VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Paul Matthews was interviewed for the TJ Talks webinar series in 2019

Jo Cook from Training Journal interviews Paul on the topic "Should L&D give managers what they need or what they want?".

TRANSCRIPT

Host: TJ talks, a session about professional practise.

Jo Cook: Professional practise all the way with TJ talks. Welcome everybody, my name is Jo Cook. I am the Deputy Editor of Training Journal. I am your host today. I get to speak to Paul Matthews and I'm very, very pleased about this. We have a number of webinars that we run every month and this is our practise webinar. I think this is a great quote to start us off, from Zig Ziglar who says, "You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great." This is a great way indeed, to start and push forward in what it is that we're doing together. So please use that chat window, to speak to each other and also, to us. You can drop in any links, any ideas, if you've got a blog, or you know somebody else who's written an article on something, please do share it with us. At the bottom of your screen, you have a question and answer pod. If you want to make sure that I've seen your question, please pop it in there and we will address it. We've also got Twitter going on in the background, so if you want to go to #TJtalks, John who's our editor, will be tweeting there on behalf of Training Journal and if you've got any kind of little kind of ideas, little nuggets you want to take away or share, please go and do that as well. This is a public recording, it'll be available on YouTube. I think at this point, it's more than time that we go on Paul Matthews. Now our conversation today, is all around do you give managers what they want, or what they need? But before we get to that, let's just hear a little bit from Paul and find out, exactly what it is he does. So Paul, tell us a little bit about yourself, please. I will just unmute you and here we go.

Paul Matthews: That's a long story. I'm a farm boy from New Zealand originally, if that's what you want to know. But I've been in L&D now for oh 20 years or more, so. Built up a little bit of stuff along the way and written a few books and it's great to talk about it. Love to chat about L&D.

Jo Cook: Thank you very much, Paul. I was gonna paste a link to where your books are, so people can go and have a look at them, if they want to. I've got a couple here. I've got bookmarks as well, there we go, I'll hide that bookmark away, but you can see they're well loved. Paul, tell us a little bit about this concept, this question that we've got here, about do you give managers what they want, or what they need? Because we all know there are managers that come along internal to our organisation, or maybe clients, if we're an external vendor and they say, "We need this." And I always use the example of time management training, because it's a nice broad one. Sometimes, we know that, ha, that's not really the solution to the problem that's being presented. But do we give them the time management training they want, or quite frankly, my opinion is usually, "Let's have a conversation and probably give you "not what you want, but actually what you need." Where are you on that one, Paul?

Paul Matthews: Well actually, I think you always have to give them what they want, which sounds a bit controversial, for the very simple reason that if you don't give them what they want, chances are they're gonna resist what it is you're giving them and perhaps even sabotage it. Now, the issue of course, is making sure that what they want, is actually what they need. So you need to get that alignment between their wants and their needs. So very often, when they come initially, they're gonna want something, because they've thought about it and they think they've come up with a solution. It may or may not be the right solution and often it's not, to be quite honest, when they come and ask for training. So what you've gotta do then, is help make visible to them, their real needs, and then they'll start wanting that instead. Then you're on a winner, because you've got alignment between what they want and what they need. If you just deliver what they need and ignore what they want and if those are different, then there's a problem, because as I said, there's a good chance they'll resist what you're offering. They won't get involved, they won't support it, they may even sabotage it. If you just deliver what they want and it's not what they need, then there's a pretty good chance it's gonna fail anyway. So, the core thing here, is to get the wants and needs aligned. So there's the first job you've gotta do.

Jo Cook: So that's a really interesting point and Andrew in the chat has said, "I'd question whether managers and people in general, "know what they want." What are your thoughts on that one?

Paul Matthews: Well they know what they want. It's just that what they want, may not be what they need. That's because they haven't thought it through in a way that has diagnosed the underlying causes and barriers and so on and so forth. So, I mean, we know what we want. Everybody does, you know? Whatever that is. But it isn't always the best thing for us. That applies to life in general. So, it is about getting and sitting with them, as you said earlier and saying, "Well hang on. Let's dig into this a little bit, to find out what's really going on" and once we figure out what's really going on, then it will become more obvious, what we should be doing. They'll say, "Ah, that's what I want. Forget that thing I used to want, because that's now behind me, I've forgotten about that. Now what I want, is what you've shown me I need, or should be doing." So that's that whole performance consultancy process, if you like, is sitting with them and consulting with them, guiding them, taking them through a process, which will help them, will help I guess expose to them, their real needs and then they're gonna start lining up with what has to happen. Then you're on a winner.

