

Transcript of ELC 079: The Updated Accidental Instructional Designer

A Conversation with Cammy Bean

[The eLearning Coach Podcast 79](#)

(See links to all the resources at the end of the transcript.)

Connie: Welcome to the E-Learning Coach podcast online at the elearningcoach.com. I'm Connie Malamed, bringing you ideas, tips, and best practices for success in creating effective learning experiences.

Hello, learning people and welcome to episode 79 of the E-Learning Coach podcast. I loved recording this episode with Cammy Bean who updated one of the most well-known books in our field, *The Accidental Instructional Designer*. We discuss what's changed since her book was first published almost 10 years ago, and what never seems to change. Cammy is a senior solutions consultant at Kineo, leading sales and account management for Kineo's US portfolio of custom learning clients. She's been in the industry for over 25 years. You can find the show notes with links to all of the resources we discuss and a transcript at the elearningcoach.com/podcasts/79. Here's our conversation.

Hi Cammy. Welcome to the E-Learning Coach podcast.

Cammy: Thank you, Connie. I'm so excited to be here.

Connie: You have a new addition of your famous book, *The Accidental Instructional Designer*, famous in certain circles.

Cammy: Yes. In a very small circle that those of us who practice in this field are in, but yes.

Connie: What triggered the need for a second edition of this book?

Cammy: Great question. Well, the original book was published in 2014, so I probably wrote it in 2013. And in fact, a lot of those writings had come from the previous three or four years. So what's changed in the intervening decade? Basically 10 years went by. A lot's changed and nothing has changed. Core principles of how people learn, that hasn't changed. But the technologies had changed. I think I was mentioning Jive as a platform or tools that aren't even used anymore. There were some things that were outdated. I think the real reason, just seeing how useful the first edition has been to people over the years and starting to see where people were using it. So I was hearing a lot about teachers who were transitioning into instructional design and certainly coming out of the pandemic,

we've seen a lot of that. People making career changes and trying to figure out where to get started.

Universities and instructional design teaching schools have used my book as part of their programs. So, people getting started in this field and then teams, I'll hear about a company, their instructional design team, the manager buys the book for everyone on their team and they're all trying to figure it out because they're all accidental instructional designers. As the first edition of the book has been out there, just getting a better sense of who's really reading it and how they found it useful, was really inspiring to me and I think, so I'm going to put a button in that thought. In addition, I have 10 more years of experience I've been doing this. I have now been in the e-learning field for 27 years, Connie. What? How did this happen?

I've amassed another 10 years of my own experience and expertise and my job role has shifted. The things that I focus on have shifted a little bit. I don't do direct instructional design every day. I speak in the terminology and the language every day because I'm working with clients and our production teams. So my view has broadened in some ways, and I think I really wanted to see that reflected in the book to help ground that new practitioner or that transitioning practitioner to the broader industry field that we work in.

So, there's some new content in the book on where does instructional design happen within organizations, because you could be an instructional designer at a small nonprofit doing work that you're super passionate about. You could be at a large corporate, you could be in the training team, the centralized L and D team. You could be in the product management team, you could be in the compliance team. There's just so many places that it happens.

So I wanted to point people to all of the places where you could find meaningful work in this field and get excited about it because I do think that's one of the best parts about the work that we do. There are so many ways that we can help people. You and I, I know, are of the same spirit. Ultimately you want to be doing work that's meaningful to you, Connie, as a human being. I feel the same way, and I think instructional design, we are creating learning solutions, solving problems for people that are going to help them do their jobs better, so that they can go home and be happier in their families and better human beings and spread more joy and add more joy to life. So that's my kumbaya vision of what we do. And helping people see that as an individual, you can find so many places where you can do that.

So that was the big picture. I wanted to step back a little bit and ground people a little bit more in overall L and D. Obviously I updated a lot of the technology, references. I think I actually talked about tools and technology in this edition,

which I didn't in the last one. So there's some just defining terms about what is an LMS and what's XAPI and things that I had avoided before. I've added a chapter on evaluation and analytics, so completing the cycle all the way from the beginning, all the way to the end. And then a lot of the resources needed to get updated too just because there were some dead links and things that no longer exist anymore that I had referred to in the original book.

