#WS 140

[00:00:00] **Intro:** Hello, and welcome to Workplace Stories, the podcast where human capital experts share their real-world experiences and insights. Hosted by RedThread Research, Workplace Stories surfaces the latest industry trends, innovative talent strategies, and best practices for success. Tune in for practical advice on how to best transform your workplace

[00:00:22] **Dani Johnson:** Hey, welcome to Workplace Stories.

[00:00:24] **Dani Johnson:** My name is Dani Johnson.

[00:00:25] **Stacia Garr:** And I'm Stacia Garr.

[00:00:27] **Dani Johnson:** And today we had the opportunity to talk to Jackie Barefield, who's the head of Future Capabilities and Operations at BAT. It was a really interesting discussion. Stacia, what stood out to you?

[00:00:37] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah. So we talked a lot about what the future L&D function should look like, which aligns with a bunch of research you're doing right now.

[00:00:46] **Stacia Garr:** But she said a few things that I think just generally apply to leaders in organizations, whether they're leading L&D right now or some other part. One of them was, we asked her kind of what her principles of leadership were, basically, and she said three things that actually remind me, harken back to my business school days at UC Berkeley.

[00:01:08] **Stacia Garr:** One was about having humility, and those, the ability to accept that you don't know all the answers, that you need to be open to hearing others. That was one. The second was going beyond yourself in terms of understanding what others need and being responsive to that. And then a third was around questioning the status quo, at least that's what we called it at Berkeley.

[00:01:36] **Stacia Garr:** So always asking questions, "Why are we doing this? What is the outcome that we're trying to drive towards?" And she talked about it in an L&D context, but it applies to everyone who's doing work right now. The other area was around unlearning. We spent a lot of time talking about, like, how do you think about what you don't need to carry forward, what you let go, and her perspectives on that, I thought...

[00:01:58] **Stacia Garr:** I'll let folks listen, but were, were really interesting. And then the final thing was I think a really good dose of just remember reality, like the world we all exist in, and that is you can ask all the questions, you can push back, and then sometimes a leader comes in and they're just not in a place to hear it, and you just do the thing they ask you to do.

[00:02:17] **Stacia Garr:** And I just really appreciated that honesty.

[00:02:20] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah. Plus one to all the things that you said. One of the reasons that I love Jackie is because she is a business person first and an L&D person second. You know what I mean? And, and it came clear, like the things that you mentioned are just good, strong leadership capabilities that she mentioned.

[00:02:34] **Dani Johnson:** A couple of other things that stood out to me a little bit is, we talked a little bit about the impact on how people are developing, and when she was talking about it, she wasn't necessarily talking about new fancy things that we can use to help people learn online. It was literally like L&D is changing.

[00:02:48] **Dani Johnson:** There is a different vision for what L&D needs to be in the future, which I thought was really interesting. The other thing that really stood out to me is she mentioned skills, kind of, she hit it from the side, so it wasn't a head-on thing, but she was talking about skills and the importance of understanding and measuring how people are developing so that you can make better decisions about where you put your money and where you put your resources and what you focus on and all of those types of things.

[00:03:11] **Dani Johnson:** It's interesting in the context of the acquisitions that have happened recently of some of these firms that deal specifically with skills and the importance of skills and that skills data to just life as we know it in HR moving forward. I thought that was super interesting. And then maybe just to reiterate, the idea of leadership humility was interesting to me.

[00:03:30] **Dani Johnson:** She talked a lot about how she maintains humility, even though she's got no one telling her what to do, and nobody knows what to do right now because of AI. She went through some of the steps that she takes in order to make sure that she's not missing anything or doubling down on things that aren't the way everybody else's reality.

[00:03:45] **Dani Johnson:** Fantastic discussion. We love Jackie. Please listen to it, share it with your friends and, and people that might be interested in it. If you

really, really like it, subscribe, and if you really, really, really like it, join us at RedThreadResearch.com. We'd love to have you as part of our community.

[00:04:08] **Dani Johnson:** Hey, welcome to Workplace Stories, Jackie.

[00:04:10] **Jackie Barefield:** Hi, Dani. Thank you very much for inviting me.

[00:04:13] **Dani Johnson:** We're super excited to talk to you today. You and I met in person in April when you were on a panel at, uh, Learning Technologies in London, where we talked a little bit about how learning is changing and how technology is playing a role in that.

[00:04:26] **Dani Johnson:** Maybe to kick off, you could give us a little bit of information about yourself and the company that you're serving right now.

[00:04:31] **Jackie Barefield:** Sure, yeah. So I live and work in London currently, although I've been fortunate enough to travel all over the world with my job. But yeah, here I am in London. I'm the head of future capabilities for operations at BAT, which is British American Tobacco.

[00:04:47] **Jackie Barefield:** I spent the first part of my career working in smaller companies, tech startups, hyper growth organizations, and then the second half of my career I've been with large corporates, and I joined BAT about two years ago.

[00:05:00] **Dani Johnson:** Very cool. What's the biggest difference between working for a big organization versus some of those smaller tech, tech startups?

[00:05:06] **Jackie Barefield:** Probably speed, I think, and agility. Yeah. And it's understandable. There's so many moving parts in a huge organization that you have to consider the impact of what's happening here with everything else, and of course you do that in a smaller organization, but there aren't so many moving parts. But it's much easier,

[00:05:21] **Dani Johnson:** yeah.