Paul Matthews: I think maybe this is what Andrew was referring to. So Andrew has said in response to what you verbalised, "That they know, the managers, or people know what they want as an outcome and L&D should help them understand the ways to get it." So maybe what the manager is presenting to us is, "I want time management training." Or, insert one of a million other examples here, what they're doing is, they think they know the solution. So they know the outcome, which is, "I want people to better at" whatever it might be, getting in on time, or whatever. But actually it's up to us to help them see the real needs. So to Andrew, if I've got that completely wrong, please let me know in chat. I don't want to put words into your mouth. So I think it's an interesting point you're making there. And, Lisa, sorry Linda Cooper says, "What sort of methods do you use, "to help people identify"--

Paul Matthews: Yeah well like I can give you a simple tool for that. I can talk it through today and if you link up with me on LinkedIn, I can send you a model, or a diagram, as well. But coming back to what Andrew said earlier, it's absolutely right. The outcome is often known, or the desire for the outcome. But even in that circumstance, at that point when you say, "What do you really want? Can you define that in terms of an outcome?" They will often have a fairly woolly idea of what that is. You've still got to dig into that desired outcome and bring it back to say, "Well what changes do we want, in terms of the knowledge, skills and behaviours there are, or the behaviours they are exhibiting and the knowledge and skills they perhaps might need to support those behaviours." So there's still a lot of definition required, very often, is they just have a general sense, as you said, "I want people to arrive on time." Or whatever that is, but what does that really mean in practise and until you've got that figured out, and figured out where the gaps are, do you really know, "Well what intervention might be appropriate?" So that brings us back on to that question of, "Well how do you make visible their needs to them?" In other words, "How do you perform that consultancy process? "What is the process to go through to sit down with them?" I'm very happy to go through there and share with you guys, over the next few minutes, if you like.

Jo Cook: I think that would be really cool, actually Paul, because Davina has asked, "Paul, how do you deal with senior managers though? Sometimes it's very hard to have these conversations."

Paul Matthews: Yeah, I absolutely, yeah. And that depends, that comes back to that question of the brand or credibility of L&D. In other words, if that senior manager just says, "I want some training, get on and do it", and they're senior enough, sometimes you're just gonna have to buckle under and do what they wanna do if you wanna keep your job, quite frankly. I think that's sad, because clearly, they have a poor opinion of L&D, in order to railroad them in that way, into a specific solution. Chances are, they wouldn't say that to their logistics manager, if there was a logistics problem in warehousing, or to their marketing manager and so on and so forth. So why are they taking that stance with L&D and insisting on a specific solution? So, that comes back to the credibility of L&D and that's a whole different conversation I guess, to what we're doing today. But what you will find is, what you don't wanna do is, say to that manager, senior or otherwise, "You're being a very silly person, because you're asking for this stuff and really you're being a bit stupid." That's not gonna endear you to anybody. So what you've gotta do, is kind of say, "Okay" and focus on the outcomes, as somebody mentioned earlier, on, "What are you trying to achieve here? Where are you trying to get to? Let's focus on that." And not kind of mention the training word, or the e-learning word, or anything else and just say, "Let's focus on the outcomes "and have a discussion around that. "Then from there, we'll figure out the best way to get those outcomes for you." So that's how you can have that discussion with that senior manager, without calling them a silly bunny, basically. Because in a sense, that's almost what you're doing, is saying, "Well you're being a bit stupid, because you're asking for something that really isn't gonna solve your problem." But you can't tell them that, overtly, unfortunately.

Jo Cook: No, or you'd have to have a very good relationship.

Paul Matthews: Yeah right. In the right relationship. Absolutely you can, yeah, yeah. So really what you want is a facilitated process, to take that person through, even if they really senior and have all the cards in their hand. If you lead them through a process that helps them kind of come to terms and exposes some stuff they haven't thought through, they'll say, "Ah, okay, yeah." I've had this many times when I've talked to people. They say, "Oh, actually that training I was asking for, probably wouldn't work. Oh okay, well what are we gonna do instead, or how do we modify it?" I've absolutely had that, when you take people through a process that is not challenging their sense of self, or what they've come up with. In other words, it's a face saving exercise and that's how you need to operate with the senior people.

Jo Cook: Yeah, I find it very much about starting where they are. So when they say, "We want training on x." You go, "Okay, make a note, you want this, you want that." And just ask those questions, almost like you're going down that road and then you can open up that conversation. Because if they feel heard, if they feel like you're taking them seriously, then that conversation kind of widens and broadens.