Connie: The fact that you mentioned all the different places where it can occur. That's why I don't use the term, if I can help it, corporate training or corporate L and D. I tend to call it workplace training and workplace because it can happen in so many different workplaces. And I also don't like to forget higher ed because higher ed uses a lot of instructional designers. The job is a little bit different, but they're still doing it. Do you have a sense of the percentage of instructional designers who are actually accidental? What do you mean by the term?

Cammy: It's a good question. Do I mean when I say accidental? I think most of us who fall into this career, fall into this career. You did not mean to be an instructional designer when you grew up Connie. Neither did I. I thought I was going to be a writer or a teacher or something. We don't have any sense when you're a kid that there is such a thing as corporate training or that training even happens for grown-ups. So most of us don't have any clue.

Anyone who says that they were an intentional instructional designer from the outset. I think it's a very small percentage. I did ask this. There is a question. I surveyed people and I asked them what percentage of people consider themselves accidental? Something like 85% of people consider themselves accidental. So there's a small subset of us out there who say, "No, no, no, this is what I intended to do my whole life." And that's awesome, that's great.

But I think most of us fall into this by accident because we have some shining skillset that someone identifies as being relevant to the training team. "Hey, you're really good with PowerPoint. "you're really good at talking in front of a classroom. You're really good with words." "You can really explain things." "You are the subject matter expert. You know this subject matter, so well, therefore you should be able to teach it to other people." There's a lot of assumptions made about, "Anyone can do teaching." "Anyone can do training."

So, a lot of us get pushed into this role for whatever reason. So we self-select in this role and we are here by accident, and then hopefully somewhere along the line there's some point of recognition of, "Wow, I want to become more intentional in my practice and I would like to build the skills and have the expertise," because there is in fact a whole field of study. You can go to school and get a PhD in instructional design. You have a master's degree in instructional design?

Connie: Right.

Cammy: So fairly early you made a very intentional decision that some of us don't make ever. I have not gone back to school to get a degree or even a certificate in instructional design. And, I think increasingly, there are more people who some point in their career make that decision now to go get a certificate or get a degree. That is something I have seen change in the last 10 years. I think there's more people who are going on to get more formal study and probably why, it's because of e-learning, because you can do it online. You don't have to necessarily go to a brick and mortar school. You have an option to be part of a cohort group online, or you can get a certificate through ATD or some other institution. So I think there's just a lot more options now where we can actually formalize our practice through more formal training.

Connie: True. Now I know that, and you mentioned, that you're focused more on the business side of things or you said you weren't doing day-to-day instructional design. You have a big picture view. What kinds of things have you learned about the business perspective? And when I say business, it doesn't have to even be a corporation. A nonprofit cares about its financial situation like everyone does. What kinds of things have you learned or seen that you think, "Oh wow, everybody should know this"?

Cammy: Let me see how to unpack that. In the book I lay out the four pieces of pie. I think we've talked about this before, that the nascent instructional designer needs to have some awareness. There's that learning and pedagogy piece, understanding how people learn. It's the science of instruction, writing good instructional objectives, et cetera, et cetera. And then there's the creative component to what we do in this space, which is so important, especially if you're developing online learning materials, self-based e-learning. It's got to look good, it's got to engage you. It's got to be interactive, it's got to tell a great story. All the things that pull us in and make it sticky. There's the technology piece of the pie, obviously. Even if you're a classroom trainer these days, you need to consider how technology fits into the picture. It could be the learning management system, it could be testing SCORM, XAPI, data and analytics, whatever you put into that technology piece.

The business piece of the pie is the most elusive for a lot of people. Some people come to instructional design because they're subject matter experts and they know their business really well. So they might have that angle of the business piece down. My job today, I am an account manager, so I manage our portfolio of custom content clients. So they are working really closely with our production teams who are developing learning solutions for them.

My role is, early in the process, helping define what the needs are. I do a lot of contracting. That's all the business, the numbers, my goodness. I have to double

check my numbers all the time. I'm not an accountant. It's speaking and thinking much more like a consultant. It's understanding the larger business requirements that are going on and how training is a part of that.