[00:05:22] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah. Leaning over to your neighbor and saying, "Hey, do you mind if we..."

[00:05:24] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:05:26] **Stacia Garr:** Well, Jackie, this is our first time meeting, and I'm so glad that we're getting to do this together. I, plus everybody else, would love to know why should people listen to you?

[00:05:35] **Jackie Barefield:** Hmm. So this is a tricky question for a Brit, 'cause we're not really, um- We're not very good at saying why people should listen to us.

[00:05:42] **Jackie Barefield:** But I guess, you know, what I can bring here is that because my career has spanned so, well, so many years for a start, but so many different business types and sizes and shapes, plus many different industries, and I think that's probably... It's not unique, but it's unusual, and I can bring that lived experience of L&D or capabilities.

[00:06:06] **Jackie Barefield:** I can tell them about my wins and about my mistakes as well. So yeah, I think that if people want to listen to me, then that's wonderful and I'm very happy to share my opinions.

[00:06:16] **Dani Johnson:** Uh, yes. If there was one thing that was very clear to me when we met is you are not afraid of opinions and- No. ... um, disagreeing with folks.

[00:06:22] **Dani Johnson:** It was one of my favorite things about you. Maybe we start kind of broad and then narrow in on BAT right now, but how do you see L&D changing, learning and development changing, in most organizations or as a function?

[00:06:35] **Jackie Barefield:** So obviously the advances in AI are a profound or will be a profound transformation, and that is something that's the here and now, isn't it?

[00:06:44] **Jackie Barefield:** But it's been evolving for many, many years. You know, we've moved away from this sort of cost center and this sort of this, this part of the organization that... I don't know, people had, I think, a pretty low opinion actually of L&D when I first started in this world, and we've grown and we've evolved and we've, we've become a value add part of the organization, and that sort of journey continues.

[00:07:10] **Jackie Barefield:** But I think the transformation that will come with AI It is just beyond anything that we have ever thought of, and I'm excited about that. Yeah.

[00:07:18] **Dani Johnson:** So am I, and I'm excited to get into it with you a little bit. We just barely... I'm in the final throes of writing a paper on L&D and AI, which I'll talk about in a little bit in just a second, but I'm curious about your title.

[00:07:29] **Dani Johnson:** You're the head of future capabilities and operations at BAT. You're not head of L&D. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:07:36] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah, and actually, I really love that in the title because it really, it sets the expectations when you're talking to people. It helps me to kind of separate the BAU from the looking forward.

[00:07:49] **Jackie Barefield:** So it's really helpful to, you know, it's helpful to say we look at future capabilities, but it, to have it in your title is, you know , it actually makes quite a difference. So we're constantly, you know, we're looking forward. We may not be looking 5, 10 years into the future. Who can do that? But we're constantly saying, "Well, have we got what we need?

[00:08:06] **Jackie Barefield:** What will we need next? How can we get there in the best possible way?" That might be moving people around or it might be building new capabilities. But yes, it's that sort of future focused view which you absolutely have to have, and I find it super helpful and enjoyable as well to have it in my title.

[00:08:24] **Stacia Garr:** So I want to build on that because when you say that L&D needs to kind of look forward or look beyond itself as it is now, what does that mean for you? Like, what is this future vision of what it should be, and how does that compare to where you all are currently?

[00:08:42] **Jackie Barefield:** Great question. Well, I think when I refer to L&D looking beyond itself- Typically what I mean is to look outside of the world that we live in, this bubble that we live in, you know, and explore more what you can learn from other disciplines, other industries, other walks of life.

[00:09:00] **Jackie Barefield:** You know, i- if you observe and you become curious about that, I grow massively from going to HR events, whether it's a seminar or a conference or a webinar or whatever, that- that's how I've achieved the best growth in my chosen field. Go to a project management conference or a marketing event or seminar and just sit there and think about how is what they're doing, how could what they're doing relate to what I need to do?

[00:09:28] **Jackie Barefield:** And if you open yourself up to those worlds, looking beyond the bubble that you're in today, I think, y- you know, there's so many things that you can learn, and then bring them back, reuse them, recycle them, apply them to what you do, and get some great results.

[00:09:41] **Stacia Garr:** Is that something that you see currently with the team, or is that something that you all have developed recently?

[00:09:47] **Stacia Garr:** Kind of where are you in the evolution of making that true for your current team right now?

[00:09:52] **Jackie Barefield:** It's true for some and not others, you know, as you can imagine. And I think that I'm in a wonderful position at the moment. BAT is a great organization to work for. It's got people who are open to new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things.

[00:10:07] **Jackie Barefield:** I mean, that's obviously not everybody, but on the whole, that's what I find at BAT, and, and as an organization, they're open to new ideas. But they don't come out of thin air, do they? You know, you've got to make that happen to a certain extent. You've got to go out and find those nuggets of ideas and seeds and then help them to grow.

[00:10:24] **Jackie Barefield:** So I would say that I'm in a great place to be able to do that, and I'm really grateful for that. I've worked in organizations where it's not been quite so progressive, and that's been a struggle for me.

[00:10:35] **Dani Johnson:** In the research that we're just completing right now about L&D and AI, one of the things that struck me is the importance of leadership for L&D in this particular juncture, juncture.

[00:10:46] **Dani Johnson:** You mentioned within your organization you have some that are thinking this way automatically and some that are not. It was fascinating to me, and this is biased, because we went after the companies that we knew were doing really interesting things. We weren't just catching, you know, a random 20 organization- or 40 organizations to figure out what they were doing.

