are you going to do next?” Be yourself, be your own development, and then, for the work force.

>> That’s wonderful advice. I think just comes under the heading of resistance, like you said, being comfortable with the familiar, that’s the devil we know. And many organizations are kind of stuck in their circa 90s to 2000’s e-learning model, and we’ve been talking about mobile in many things for a long time, but, it takes a while to get traction. And I think this industry is a little bit of a lagging indicator of where technology is anyway. There is that time to digest, how will we do mobile, how will we do social, how will we do all these other things? So this is very valuable, and I thank you though, for coming on with us

Doctor Rossett. Do you have any closing thoughts?

>> No, just because I serve on the board of visitors for DAU, I know how important the work is and how devoted the leadership is, and yet, that there's much, much, much more to do.

>> There is, and we thank you for having this conversation with us.

>> Pleasure.

>> For our listeners. Check out Doctor Rossett's books that were mentioned and her website, [AllisonRossett.com](http://AllisonRossett.com). Some wonderful articles there. Thank you again Doctor Rossett.

>> Pleasure. Take care everybody.

>> Take care. Bye now.

>> Bye, bye.

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