Part of my role, I've been a salesperson as well, I have sold a learning management system for the last six years. And back to what's changed in the last 10 years, is I had to take my fingers out of my ears and really start to understand the LMS, which I had ignored. And I think a lot of people get into instructional design and what they are doing is maybe they're developing courses in storyline, but they call themselves an instructional designer. We can have that debate about what's in a title. Lots of different skill sets ladder up to this umbrella term that has, in effect, become instructional design. So somebody might start off thinking that instructional design is just about building a course and storyline.

Connie: Absolutely. I see that all the time.

Cammy: And so they have a really small piece of the pie, and as you pull out, and this was part of my vision with this updated version, was to help people see that big picture. And so when you operate more on that business angle, I just see this bigger picture now that's going on, that includes all these other technology systems to connect to the talent HR system. There's obviously dollars and cents that gets involved and people are talking about ROI and investment and data analytics, and I'm not at a point where I'm getting an MBA, but some days I feel like I am.

Connie: I really think that that big picture view of what are the requirements of the organization really makes a difference when the L and D group is completely aligned with the organization's larger objectives. You're more of a profit center, you're not a loss because you're actually helping. Even if it has nothing to do with sales, you're helping retention, you're helping engagement, you're helping people feel like it's a learning culture. So there are so many ways that it improves the life of the employees of an organization. So you're not just losing money, money, money on training.

Cammy: Yeah. Well, and there's just been a lot of focus, I think, in the last two years, coming out of the pandemic on the increasing focus and opportunity for L and D to be part of the larger transformation of a business as businesses have to become more agile. There's a lot of talk about skills and re-skilling and becoming AI revolution and how that's going to change all of our jobs. And L and D is going to be right there through that because L and D teams are going to have to help individuals manage that transition. And there's a lot of talk about employees are expecting to come to a company and get developed in a meaningful way and have actual training opportunities that are going to help them get ready for the next job. That's not just lip service anymore. So people are demanding that,

employees are demanding that, and there's an increasing focus on L and D as being part of that solution. So the stakes are higher. You're not just creating-

Connie: One little course that's isolated from everything else.

Cammy: Thank you. Connie finishes my sentences for me. Love it.

Connie: Do you think that the perception, and I think this is what you were saying, of an L and D group, of a learning and development group, or even just a single person, the perception has changed over the decade since you wrote your book?

Cammy: I'd like to think so, and I can't tell if that's because I have shifted my role out, so I have that broader picture view. Some of it's just the angle that you're looking at that scene from. So I'm looking at it all from a different angle than I was 10 years ago than I was 20 years ago. So there's some of that. Well, at least what we see all of the L and D pundits saying out there these days, "Oh, L and D, pressure's on L and D, everything's really shifting." Is that true or is that wishful thinking? I don't know. What do you think?

Connie: Well, I had thought that it was true, but now you're making me realize, maybe it's just because I'm hearing it from L and D people.

Cammy: Yeah, I don't know. I'm asking this question to myself right now too. It's like the next shiny object syndrome. Well, is the next shiny object syndrome really that L and D is going to actually be valuable to organizations. That's being super cynical of me and I shouldn't speak that out loud. Brandon Carson, I don't know if you've read his book L&D's Playbook for the Digital Age, it's great. It's a fabulous read and he is talking about that shifting role of L and D. He sees it at Walmart, and I think he sees it across all kinds of institutions, where there is this expectation of real meaningful development of people, and that companies are taking more responsibility for that. Now, he is an L and D person saying that, but he's inside of a large organization and has the ears of people. So I do think there is something to this. I don't think this is all just shiny object syndrome.

Connie: And that might be some of where I got it because I read his book and then I interviewed him. But I see it all around. There are more chief learning officers. That wasn't even a title at one time. Learning and development needs a seat at the table in high-level strategy meetings.

Cammy: L and D needs a seat at the table. That's been echoing for 15 plus years, probably longer. I feel like that's something everyone has been complaining about for right years. How do you go find that seat, people?

Connie: Can you talk about a few things that have really changed that you wrote about in the book?

Cammy: Great question. Whether or not they're in the book, I can't remember. It's been since October since I've even looked at the manuscript. So what's changed in instructional design since the first edition of the book? 10 years ago, I don't think we were really talking about microlearning, for example. And I don't go into that in great detail in my book because I feel like in many ways it's another tool that we have. It's an approach. Microlearning is part of digital design. It's something we need to know. And there's some great books written about microlearning.

