



## Spotlight on Laura Emson

Group Talent Development Consultant at Cambridge Assessment

### How long have you worked in Learning & Development?

Four years

### In your career in L&D, what has been your best or most memorable experience and why?

From a learning perspective, doing my Insights Discovery Accreditation. It was great to have the time and space to focus on the tool with other L&D professionals from a wide range of backgrounds. Then being able to take my learning back to my own organisation and see people have a similar positive experience is what it's all about.

### What was your most challenging training situation and why?

I was leading a session and it was clear that not everyone in the room wanted to be there or, indeed, knew why they were there. That's hard as the facilitator when you've designed what you think is engaging content and you think you've hit the brief you've been given, but you can't see people coming along on the journey. It was also a reminder to self that it's not actually at all about me. I gave myself that talking to whilst grabbing a glass of water; then by challenging the group and checking in with them about what they needed, I was able to change the direction of the session in the moment. By doing that I was able to get to a place by the end where conversation had been opened and everyone was on the same page.

### Best (or most unusual) training environment you've ever trained in and why?

We've got a lovely new headquarters with great new rooms, so I'd have to say there.

### How do you stay up to date with what's going on in L&D?

Constant knowledge sharing with the team I work in. LinkedIn is becoming my L&D bible – if there is such a thing. Finding those people who are knowledgeable in the field. LPI have some great articles, and listening to blogs from CIPD.

### What's the best advice or recommendation you could give to a new trainer?

I have two things.

- 1 Less is more – and that's about a whole range of things. Not being too 'content-heavy' to give a better chance of information actually being retained, and being realistic. With PowerPoint slides – I think I speak for most people when I say the majority get put off when they just see a slide of words. Share your thoughts and slides with others in your area for feedback.



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2 Probably the simplest but most crucial thing – when I’m designing a session for a team I simply always start with asking the question about what do you want to be different at the end of it? People’s time is so precious in the workplace so as a trainer you have to make that time when you have them in the room count and stick to that desired outcome. Help people know what they will see differently as a result of your session.

### What do you think the future of L&D looks like?

Million-dollar question. I read so many blog posts and articles about technology and digital, and I still wonder if we really understand what it means and looks like and, actually, how many people are really doing it well and seeing the ROI from it. I hear and read about the same couple of buzz words – AI and VR. Yes, I don’t doubt technology will have a place in workplace learning but for me there will still be a big place for having a physical conversation with a human! We still need to be able to help people have real and honest discussions - with people and not just computers and smartphones.

As L&D professionals it will continue to be our role to offer a suite of options to provide for different learning styles and to have the skills to be able to do that and recognise what would work best for the outcome and audience your solution is for. Maybe our Apple Watches and Fitbits will be intelligent enough to coach us through a situation? Social media has changed how easy it is to communicate and collaborate and so that will be a constant challenge for L&D professionals. We can craft those moments of our lives that we want people to see with the click of a button and the challenge is to decipher the credible from the hearsay, and companies are constantly adapting to give that greater user experience.

### In your opinion, how can L&D teams be more strategically aligned to business priorities?

L&D initiatives should enable organisational goals, so we should be devising L&D strategies that align to the business strategy, direction, values and purpose. It’s essential that senior leaders in an organisation are part of those conversations and input into what the L&D offering is so they’re bought in – and it’s our responsibility to ensure that it’s a constant conversation at that level and that it’s cascaded so that staff can see the strategy and contribute. You should be able to see that direct thread for everything that you do and offer, right from the detail up to that top strategic level. It’s pointless if you go off and put together what you think the organisation needs if you haven’t had the relevant conversations with key stakeholders.

### ... And lastly, what would you attempt to do, if you knew you could not fail?

I’ve been putting off running a marathon for about the last two years. Having done quite a few half marathons before and knowing that’s the next step scares me. The last couple of times I’ve done a half marathon I’ve thought – I’d have to do that all over again!



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