[00:11:02] **Dani Johnson:** But- I was fascinated and quite frankly, really surprised at the sort of forward-thinkingness that we saw of organizations. It's not like they're making small incremental changes, it's that they're radically changing how they're thinking about things. You know what I mean? Like, we had organizations say, "Yeah, we're building a mind hive for L&D, and

everything goes into this mind hive, and then we're able to build things so that everything sort of stays solid."

[00:11:26] **Dani Johnson:** We had people talking about building themselves, not being able to get approval for the tools that they want or not seeing the value in the tools that are out there, and so instead they've decided to upskill their team and build for themselves. I heard GitHub more with this particular group of L&D leaders than I've ever heard, because they're starting to think radically different about not just how they can do it, but even the things that they're doing.

[00:11:50] **Dani Johnson:** I'm curious from your standpoint, clearly you are thinking differently about L&D and what it can do in the organization or what it should be doing. What kind of gave you the sense that things were changing, that the traditional way of thinking about L&D was no longer viable?

[00:12:06] **Jackie Barefield:** I think that that's happened many, many times over the years, right?

[00:12:10] **Jackie Barefield:** And it depends on your definition of traditional. So, you know, having been doing this for nearly 30 years, I've seen it evolve and I've seen it, sometimes there's been a bit of a revolution. You know, that when the internet first sort of came out and people started learning through those means, that was a bit of a revolution.

[00:12:27] **Jackie Barefield:** You know, that changed things quite a lot. L&D didn't really keep up with that. You know, we kept working with our old methods and our old formats, and then people were going, "Well, actually, I'd rather go and Google it," or, "I'd rather go and watch something on YouTube." So we potentially didn't keep up with that, and I don't see that now.

[00:12:46] **Jackie Barefield:** I see it may be situation or may be because of where I am and the people I'm surrounded by versus the ones where I was before, but I just see people so excited about the things that they can do. And as you say, they're not just being excited about it, they're making it happen. And I think there's probably something to be said for the fact that we have the tools now and we are empowered now.

[00:13:07] **Jackie Barefield:** You know, there was a time where if you wanted something to be built, something techy to be built, you have to go and speak to a coder or a specialist in that area, and now we've got the ability and the tools to do that ourselves, and I love the fact that people are taking advantage of that and

actually experimenting, you know, trying things out, and I see that around me a lot.

[00:13:27] **Jackie Barefield:** You know, at BAT I see and hear about AI or applications of AI all the time, all the time, all the time, and my only Concern, I suppose, is how can I possibly see all of these things at the same time and be aware of them all and, you know, make sure that we've got some joined up thinking going on there, that we kind of don't keep reinventing the wheel, and we have 24 versions of the same thing.

[00:13:52] **Jackie Barefield:** But, you know, the alternative is to have nobody trying anything, and we just stick to our old ways. I think the current situation is better than the alternative, but it's still, you know, it's just growing so madly, isn't it?

[00:14:04] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah. How do you keep it from being chaotic? How do you decide where AI is applicable and where it's not, and wrangle all this stuff that's happening?

[00:14:11] **Dani Johnson:** Because you talked about this for you, we're seeing it in organizations at large, right? So much is going on, so much is changing all the time. How are you wrangling it?

[00:14:20] **Jackie Barefield:** I don't know that I am, to be honest. I think that possibly some of those decisions are potentially out of my scope. We've got a strong IT team.

[00:14:33] **Jackie Barefield:** We've got the ethics and governance around AI and that sort of thing. So in terms of making sure that we are making good decisions in terms of data privacy and that sort of thing, then I trust those people to have made and will continue to make good decisions in that area. On a more day-to-day basis, I think we're just constantly...

[00:14:52] **Jackie Barefield:** Or sorry, I can only speak for myself really, is to, I can spot this situation where there's so much going on that I'm having difficulty, you know, making a full picture of it. So then I ask myself, "How can I mitigate that?" You know, what can I put in place that helps us to have better visibility? You know, can we share some real stories?

[00:15:13] **Jackie Barefield:** Can we bring people together with some really interesting demos of what they've been doing, and create an environment where people can be more aware? Yes, I feel like it is a little bit of a knee-jerk reaction.

You know, when I see something I'm like, "Okay, let's put something in place to help that." And, "Oh, God, there's something going on."

[00:15:30] **Jackie Barefield:** I guess spinning plates, putting fires out, like those are the analogies that come to mind, which doesn't make me sound very organized, but it's a product of the environment.

[00:15:40] **Stacia Garr:** It actually ties into something that I feel like I'm hearing a lot now, which is a mindset shift around control, right? I feel like maybe part of the reason, you mentioned the shift to the internet and how it kept the same old methods, and I think my perspective is that some of that was a control thing.

[00:15:57] **Stacia Garr:** If we keep doing things the same way, we're controlling or keeping stable that variable as it were, and that may have worked in the late '90s or early 2000s, but we are in just a fundamentally different world that requires a different mindset. Around control is one thing, around outcomes that we're looking towards is another.

[00:16:19] **Stacia Garr:** But I would love to hear from you as you think about managing all these plates, spinning plates and chaos. Are there aspects of your mindset that have shifted in terms of how you think about your role as, you know, the head of all of this learning and capability development that's happening, that a mindset shift that has to happen now that we're in this kind of AI-enabled age?