Connie: I loved Karl Kapp and Robyn Defelice's book, [Microlearning Short and Sweet](#).

Cammy: Maybe it's that one. There's some great books about microlearning. Microlearning wasn't really something that we talked about. Things have gotten shorter and there is more video happening in instructional design. When I started in 1996, the company I worked for was called Video Information Systems and we had cracked the code on the Kodak for getting video compressed and onto a CD-ROM. So we had talking head and scenario video and that was super cutting edge in 1996.

Fast-forward to four or five years later, CD-ROMs were gone and everything was on the internet. It was e-learning now and video was gone and it was gone for a long time. But I feel like video is really back. People want video libraries. There's more's happening with podcasting. We're doing more scenario shooting in our courses. We're creating interactive video. And a lot of that has to do with expectations that the learning that an organization produces is more consumer grade and slicker, higher production values.

It's great to see video back because we know that's super effective and a lot of that's certainly the rise of YouTube and the increasing reliance on so many of us. People like to digest content through video. So that has changed in 10 years. I think there's just a lot more video and that marries with that microlearning piece. Your training program, your learning campaign, if you will, might just be a series of videos with some structural activities around it, but your content is getting delivered as videos, be it animation or live action or scenarios or what have you. So just the use of rich media in general.

Connie: Can you talk about how you're organizing or structuring microlearning for your clients?

Cammy: We structure it together into a learning pathway or a curriculum, all these new jargony terms. Learning pathways was not something people talked about 10 years ago, just to add to our list of things that have changed. Some of the lingo

and the terminology has changed and certainly the tools are changing. When I was rewriting this edition of the book ChatGPT was not a thing that people were talking about. And now it's all anyone's talking about. Like AI and all the AI tools, they're super going to transform the way people work every day. Do I have my head around it? Not yet, no. And I think that's a significant space to watch if you are a practicing instructional designer. How are you going to use these tools to change your workflow to become more efficient while ensuring accuracy, while ensuring you're not plagiarizing, all the other things that go along with it? But it's going to be pretty radical.

If you can have a voice, what is it, text to voice AI tool that can sound like you now. They are getting better and better or video. I've seen some of the AI video, which is still a little uncanny in my mind's. It's a little weird. It's only going to get better. It doesn't mean that you have to rush off and learn all these tools right now, I don't think. But I think we need to be paying attention and start sorting out how it's going to impact our work. So that's not even in the book because that's changed in the last three months.

Connie: It's been a very fast change. I don't really want a voice that sounds like me, I want a voice that sounds better than me.

Cammy: Yeah.

Connie: You have a new part in your book on analytics. What would you say that instructional designers need to understand about analytics?

Cammy: I feel like this is a nascent practice for me as well. I'm not a math and science person. I'm an English major. So speaking in terms of analytics feels like a bit of a foreign language. And yet the last few years have been just talking about the increased role of data and analytics and informing better decision making within organizations. So as we look at how we design training solutions, that's got to be part of what we are considering as instructional designers and it may not be a natural skillset for you, and yet we have to add this as another slice to the pie that we have to think about. So I talk a little bit in the book about some evaluation models, start giving some framework to it. It's not the be all and end all. I would not say that my chapter on learning and analytics is going to give you great deep insights. It's a starter. Hopefully I'll point you in the right direction.

I know Megan Torrance is just publishing her [data and analytics book](#). I'm really excited to read that. I have been reading a book called [Measurement Demystified](#), which is a big a tome by Peggy Parskey and David Vance. I think it came out last year, helping understand what are the metrics that matter within organizations. And I think a lot of times, this has just been my understanding, if you go to a big ATD conference, there are people who are talking about ROI, the

Kirkpatrick and the Phillips, and there's people who focus on that. But a lot of instructional designers don't think those paths have necessarily joined up together. As an instructional designer, we can use better data and analytics to refine what we're doing at Kineo. We have been looking at and are actually offering some new services to our clients to help dig in more deeply with data and analytics and capture more in a learning content experience to help inform some of that.