Paul Matthews: Get focused on the outcomes, rather than on the training. Sort of almost don't mention the training. You just say, "We're looking at the outcomes." So you can sort of say, "Yeah we do that kind of thing in L&D, let's focus on the outcomes, to get you what you want." And then have that performance consultancy conversation, and then try and avoid the training word at all in those conversations. Because at that point, it's still too early to be talking about an intervention anyway.

Jo Cook: So tell us a little bit more about that performance consultancy conversation.

Paul Matthews: Yeah, well there's a few stages to it. I mean, normally they will start with an almost ad hoc request, it might even be stopping in the corridor, an email that just says, "Hey I need a one-day time management training", to use your example from earlier. "For this group of people and I need it to happen within a month." Or something like that. So the response to that, you've got to get some kind of sit down conversation with them, at that point. Somehow, you've gotta engineer that. So your first job, is to sell them on the need to sit down. So, you've gotta go back to them and have a brief conversation and basically say, "If we don't touch this problem that you've got, or that you think you've got, for the next six months, what's it gonna cost the organisation?" They probably won't have an answer to that. But you can say, "Well is it 10,000 pounds? Is it 100? Is it a million pounds? You know, what are we talking about here? Let's get some sense of urgency and scale into this conversation." You'll go and narrow it down to say, "Well it's a 100,000 pounds plus or minus 50%." or whatever and they'll say, "Yeah okay, I'm happy with that." So now you've got a sense of scale and also a sense of urgency. At that point, you can either say, "Well that's such a small amount of money, I can talk that through with you, but we've got far more urgent things in L&D to deal with." So that helps you also prioritise. But if it's a significant amount of money, then clearly you've gotta say, "Okay, we need to sit down and solve this and figure out, what our real outcome is, because that's not a trivial amount of money and if we don't sit down and get it right, we're actually gonna both of us, have a real problem, when what we do, doesn't work very well. So it's worth sitting down for an hour, isn't it, to sort this out, okay? And what we have to sort out, when we sit down for an hour, is what's currently happening and what's the gap between what we want to happen instead? Specifically, what's the gap in terms of behaviours? Then in order to generate that behaviour shift, what skills and knowledge might we need to put in place, to underpin that shift in behaviours and then how do we embed that? So that's kind of what we're gonna be talking about, when we sit down in an hour, for that hour." And that might be this week, next week, or whatever. So you've actually put a time in the diary. Then you have that conversation over that hour. It's that whole conversation, even there's words to say, is in that red book that you held up earlier, my second book on capability. So that process is in there. But it'd be very rare for a senior person, or anybody in management, not to sit down with you and have that conversation. It really would be. If they're, okay, I use the word stupid enough not to want to sit down and you probably need to go to your boss and their boss and make them bang some heads together, because starting any kind of learning intervention, without having that sort of scoping initial meeting, is crazy. So what you do, is go through that process and then you go back and again, ask those same questions. "If we don't touch this for six months, what's it worth?" Their thinking will have changed around that, because they've probably thought about it since you had that initial kind of, sell them on the idea of the meeting conversation. Also, they will have thought a bit more about, "Well what behaviours do they want?" Because chances are, they will have said, "Oh they're not doing what I want them to do." "Yeah, but what do you want them to do instead?" They probably haven't even thought about that. So they haven't thought about what good looks like, they've just thought about what bad looks like and they're moving away from what bad looks like, rather than moving towards what good looks like. So you need to shift that perspective, as well. So it's that whole conversation and there's a chart that I use in the process. I'll hold it up here. You can't read it, but I'm very happy to send that chart off to anybody, if they link up with me on LinkedIn, or something, they'll find me and then I'll pass that on. It's about taking them through that chart and the tool I recommend for that, is the cause/effect diagram. You had the Ishikawa or Fishbone diagram and that's a very useful tool, to look at this model and start drilling out, Well where are the real barriers? Where are the real causes that are causing people, not to do the behaviours we want and causing them to do the behaviours we don't want.

Jo Cook: Paul, how often do you find, when you go through that kind of diagram and that conversation, that by the end of it, actually, it's not training at all, that needs to be the solution. It's the environment, or the system.