[00:16:42] **Jackie Barefield:** I do believe that we need to reinvent ourselves and probably continue to reinvent ourselves regularly, and the secret of that really is being able to let go of these old personas or these old control mechanisms that you used, you know? When you make the shift from, for example, reporting on your, you know, engagement metrics, we trained this many people, so many people watched the video, we got a 4.5 out of 5 satisfaction.

[00:17:10] **Jackie Barefield:** This isn't a new story, you know. I've been bleating on about this for 20 years. But, you know, when people make that mindset shift, that is not a measure of success Then they begin to start to take control of other things, right? So I think that there is a need for us to keep reinventing ourselves, but also to be open to all these different possible futures.

[00:17:30] **Jackie Barefield:** Not just be open to them, seek them out and bring them into our world. I suppose not everybody is like that. Some people do like that safety and the security that they get from doing the things that they know

they do well. Bit shortsighted, I think, really. It, it's not gonna get you where you need to be.

[00:17:46] **Jackie Barefield:** It-

[00:17:46] **Dani Johnson:** One of the people that we interviewed said, "I spent a litt- I spent quite a bit of time trying to convince a particular L&D team that they shouldn't use a course to teach people how to use AI." Like, that was their mindset, right? And we're like, "We're in a completely different world. Like, let's not, let's not create a course to teach people how to use, use AI."

[00:18:06] **Dani Johnson:** I don't know if you're seeing this too, Jackie, but I am seeing it feels like the shackles are off L&D. Like, L&D has gotten a bad rap for a long time, but a lot of it is just because they're pigeonholed into this thing, and they're told what is learning, and they're told what their sort of circle of influence is.

[00:18:23] **Dani Johnson:** And I have seen more proactivity in the learning space in the last six months than I think I've seen in the entire time that I've been studying this. It feels like people are like, "Oh, I have all these tools. I don't have to worry about approval right now. Nobody knows what I should be doing anyway, and so I'm just gonna go for it.

[00:18:38] **Dani Johnson:** I'm gonna do what I think is best for the organization." Have you seen that as well as you're talking to other leaders?

[00:18:43] **Jackie Barefield:** Yes, you do see it, and I agree, you see it more often. And one of the other sort of yardsticks that I've got is that I've been a judge and chairperson for the Learning Awards, the International Learning Awards for this is my 10th year now, and that's given me a really interesting view or perspective and visibility of how the industry is changing.

[00:19:03] **Jackie Barefield:** So I'm no longer looking at one organization, the one that I'm in. I'm able to see hundreds of organizations and the best in class, you know, the people who are really up there and doing really great stuff. And I have seen that there are organizations out there that are really pushing the envelope. I don't know, I never really understood that analogy, but apparently it means, you know what it means.

[00:19:24] **Jackie Barefield:** But so there will always be organizations out there that are more progressive, and there are others that kind of are a little bit slower. But yeah, I think it goes back, Dani, to the fact that we've got these tools and

these resources at our fingertips now, and we never had them before. We always had to go and ask permission or get funding or find the expert, and with that came business case or a rationale to be able to do it, and that's where we fell off, wasn't it?

[00:19:49] **Jackie Barefield:** We fell off the cliff there and, and never managed to get many of those over the line. But now that people have got those resources and they have... they can bring their own ideas to life, that's what's revolutionary, isn't it? And that's, we're seeing more of those shackles off type changes.

[00:20:03] **Dani Johnson:** In an organization where your title is actually head of future capabilities, not head of L&D, I'm curious about where you see the future of L&D going.

[00:20:13] **Dani Johnson:** I think it's clear to me that We're not gonna be building courses anymore. What is the role of L&D in the larger organization moving forward?

[00:20:21] **Jackie Barefield:** Well, I think in some cases already are, but we need to become more of this, and it's becoming agents and accelerators of change. We should be driving and leading that change rather than supporting the changes that other people want to make.

[00:20:34] **Jackie Barefield:** That's one change. The area that is of particular interest to me is the way that we measure our current state. So we've got these ways of doing this that have done a little bit over the years, but, but essentially they're down to self-assess your proficiency level in this capability, and maybe your manager will validate that or maybe adjust it and so on.

[00:20:57] **Jackie Barefield:** In our e-learning, we have a quiz at the end, and if you pass the quiz, then we okay you've now reached intermediate level or whatever it is. Completions is another one that's used to measure someone's capability level. We've got some more sort of robust areas such as maybe academic and professional qualifications, which is an indicator of someone's abilities, but I feel that that is a huge opportunity.

[00:21:19] **Jackie Barefield:** How can we get better at understanding how somebody applies that learning in the workplace? So I don't have the answer to it yet, but I feel like there's a bright light shining at me and , and it's, you know, a bit like a moth, you know. I'm kind of attracted to it, and I think I want to solve that problem 'cause I think that's huge.

[00:21:37] **Jackie Barefield:** 'Cause if we know where we are, we know where our hotspots are, we know where, where our gaps are, and we also know where we need to go. If we get a good measure of where we are now, then, you know, we suddenly really start to make a difference. The investment is directed to the right place. Effort is directed to the right place.

[00:21:56] **Jackie Barefield:** Measurement's easy. I just feel like that's a bit of a secret sauce in there somewhere

[00:22:01] **Dani Johnson:** So I think it's interesting that you bring this up. Stacia and I have been studying skills for a while, and a couple of years ago we wrote a short paper on assessment, which is what you're talking about. Like, how do you actually assess the skill rather than these stupid ways that we've been doing it in the past?