I think historically we've had SCORM, so you know what your LMS can report, you can track butts in seat and completion and percentage pass rates, and that's not all that useful. Then on the other spectrum, there's XAPI, which has been around now for about 10 years. Experienced API, for those who don't know. I think it's still a daunting startup for people to get into XAPI because you're writing statements and you need a learning record store. So you need another piece of technology and there's all this promise that you can get out of it. And people like Megan Torrance, who I mentioned previously, are really helping to demystify that and give a lot of great use cases for it. But we haven't seen the record-breaking adoption of XAPI. It's still seen as a little bit out of hand for people. At Kineo we've been trying to find some ways to help organizations get around some of that and get more meaningful data out of the content. Experience just to start us along that path.

So I think if you are an instructional designer and you are focused on creating courses in storyline or whatever your tool of choices, you do need to start thinking about this. And part of it's just understanding what is it that we're trying to measure, what matters, and then how are we going to do that?

Connie: Two things. One is that by connecting with other people in the organization, you can find out what metrics matter. It doesn't even have to be an XAPI statement. It can be six months or a year down the line. Did things change? And the other interesting thing is, a few podcasts ago I spoke with Lori Niles-Hofmann, who does analytics at the start, she talked about how you can use the knowledge that you can gather from data to design a more effective program.

Cammy: Well, If you're asking that question of what do we need to measure, what really matters? You've got to design a learning experience that's going to be tapping into that.

Connie: What problems do learning designers face that never go away like a decade later and you're going, "Again? This is still happening?"

Cammy: Boom. Subject matter experts who disappear. Subject matter expert wrangling, just trying to stay on track. Usually your subject matter experts, if you're working on a project, have day jobs and they miss their deadlines because other things

come up and you're not their priority. So that wrangling bit is a challenge. I think another thing that has never gone away is trying to, and it comes back to subject matter experts as well and stakeholders, but trying to help people visualize what this thing that we're talking about that we're going to design is going to turn into. I'm sure everyone has different story-boarding processes and scripting processes. We were often using Word documents at the beginning of a project because it's much easier to do things on paper than to build it. And even with advances in rapid prototyping tools and all that kind of stuff, it's really hard for a stakeholder or subject matter expert to understand that what you're talking about over here is going to turn into this kind of interactive story over here and this is how it's going to function.

So how do you paint that picture and how do you build that into your process so that the end, or at the beta you don't have stakeholders coming, "Oh, this is what was going to happen? Is this what's it going to look like?" That problem has never gone away.

Connie: Early prototyping can be a solution to that problem.

Cammy: Yes. But even then, it depends, is it a paper prototype? I don't know. There's still often this visual leap that people make and need.

Connie: That's true. And I think, "How could they understand?" People in our field often think visually pretty easily, and I think that's one of the things that attracted them.

Cammy: Right. Well, and if you're working as an instructional designer in this field, if it's been a year, if it's been 10 years, if it's been 20 years, you've amassed a lot of experience. You are the expert in instructional design and experts forget what they don't know or forget what they used to not know. So we have to remind ourselves that we are talking to a novice learner when it comes to instructional design and e-learning or whatever it is you're creating. And we often forget that. We think, "Oh, everyone can know exactly what's in my head and how I'm communicating this."

Connie: That reminds me of something else. The one thing that hasn't changed is the need to educate our clients. And I never knew that or did that at first. It never even occurred to me that, exactly what you're saying, that they weren't in my head knowing what I was thinking.

Cammy: And the language. This is also not ever changed. The terminology is inconsistent. So we got an RFP (Request for Proposal) just the other day for a client that was looking for us to produce videos. And what they mean by videos is actually an interactive training experience. And their RFP was written in such a way that it wasn't like, "Are you asking us to edit videos? Because you have this library of

existing videos that you want to use, but you want us to produce videos with your videos," and you have to sort through it. And even in the RFP process, there's education that often needs to happen because there's just misunderstanding and misconception of what this is, what we're talking about. So always make sure you're aligning on terminology with your clients, your stakeholders, because they have a different understanding of what video means, for example.

Connie: I have had that so many times. "So you want to get together actors and a camera and go into a studio?" And they go, "Huh? No, no, it's online."