Paul Matthews: About 80% of the time. There or there abouts. And I've seen research that supports that. Now, it's usually more complex than just, "Is it training, or not?" Chances are, there's going to be a half a dozen or more different things you might have to do, to mash together into a programme, to get the changes you want. There might be some IT changes. There might be some process changes and so on and so forth. But almost certainly, there will be less training than what someone thinks there will be, or need to be. And there may not need to be any at all. It could be done with job support, or job aids. So, once you've had that first conversation, then you've gotta start, at the end of that hour long session, or thereabouts, you then would start brainstorming. Because they'll get to the point we're saying, "Actually there's more going on here, than what I thought there was." That's all you're really trying to do at that point and at that point, they're already shifting from what they wanted as a solution, to the fact that there may be multiple solutions and they need to be stitched together in a way that actually gives them a programme to work through over a period of time. So that's where you need to get them. Then you can do a little bit of a brainstorm with them at the end of that session, "Well given these things we've now identified, that were previously hidden, what can we do about those?" At that point, you would never agree to a solution, because you need to talk to other stakeholders, because they are one stakeholder, but clearly you've got others, who are the delegates, or the employees themselves. Then there might be internal or external customers. There might be more senior people, other departments, all sorts of other stakeholders may be involved. So you need to get that bigger picture of how that fits and meshes with everything else. But what you will do by brainstorming a few kind of nominal or ideas in that meeting, they'll go away and start implementing some of them anyway, because they'll be cheap and almost immediately possible to do and that will start changing what's going on. So effectively they're prodding the system, which will then change in response to those prods and then that will give you more information about how it could be changed and fixed on a more permanent basis. And it may even just fix it, without you know, all those talks and no training. Then they can say, "Thanks very much." And it's done. I mean I've seen that happen, too.

Jo Cook: Yeah and that time and reflection, is really good. So if you've had that conversation, they've put a few things in place, they have time to reflect. Something that I really like about my role when I do these kind of things, is when the managers come to you, they said, "I want x training course." You have that conversation and they go, "Oh good question. Hmm, I haven't thought about it that way." Then having that time in their reflection, means they go and do those things and they reflect on it more and come back to you and then in that follow up conversation, it can be quite different. Actually, this is where we go back to, and in the chat, we've been talking about partnering and about building credibility. Presumably, Paul, that's where some of that comes from. It's not just in the outcome of the training that you deliver. But actually, from those conversations.

Paul Matthews: Yep, that your brand as an L&D practitioner or professional will be greatly enhanced, if the person that you're talking to, suddenly realises that you have the ability to uncover things, they couldn't see. Or help them uncover things they couldn't see, because it's a collaborative consultancy arrangement. They know their business in their business area, you have some processes to apply. Together, you can drill into the existing problem, and come up with, use a diagnostics process and come up with some ways to solve the problem, that neither of you would've been able to do on your own. I think some L&D people, it's sheer hubris to think they can go in and think that they have the answer and that the other person is being stupid. It's gotta be a collaborative approach. This is where you get into things like design centred thinking, when you then start moving into solutions. So, but again, that's beyond what we're talking about today. So this is just the first step in the process, of where do you then go from here, but what you are doing, is setting up in effect, that credibility thing. You're setting your stall out as the person that can manage this process and can put in very valuable things. So it comes back to credibility and reputation of L&D, as well.

Jo Cook: Yeah.

Paul Matthews: Plus of course, you'll end up with situations, where the training that was requested, just never happens, or a very small piece of it does, in which case, you're saving an awful lot of L&D money and resources. I've actually seen people apply this and literally, slashed their L&D budget, overnight virtually, because a lot of the training they were doing, just wasn't doing any good and now they've got a process in place that's auditable in a sense, and then they can say, "We're not doing that anymore, "because here's the proof "that it wasn't and didn't ever work. "Here's what we're gonna do instead." So yeah.

Jo Cook: It's about putting that money and those resources in the right place, isn't it? Where actually it will make some difference. To that point, Michael's asked a great question in chat. Michael says, "How do you deal with managers not following through on embedding the knowledge and the skills and the behaviours, and just going back to the old ways." And I have a feeling Michael, that Paul's answer might be the book.

Paul Matthews: That whole thing on learning transfer. That is very dependent on the culture that's there in the organisation, the expectations of that culture, in terms of how people behave or react, following a training course. In my book, I've quoted some research that drives out 12 levers of learning transfer. If you go and pull all those 12 levers, you will get that embedding and then sustainability in behaviour change. So I would recommend if you're interested in that, to go and have a look at that book. Then, in the back of that book, there's a couple of other books I recommend, as being worth reading in that space. So that'll give you pretty much everything you want, to really get that going well. But I'm happy to have a chat about that at a different place, in a different place and time. So we can do another webinar, we can do learning transfer as opposed to this one. Because that's kind of the other end. What we're talking about here, do you give them what they want or need, is that initial consultancy process. That's at the front end and then you've got delivery of something and then you've got the embedding and measurement stuff that follow that. So, it's all part of the same big longer term process. But all of the bits need to be there and it's like a chain. The weakest link, is the weakest link in the chain. So they've all gotta be strong links, in order for this to generate the right kind of behaviour change and then business results to what you're looking for.