[00:22:14] **Dani Johnson:** And I think it's telling that in the last three weeks we've seen some fairly significant acquisitions having to do with skills, right? We saw Fuel50 being acquired, we saw Workera being acquired by Pearson, and then just yesterday, Tech Wolf was snatched up by SAP, or will be, if everything goes according to plan.

[00:22:33] **Dani Johnson:** And I think it's interesting that we have been talking about this skills discussion forever, skills, skills, skills, and there was a big discussion about whether it's worth the squeeze, you know, is the juice worth the squeeze? All of that kind of stuff. But what I'm seeing, and I would love Stacia's take on this as well, is it just is.

[00:22:48] **Dani Johnson:** Like, we're not arguing over, over it anymore. This is what needs to happen in order to do some of the things that you just mentioned. Like, we have to learn how to assess skills in real time. We can't... And there are different levels of assessment and different types of assessment and all of that, but the data is gonna be crucial to moving the people where they need to be in

[00:23:05] **Jackie Barefield:** this.

[00:23:05] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah, absolutely. We're on that skills journey at BAT, and it's been an interesting journey so far because when we can talk about skills, we can talk about the concept of a skills-based organization and how it should work, but when you really try to look at where we are now to becoming a skills-based organization, it's been fascinating.

[00:23:23] **Jackie Barefield:** And it's not an easy journey. It's a tricky one, but the opportunities are so vast that you can't afford not to do it really, I don't think.

[00:23:31] **Stacia Garr:** I think the thing that's so exciting about this moment, particularly for learning or for capability development, is the measurement and data opportunity. You mentioned being able to funnel resources to those parts of the organization that matter the most or that need it the most, and I think, you know, that is what is exciting, is the bringing together.

[00:23:52] **Stacia Garr:** It's always confounded me why learning data always kind of sat over here separate from everything else. And I think that is what I'm hearing kind of from my side, is just how powerful bringing those data together is and how the validity of that data, whether it's, you know, through accuracy of assessment or through confidence that we have in the mechanisms by which it was collected, et cetera, how important that validity is to really being able to make this whole AI-enabled workforce come to life.

[00:24:25] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah. I mean, it's the whole talent intelligence bucket, right? In fact, it's bigger than that even. But we need to be careful not to just look at L&D data. We need to look at all of the other areas, the objective setting, performance, you know, approaches, and career planning, and y- you know, that broader set of information that we can get and start bringing that together, 'cause that's really powerful.

[00:24:48] **Jackie Barefield:** But completely agree, it's having that data information and insight is what will transform us. Without it, we'll make some mistakes that we don't need to.

[00:24:57] **Dani Johnson:** Well, maybe let's take a breather right now and do our lightning round. Our lightning round is just an opportunity to get to know you, Jackie, a little bit better on a personal level.

[00:25:04] **Dani Johnson:** I will start with the question: where did you grow up?

[00:25:08] **Jackie Barefield:** Well, I actually grew up in a very small village in Wales in the UK, surrounded by fields and trees and not many buses and not many things for a teenager to do. So it's very different from the life that I live in London.

[00:25:22] **Dani Johnson:** Wow.

[00:25:23] **Stacia Garr:** What is on your bucket list?

[00:25:26] **Jackie Barefield:** Hmm, my bucket list is, I think it seems to be a bit about escapism actually.

[00:25:32] **Stacia Garr:** Back to the fields of Wales?

[00:25:34] **Jackie Barefield:** One of the things that, that I must do is to go to the Great Barrier Reef. Yeah, it might be a common one, but yeah, I have a real desire to do that. That's a must-do. Another one is to have a holiday home in Italy and spend several months a year there.

[00:25:52] **Jackie Barefield:** That's my dream. And then another sort of travel one, I suppose, is to explore South America, 'cause I haven't been over that part of the world. That intrigues and interests me. So yeah, it's all about travel really, isn't it?

[00:26:06] **Dani Johnson:** That's awesome. Well, I've done quite a bit of South America, so when you get ready to go, let me know.

[00:26:10] **Dani Johnson:** Oh, great. I'd be happy to show you.

[00:26:12] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah. Tour guide.

[00:26:13] **Dani Johnson:** Lovely. Final question: What is your superpower?

[00:26:16] **Jackie Barefield:** My superpower, I think, is the ability to walk into a new environment, whether that's... usually it's work. But yeah, walk into a very unusual, unknown environment, quickly make sense of it, and make some assessments about w- what could be challenged and what should be left alone for the moment and so on, and then to reimagine how things could be done.

[00:26:40] **Jackie Barefield:** And I'm able to do that quickly in comparison to other people, and I usually get it pretty right as well. So I think that's my superpower.

[00:26:48] **Dani Johnson:** Just an aside, we probably aren't gonna keep this in, but I'm super curious what your education is, Jackie.

[00:26:52] **Jackie Barefield:** So I left school with not many qualifications, went to college for a couple of years and studied sociology, which was a- an

interesting thing, but it was never something I wanted to do as a career, but it was interesting, so that's what I did there.

[00:27:07] **Jackie Barefield:** And then much later in my life, my career was great. I worked in fantastic organizations, loved the places I worked, had some great, great jobs and did some great things. And then I think it was probably when I got to about maybe my late 30s, it was only at that point that I thought, oh, my academic qualifications are now a bit of a blocker.

