

Tania Hector

Tania Hector is an accomplished change leader, with extensive international experience in all aspects of human resources and social work. Before working in HR, Tania was a Social Worker for Family and Marriage Society of South Africa where she was responsible for a variety of combined clinical and outreach programmes, community development programmes and specialised training for professionals. Since moving to HR, she has successfully completed turnarounds in a variety of HR departments in South Africa, Malaysia and Singapore. In her current role as Head of Talent, Engagement and Leadership for Nestlé UK, Tania is responsible for company-level strategic talent management and leadership development, as well as optimising the employee experience, through EVP, talent branding and employee wellness.

Development and learning in organisations: What are your day-to-day priorities?

Tania Hector I have two main priorities – the first of these is to be a good line manager. As Human Resource (HR) professionals, we are sometimes a bit guilty of *not* practicing what we preach! Being a line manager is a serious responsibility, so I spend a lot of time and energy doing my best to support the team. My second priority is to our customers in the HR community, as well as line managers and employees in the organisation. Our team is responsible for empowering the HR community to deliver against the needs of the organisation, particularly in leadership development, talent management, employee wellness, diversity and inclusion, safety beyond operations, employee engagement and talent branding.

DLO: What is your leading L&D priority?

TH: Leadership development that is suitable for the requirements of the leadership position – with a particular emphasis on enabling our managers as they transition. We, for example, have an in-house programme called “Leading 4 Change”, which is a fantastic programme based on Self-Managed Learning. Many development programmes fail to translate into action for a variety of reasons, but we have already seen the benefits of this programme. In addition, we have started using these learning groups to solve real business problems in an innovative and cross-functional way. The power of these groups – due to the way they have worked together on the programme and the learning they have achieved – offers creative solutions through inclusion of diverse perspectives.

DLO: Do busy executives have time to develop? How do you tackle this at Nestlé UK&I?

TH: There is a beautiful quote by Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the 20th century are not those who can’t read and write, they are those who cannot learn and unlearn on a continuous basis”.

As a leader, the route to redundancy lies in the failure to learn, apply, unlearn. ...and repeat. Whether you are an 18-year-old school leaver or a 64-year-old CEO – your knowledge and skills are constantly becoming irrelevant; you will not succeed with your current

competencies. We each have to take personal responsibility for our learning, and our role as an employer is to offer the best quality opportunities, such as Leading 4 Change.

DLO: How have you made your mark on L&D in Nestlé UK&I?

TH: Within Nestlé UK&I, my greatest personal L&D achievement is a programme we developed in Malaysia, which involved getting people to shift and engage with digital learning, and the self-discipline involved. We created a virtual Marketing Academy where all content was delivered digitally, via PC or mobile. Learners needed to commit to a time they would plug in and attend virtual classes with no-one standing in front of them in a classroom or ensuring attendance – that is a completely new mind-set! It was entirely student led. Getting the system online was the easy part, the challenge lay in getting people to shift and engage in a self-disciplined manner.

DLO: What is the biggest barrier to learning?

TH: Many people still have an expectation of being spoon-fed, due in part to the schooling system. We struggle to prioritise personal development appropriately – many have failed to understand that they have to apply discipline in order to ensure sustainable growth. In addition, the attention economy creates more opportunities for distraction – as L&D professionals, our challenge is to deliver learning and insights in a way that is attention grabbing and effective. One solution is to learn from the experts – a few years ago, I improved my competency in marketing and advertising – because we know that they use many effective techniques!

DLO: How has your background in social work informed you as an L&D professional?

TH: As a social worker, we learn to “accept the person, reject the behaviour” This means that you acknowledge the whole person and challenge the behaviour that was problematic. This is very useful in the corporate environment, where we are often prone to labelling people as our unconscious biases play out. A further extension of this concept is an abiding respect for the individual’s right to choose – and with choices, come consequences. You can enable, you can challenge and you can influence, but at the end of the day, you get to make your own consequences.

DLO: How do you measure the impact of your learning interventions?

TH: Nestle uses the Kirkpatrick four-level evaluation model. We are at Level 4 evaluation on a number of our programmes already and will move the remainder from Level 2 evaluation in 2019. In addition, we use leadership effectiveness measures and attrition rates (compared with a control group), as well as comparative psychometrics.

DLO: What advice would you give people who are just coming in to the profession?

TH: Learning is constant. Change is constant. Your ability to succeed lies in utilising the cusp of these. Think creatively – combine your skills in new ways. For example, today you have mathematicians with a marketing degree for SEO. Alternatively, advertising graduates with a science background who use the rigour of science to test the effectiveness of their copywriting. However, as an individual, you will never know it all – multiply your impact by finding synergies with others.

DLO: Where do you see L&D in three to five years' time?

TH: Blended learning! Currently, 30 per cent of our learning is online and 70 per cent classroom based. Developing nations like China and India are already changing this ratio, which is one of the reasons why the UK, from a productivity perspective, needs to shift its mind-set. We can attain certain skills far more effectively on a digital platform. In addition, we need to pay more attention to Just-in-time learning – ensuring that learning is available on the job, in the moment through a variety of platforms, but also through the deliberate creation of stretch assignments. L&D has both the power and responsibility to shift to a more strategic role in influencing the business.

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