Jo Cook: Yeah and a similar, well not a similar question, but I think probably is a similar answer, will come from Neve. Neve says, "Sometimes after you've unpicked a problem and uncovered a number of solutions, how do you prevent L&D becoming the owner of a bigger problem, because the line managers do see you as the fixer of their issue?"

Paul Matthews: It's allowing them to have a Teflon desk for their problems. You do have to be careful of that. What you don't wanna do is, allow L&D to become the owner of any of those problems, because they are, their execution of strategy problems that are out there and they belong out there in the business and L&D is there to support people to be capable and competent of executing that strategy. The execution of strategy itself, is a business issue and should stay as a problem in the business space. So I never like to see L&D kind of allowing themselves to become owners of those problems, anymore than a therapist would allow themselves to become the owner of a problem that someone, like a phobia that someone walked in the door with. It just doesn't make any sense. Or the doctor taking over your broken leg. You know that's just, it doesn't happen and there's no point. Because if the doctor took on your broken leg, they can't heal it, because it's your leg. So it's the same issue. The problem has to stay with the problem holder and that must be apparent through that performance consultancy process. You can make sure that happens and there's some stuff in my book about that, as well, the red book. But it's a really good question. Part of that too, is you will, when you then start doing the learning interventions, whatever form those may take and if they take a training form about learning transfer, some of the levers that you would need to pull, those 12 levers are involving the manager and their role in that process. Again, that's an ownership role.

Jo Cook: Well Paul, thank you for all of that. You've answered some great questions from everybody, with some great answers. We've come off webcam now, but Paul is not going anywhere, because what we are doing, is just moving into a really quick reflection piece. So there's another chat pod on this screen for you, kind of in the main area of the screen. From the conversation today, what is that you're going to actually do? So we've had some great questions from you, some great answers from Paul. Let's just think about, Well what are we gonna put into place? Is it that we're going to look up learning transfer in more detail? Is it that we're going to go and research performance consulting? You know, just tell us, "What is it that you're thinking about now, in terms of what you can go and do?" I think there's been a great conversation in the chat window, as well, about everything that's been going on. I've pasted links in to Paul's books, also to Paul on LinkedIn, as well. So that if you want to go and get that diagram that Paul highlighted, you can go and message him and Eva, who works with Paul, has also put her email address in the chat window, so if you want anything, you can also email Eva direct, if you want to. Of course, Paul also does a load of blogs for us on the Training Journal site. So you can always go to trainingjournal.com and have a look at his blogs, always something interesting and useful to say. So what are some of the things that we'll do after this conversation? Devina says, “To locate the diagram that Paul mentioned.” So if you just email Eva, you'll be able to do that, Devina. Angie says, "Will reflect through a few blog posts. One tomorrow about lack of ignorance, I think." Oh interesting. Now please do keep typing, I'm just going to move the chat window to the top right hand corner, but if you want to share some more, please do. Natalie says, "Exploring more about performance consultancy." Linda says, "I'll link in with Paul and that was sounding good." Paul, a big thank you to you. What's your really super quick summary of the presentation today?

Paul Matthews: I think it's where we started. It's about that alignment of wants and needs. There has to be, those have to be aligned, when you're starting a learning intervention, because otherwise, it's just go to hell in a hand basket, basically. You've gotta get that right and all of the different stakeholders lined up, so what they want, is what's being delivered and what's being delivered, is what they need.

Jo Cook: Wonderful. Thank you, Paul, so much for being here today. I will put into the chat window a link to Paul's website, as well, People Alchemy. So thank you, Paul, on behalf of everybody here and at Training Journal, that was really awesome. As we said, all our webinars are recorded, they're all available online. And you'll be able to register for our next webinar, as well. We have Laura Overton. You probably all know Laura Overton, previously of Towards Maturity and a speaker author, facilitator, analyst and we're talking culture with Laura. So really looking forward to that one. So please do come along in the future, if you want to go and share any of the conversation nuggets. Anything that you've learned today, or picked up, please go and do so on #TJtalks and you can go and follow Training Journal and Lightbulb Jo and People Alchemy and find all of the great conversations on there. So thank you, everybody, for coming along. Really great time that we had today and hopefully...

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