

Designed to Succeed

20 things I know that help make
Learning Design Initiatives succeed



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PREFACE

I began my working life as a trainer, and, over the first 10 years of my career I diligently built the skills I needed to be what I told myself I could be - a very good trainer. I developed the ability to sense the needs that were at play in individuals and working groups, to achieve balance in both responding to the emergent learning in a group whilst moving towards predetermined learning outcomes, and to have the strength needed to leave my own ego outside of the classroom. I was proud of my successes and reflective about where I could improve, but through all of this my overwhelming work-identity was as a trainer. It came, then, as rather a shock, when I was told by a respected colleague, that it wasn't as a trainer that I excelled, but as a designer.

The conversation that followed that observation informed me that what I thought of as training skills were much better defined as learning design skills. These included a strong drive to move away from accepted ways of delivering a curriculum and to re-craft content and processes to better meet the needs of specific students, a clear desire to develop content that delivers against desired outcomes, yet leaves open the opportunities for serendipitous learning, and a confidence that students will make their own positive choices about their learning if the person at the front of the classroom can confidently accept the role that I describe as a 'Catalyst-Enabler'.

Since then I've progressively moved towards becoming a specialist and expert in experiential learning design, the last 13 years as Design Director with RSVP Design Ltd. And it's been a very rewarding career: I've worked with thousands of people from hundreds of organisations - Corporates, Business Schools, NFP's, and Universities on just about every Continent.

It's also fair to say that in that time I've learned a lot about what gives Learning Design Projects the greatest chance of success. This is what still guides me when it comes to negotiating and setting up new projects; the things that enable me to do what I'm best at - creating learning environments that deliver for my clients. These are the things that, if I'd known them 30 years ago, would have made it easier to avoid the potential pitfalls that exist where organisations contract with designers of learning.

This collection of personal knowledge-nuggets is intended to help anybody who is engaged in putting together Learning Design Initiatives - either as representatives of a contracting organisation, or as a design specialist from an outside supplier.