Cammy: That's not a video. We think it's not a video, but the public does.

Connie: Exactly. Well that leads me to my last and final question. Do clients seem more educated, it sounds like I already know the answer, or sophisticated about what it takes and how long it takes to design a training program?

Cammy: Yes and no. One of the things at Kineo we talk about is a learning maturity model. And really it's going to depend on where a client sits along that learning maturity model. At the far left of the spectrum, in my mind it's chalk and talk. This is what we call it. Chalk and talk are those people who are probably just producing PowerPoints. It might be a startup company or just a new organization, or they're just getting training going for the first time. And to them, training is PowerPoints. They might want to create a library of webinar recordings and if they can get that in an LMS, awesome. And that's stage one for them. And you move along a maturity curve. I think we go from chalk and talk to brilliant basics to, I can't remember the third one, the last one's future gazer.

So that's where you're getting totally innovative and probably experimenting with VR, thinking about data and analytics. You've got the full ecosystem and everything is really well evolved. So those clients, which are rare, but that's probably your bigger organization because they've just been doing it for longer. So those clients tend to have that big picture and understand, whereas someone who's at that chalk and talk stage, that example I was just sharing about the video RFP that we received, they're at the very basic level. So it really depends, and that's not going to change. That's never going to change. It's like the way accidental IDs will never change. That's never going to go away. We're always going to have accidental instructional designers because the need for training bubbles up and emerges at organizations and people start with the basics and slowly this awareness goes, "Oh wow, there's more that we could do. We need to be more robust, more sophisticated." And along that path we go as individuals in our instructional design journey and I think organizations go as well.

Connie: Good point. I actually do have one more question, and this is a really super important one. In 2014, we recorded a podcast that I titled with your term, Clicky-

clicky-bling-bling. That was 2014. Can you explain to people what that means in case they've never heard that expression and has it changed?

Cammy: Clicky-clicky-bling-bling is my patented term. It's not patented. It's the jazz hands of e-learning. It's a lot of click, a lot of bling, a lot of whizzbang. It's animations that fly in unnecessarily onto a screen. It's perhaps an interactive hot graphic on a screen where you have 30 things to click on. It's all that flash that people add. And 10 years ago when I was writing that, it was alive and well. Stakeholders would ask for it. And our challenges, instructional designers is to help people to see that, that actually more often than not distracts from the learning experience. Is clicky-clicky-bling-bling alive and well? Absolutely. People are still doing it all over the place. It probably won't ever go away too.

I think there's an interesting challenge though, because we get into this notion of we need to deliver more consumer-grade learning experiences. I think understanding where that fine line is because there may be. Some bling is important. You need it to look good. It needs to be visually branded, it needs to have a polished identity. So I think bling is okay. Well, it's bling with substance though. And I don't know if in 2014 I talked about inner bling. We want to make sure that our designs have inner bling. They shine from the inside. And it's about an effective learning experience that's actually going to move the needle on performance and all that kind of stuff.

Avoiding clicky-clicky-bling-bling doesn't mean making it ugly and tearing it down to the pure basics and no clicking at all or anything. It's just finding that right balance and creating something that's polished that looks good. We know that visuals matter. We know that first impressions of experiences matter, so we don't want to lose people, but we don't want to distract them and have, the only thing they remember from your interactive training program is the flashing next button at the bottom of the screen.

Connie: There's that misunderstanding, that clicking on an item to reveal text is an interaction. An interaction is making a decision and getting feedback or a consequence or something that enhances the learning.

Cammy: Yeah, so you could think about it instead of clicking. Interaction is cognitive engagement. It's thinking, and it can happen purely in our brains. And no clicking is even required because you can ask a reflective question that really gets someone thinking about how they're going to apply this and that's the best kind of interaction and that's going to lead to the most effective knowledge transfer.

Connie: Well put. I think we'll wrap it up.

Cammy: Awesome.

Connie: Thanks for being here, Cammy.

Cammy: It's always a good time with you, Connie. It's great to chat.

Connie: I hope you enjoyed this episode. What do you think has changed? What hasn't changed? Leave a comment at the elearningcoach.com/podcasts/79. That's also where you can find links to resources and the show transcript. Take care and I'll talk to you next time.

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