



THE POTENTIAL CAREER BENEFITS OF BEING A ONE-PERSON L&D TEAM

Consider that most learning and development (L&D) functions started with one person. Prior to that, organizations typically featured a strategy that was a mashup of sorts between onboarding and apprenticeship: “For the next six weeks, we want you to follow this ‘proven performer’ around and pay careful attention to everything they do. When you can do half of what that person does, you will be very good at your job!”

Gradually, the training function evolved into its own entity. It had to, really. Even though efforts to measure impact were archaic by today’s standards, organizations could still see an undeniable relationship between learning and increased profitability.

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So, the “next-step question” as learning continued to grow into a strategic priority became: “Who do we put into the training job?”

As we remember it, discussions on the skills needed to initiate the role often included (keep in mind that essentially all of these hires were internal):

- **A track record of performance:** Tenure with the organization, familiarity with its culture and a documented history of meeting expectations.
- **Platform skills:** Typically featured experience presenting background,

updates and projections to line management and occasionally senior management.

- **People skills:** Universally likable, dependable, approachable and responsive.

Suffice it to say, the role of L&D on the strategic landscape has expanded exponentially over the years, and today features clusters of integrated and sophisticated responsibilities:

- **Administration:** Internal marketing, metrics, materials fulfillment and registration.
- **Content:** Instructional and graphic design, development and ongoing refreshment.
- **Delivery:** Instructor recruitment and development, facilitation and feedback.
- **Integration:** learning management system (LMS), content management system (CMS) authoring and compatibility.

Each cluster, and in some cases, each subset, can be a job in and of itself. No way one person could possibly do all that effectively, right? The short answer is: No. But in reality, and for a variety of different reasons, there are indeed many L&D professionals who try!

In that regard, we recently had what can only be described as an exhilarating conversation with Edie Stulken, who is a one-person training department for an organization with a little over 1,000 employees.

We asked Edie to tell us a little bit about her job, and it was abundantly clear from the get-go that she thrived on her impossible circumstances. Her company was going through a difficult stretch, and she was playing a key role in navigating those waters. The company had no travel budget and no budget for outsourcing anything. As she described her reality, the age-old imagery of a bicycle wheel came to mind. She was the hub, and each of the departments and divisions she supported were function-based spokes that extended outward.

As Edie sees it, success in her role depends mostly on **people skills**. For example, if the company needs to do information technology (IT) training, she interviews a subject matter expert, then designs, develops and delivers a custom SharePoint module on the topic. The same goes for every other spoke in the wheel.

Frustrations aside, it struck us that if you find yourself in circumstances that resemble those described above, you have the opportunity to learn at least a little bit about everything. It’s like you can become a central repository of relevant knowledge for everything that is going on around you. And over the course of a career, because that will inevitably take one turn after another, imagine how that kind of experience would significantly enhance your value and increase your options. ☀

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