[00:27:28] **Jackie Barefield:** I don't feel like I'm getting the opportunities that I potentially could do because of my academic sort of qualifications or lack of. So then I went and did an equivalent of a master's in HR, and that unlocked all sorts of doors for me. But I was able to do that quite quickly and quite, say, easily. It wasn't easy at all.

[00:27:47] **Jackie Barefield:** It was really hard, but it was infinitely easier having got all that experience behind me, that lived experience that I was talking about earlier on. You know, there were topics in there that if they were new to me, it would've taken me a while to get my head around them. But I knew instantly what they were, so that made the journey easier.

[00:28:03] **Jackie Barefield:** So yeah, so that- Okay ... that's.

[00:28:06] **Dani Johnson:** We have a theory that everyone should just get a liberal arts education instead of all these specializations because of the very thing that you said. We, Stacey and I both... I do not have a liberal arts education. I have a, a very specific STEM education. As we have tried to hire people, for example, like, the liberal arts tend to do better because they can make connections between different ideas, which you've talked about through this entire podcast, and people that are sort of like, "Go do this thing," to- have less of the ability to do that, so.

[00:28:34] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah. Interesting. Yeah. I'm a bit passionate about not getting hung up on hiring graduates from these, I don't know, Ivy League, the, you know... I, sorry, I shouldn't say that. I don't do that. I'm just saying some organizations get completely hung up on that, and they won't hire otherwise, will they? So for me, I think it's always been, when I've been hiring and building teams, it's about looking at the person, the ma- you know, obviously the skills and experience that they've got, because I want them to do well, but their qualifications on paper is of less importance to me it seems than many other people.

[00:29:09] **Jackie Barefield:** But it's served me well

[00:29:11] **Stacia Garr:** Well, it's that sociology background-

[00:29:14] **Jackie Barefield:** Is

[00:29:14] **Stacia Garr:** that what it is? ... making

[00:29:15] **Jackie Barefield:** selections.

[00:29:15] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah.

[00:29:16] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah.

[00:29:17] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. Jackie, one of the things we've been talking about and hearing a lot is how traditional L&D functions need to unlearn a lot. So you've been doing this, as we've talked about, for many years and have education in it.

[00:29:34] **Stacia Garr:** What have you felt like you personally had to unlearn to see this different vision?

[00:29:41] **Jackie Barefield:** I think I'm constantly unlearning things, and I think that maybe the change that I noticed was when I found- when I became more comfortable with that. So I think that perhaps becoming aware of the fact that it's okay to learn something that then no longer serves you and you need to let it go, finding some comfort with that's great, that's progress, you know.

[00:30:01] **Jackie Barefield:** I think that probably is the pivotal moment for me, was the moment where I thought, actually, I do this all the time now, and it, it just doesn't bother me. And I think, again, it goes back to the career that I've had, so I can use my expertise and my experience when I walk into a new organization to spot patterns and understand maybe what's gone before and what needs to come in future.

[00:30:20] **Jackie Barefield:** But I need to always remind myself to bring the context in, because you're in danger then of using your own assumptions and making some poor decisions based on, "I saw it over there, so therefore it's gonna happen here." To some degree, each time I move to a new industry or to a very different business, I have to remind myself, okay, it's time to unlearn or at least leave your mind open to unlearning some of these things.

[00:30:43] **Jackie Barefield:** Question yourself. Don't be egotistical about this, you know. Just be open and be, be humble about... Sorry, I've gone off track a little bit there, but-

[00:30:53] **Dani Johnson:** I actually, I wanna keep, uh, along this vein a little bit, 'cause I think it's really interesting. Like, there is a humility that comes to leadership, especially in opportunities of great change, right?

[00:31:02] **Dani Johnson:** We're in an era of great change, and humility is needed. I'm wondering, particularly in your position, where no one's telling you what the answer is or where to go, and there is no answer, a lot of leaders fall back on the things that are comforting to them. You know what I mean? And it's usually rote processes, and the things we learned in school, and those types of things.

[00:31:18] **Dani Johnson:** And so I'm, I'm curious from a leader's standpoint, how are you making sure that you don't fall into those- pitfalls, fall into pitfalls

[00:31:27] **Jackie Barefield:** So I don't know. I, if I think about it in a large, complex, multinational organization, you have to reconcile yourself with the fact that you will never know everything.

[00:31:38] **Jackie Barefield:** So coming from those small organizations where you, especially when it's a startup, you might be employee number five or number 10, for example. You will know everything. You'll know every part of the business and how it works, and then you land in a huge organization and you just have to accept the fact I'm not ever gonna know this, so therefore I have to rely on other people.

[00:31:57] **Jackie Barefield:** And that brings a certain amount of humility, right? As long as you accept that's okay to be like that, and perhaps some people don't, but I'm in the situation now. So the operations function within BAT is the largest of the functions, and it's a huge and diverse population. You go from sort of R&D through procurement, manufacturing, supply chain, quality, sustainability, so they're very different types of people for want of a better expression.

[00:32:24] **Jackie Barefield:** They have different appetite for learning. Obviously, the topics that they need to learn are very different anyway. They're in very different physical environments. As an L&D leader, you have to accept I am not gonna be able to solve all of the learning problems in all of the places across this entire business.

[00:32:39] **Jackie Barefield:** So I have to therefore rely on other people to share their knowledge with me, and I'll share my knowledge with them, and together we'll make it. I think it's naturally happened by being in a huge organization, but you're right, it could serve leaders well to be vulnerable or to show vulnerability and some humility.

[00:32:57] **Dani Johnson:** So we've talked about how you do it as a leader. You're obviously also leading a group of folks that are fairly risk-averse because that's their job, to be risk-averse. How are you getting your team to unlearn the things that they've done, the habits, the metrics, the instincts, all of those types of things that are associated with a more traditional view of L&D?

[00:33:15] **Jackie Barefield:** You know, if people don't get it... I mean, I've been really lucky enough to work with really smart people. I've had a few moments over my career where I've stepped into an organization where, or into a role, for example, where the demographic of the people is very different and on the whole, I'm really lucky.

[00:33:34] **Jackie Barefield:** I work with really smart people, and if they don't get it, it's not because... it's not for any other reason than it's maybe a new way of thinking, and they're not quite ready to do that. So at risk of sounding really obvious, you know, I never would implement a change without discussion, right? You know, if you have a discussion, why should we do this new thing?

[00:33:54] **Jackie Barefield:** Why shouldn't we do this new thing? And if you have those discussions, then, you know, I learn something from that as well. Somebody might come up with a reason why we shouldn't do it, and something I haven't thought of. So open discussion, transparency, empathy, understanding why they're struggling with it.

[00:34:10] **Jackie Barefield:** But eventually, it does... you do get there, that people, smart people will get it. It's just a bit of discomfort that they have to go through or maybe a bit of discomfort I have to go through. Sometimes I have to turn on my decision and say, "Actually, you're right. It was a really rubbish idea. Let's not do it."

[00:34:25] **Stacia Garr:** But that goes back to your humility as a leader and openness as a leader as well. Yeah.

[00:34:30] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah.

[00:34:30] **Stacia Garr:** And fostering that environment. Yeah. I wanted to ask also about your stakeholders, 'cause as I'm, like Danny, doing research on AI, but particularly its impact on HR org structure and function, and one of the things I'm seeing is that it's all well and good for HR to think that it can, like, change its structure and how it operates, but business leaders are often saying, "That's nice.

[00:34:56] **Stacia Garr:** That's not what I want from you. Do this other thing. That's what I've always asked for from you." And so I'd love to understand how you're seeing that within L&D. Are you seeing your stakeholders have kind of this more traditional vision? And if so, how are you helping them transition to this new vision?

[00:35:17] **Jackie Barefield:** So this is something I've seen over many, many years that, that stakeholders or the business will come and say, "We need this training." And okay, so here I am again having this conversation again. What makes you think you need this training? What makes you think it's a capability gap? What are the metrics that are telling you this?

[00:35:36] **Jackie Barefield:** And again, you know, if you're... Some people, there are occasions where I just had to bite my tongue, maybe a very senior, senior leader not willing or able or has the capacity to have that discussion at this moment, maybe too busy, got other stuff going on. And sometimes you just have to swallow it and say, "Oh, this goes against everything I believe in," but this is one of those times.

[00:36:00] **Jackie Barefield:** Thankfully they're few and far between, but there have been occasions where I've just gone, okay, it's just one of those times that this is gonna be a journey, and this person's not ready to start on that journey yet. But I think, you know, for the most part, you will find a number of stakeholders that get it Get them on side, do experiments, gather evidence, and eventually people will kind of come round.

[00:36:24] **Jackie Barefield:** But managing stakeholders, especially when you, again, you know, in this sort of operations environment, and there are many others that are similar, where you've got a group of stakeholders and their own issues, their own problems, their own capability gaps are the most important ones to them. And as a central sort of pillar to that, you have to prioritize, but you then have to go back and explain why maybe theirs wasn't the priority.

[00:36:51] **Jackie Barefield:** But you know, if you present a good case for that, then typically I haven't found too much. There've been some difficult ones over the years, but yeah, I get better every time I do it.

[00:37:01] **Stacia Garr:** Great. Thank you.

[00:37:02] **Dani Johnson:** Maybe one final question before we wrap up. Because of all the changes that are happening in our particular area of expertise, we're seeing a lot of baby and bathwater situations, where we're just throwing out all the old and bringing in brand-new stuff.

[00:37:15] **Dani Johnson:** I'm curious if you have thoughts on the things that we definitely should not lose when it comes to some of the things that we've done traditionally in L&D.

[00:37:24] **Jackie Barefield:** Great question. I'm always looking forward, and it's good to actually stop and say, actually, well, you know, let's not chuck the baby out with the bathwater.

[00:37:32] **Jackie Barefield:** Again, I suppose it depends on your definition of traditional L&D, but if we say traditional L&D is sort of classroom based, then one of the things that we are in danger of losing is the connections that people make when they have physical proximity to each other. So powerful every single time we do an event.

[00:37:54] **Jackie Barefield:** It might not be a learning event, but an event where we bring people together, the feedback is always, "I met some great people," "I forged some great relationships," or, "Five years ago I did this thing and I'm still in touch with those people." So I think we have to be careful not to lose that. I don't necessarily think we should be running classrooms to teach people the things that they can learn through other means, but I think we need to not lose that.

[00:38:16] **Jackie Barefield:** That's my response.

[00:38:18] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah. I think that's a really interesting thing. I'm doing a lot of thinking right now about expertise, like how you develop expertise and what AI takes away from how you develop expertise, but also what do we not need to do anymore or know anymore because AI exists in an organization.

[00:38:31] **Dani Johnson:** And one of the things that keeps on coming up over and over again is this idea of network and relationships and your reputation. That is part of your expertise, and I think it will increasingly become L&D's, or whoever is responsible for the development of individuals and organizations, to help them build those, because it will be key.

[00:38:49] **Dani Johnson:** If you think about the examples that you gave, you know, five years ago, I learned something from somebody and it's really important to me, or you're keeping that relationship, right? You're probing them, "Hey, I'm in this situation. What do I do?" It's an avenue for continued growth and development that I think we've really given the short shrift over the last 10 years.

[00:39:06] **Jackie Barefield:** That's such a good point. It's such a good point. You know what? I've been thinking about how we can build expertise using AI or how AI can build expertise for us, so not necessarily role plays or scenarios, but actually being a coach and a coworker and a partner to help you actually do the thing that you're supposed to be doing.

[00:39:25] **Jackie Barefield:** And in that process, the byproduct of that is learning, which is fantastic, but that is such a private, insulated world.

[00:39:32] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah.

[00:39:33] **Jackie Barefield:** That's what's gonna be missing. It's such a good point.

[00:39:35] **Dani Johnson:** Yeah. We're thinking in terms of... 'Cause if you think about it, if you can define work really, really well, then AI can do it, right?

[00:39:42] **Dani Johnson:** S- the most part. I mean, there are some physical aspects that it can't, but we, as L&D, have been focused on knowledge and skills for a really long time. That's our bread and butter. But when you think about AI coming in and taking over a lot of those tasks, we have to go to more tacit types things, like we're hearing a lot about judgment right now and context sensing and pattern recognition, these things that we've just assumed that the environment is gonna give us, but it's not.

[00:40:04] **Dani Johnson:** And so how does L&D start thinking about some of those things that have been traditional L&D things, but we haven't been paying a whole bunch of attention to them because- That's

[00:40:12] **Jackie Barefield:** right. Yeah. It's been a bit of a nice to have. Yeah. And the other area, I suppose, is the thing that, you know, I talked about quite a lot recently, which is that as AI takes over those routine tasks, the things that we got wrong, we made mistakes, we got hurt, we got shot down in a meeting or whatever, that's how we grew.

[00:40:29] **Jackie Barefield:** That's how we've got this critical thinking skills that we can question what AI is telling us and spot something that feels not right, and that there's gonna be a gap. The young people that are coming through are not gonna have those mistakes behind them and those, those painful moments, that expertise in them.

[00:40:46] **Jackie Barefield:** So, so that's something that we've got to look at.

[00:40:49] **Dani Johnson:** I think that's so key. I talked to a woman last week who called it the unpromotional generation. We're not gonna be able to promote these people-

[00:40:56] **Jackie Barefield:** Oh ... because they don't have- That's so sad ... what we're

[00:40:57] **Dani Johnson:** talking about. I know. A lot of people are looking at, like, a cliff in 2032.

[00:41:02] **Dani Johnson:** They're like, "Uh, if we don't solve this problem, we're in really big trouble." So that's a happy way to end this podcast.

[00:41:10] **Stacia Garr:** I've got a question, actually, that might be a little bit more uplifting, hopefully. So Jackie, just really kind of a question about advice that you would give, right? If you were to walk into an organization today, maybe it's a more traditional L&D organization, you wanted to kinda shift their mindset, how would you start?

[00:41:30] **Jackie Barefield:** S- that's a really big question. I think, personally, I always start, and I would start by truly understanding what the business does, what it wants to be. Or what it stands for, whether that's as a customer-facing brand or an internal employee brand or proposition. So you have to understand the environment that you're in and where they want to go.

[00:41:52] **Jackie Barefield:** Because I could go in with all my wonderful and wild ideas about how they could, you know, revolutionize the way that they learn, but actually, if nobody's got an appetite for that, or if I'm taking them in a

direction that doesn't really fit with that, then it's not gonna fly. So, so that's it. It's just understanding where you are, the context of where you are, and the desire of people, what motivates them, and what's their vision of the future, and how can I help them get there through L&D?

[00:42:19] **Jackie Barefield:** I don't know, even know if that answers your question. Sorry, Stacia. It was a tricky question for me, that one.

[00:42:24] **Stacia Garr:** No, I think that understanding what motivates people as a first step is brilliant. To your point about unlearning and not coming in with preconceived notions, until you know what motivates people, you can't help them.

[00:42:37] **Stacia Garr:** I think it's great.

[00:42:38] **Jackie Barefield:** Yeah. Thank you.

[00:42:40] **Dani Johnson:** Jackie, thank you so much for being with us. We always end each podcast with the same question. We call it our purpose question, and that question is, why do you do the work that you do?

[00:42:49] **Jackie Barefield:** I do the work that I do... I started out by being fascinated and intrigued about what makes people, individuals learn.

[00:42:58] **Jackie Barefield:** And over the years, that grew into an equally deep fascination as to how organizations learn and develop and change. And that hasn't died away. I'm still incredibly, after all these years, I'm still fascinated by it. And the role that I do gives me the opportunity to not just to see that firsthand, but actually contribute to it and be part of the change.

[00:43:22] **Jackie Barefield:** So that's why I do what I do.

[00:43:24] **Dani Johnson:** Good answer. Thanks so much, Jackie. Thank you, Jackie.

[00:43:27] **Jackie Barefield:** Thank you, Dani. Thank you, Stacia. It's been amazing talking to you, as usual.

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