



What to Expect from Your Professional Network

Episode #22

with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

[00:00:00] **Joanne Bentley:** Hello, and welcome to the Leaders in Learning Design podcast by Blue Consulting and Resourcing. The place to get up to the minute information for cutting age learning design. So, listeners, last time we were talking with Ardell about how she values her professional network. And we all know that that's why we formed BCR. Graham, and I are really committed to helping others and bringing them in and helping them to be successful.

And as independent consultants, that can be quite challenging, can't it Graham?

[00:00:44] **Graham Edmondson:** I think it can. Obviously when you first step out as it were in inside the big wide world, you suddenly realize kind of what you're missing, what you had and maybe what you were taking for granted.

If you were part of an organization or if you were perhaps a consultant working with a consulting company, you know, you have all kinds of benefits like, you know, a ready-made network, you have information provided to you and places to go to find what you need to know. You have that feeling if you like to just like camaraderie and then suddenly, boom, bang. You don't have that anymore.

[00:01:24] **Joanne Bentley:** It can be a real challenge. Tell me about your experience with a network in the UK. How did that work out for you?

[00:01:32] **Graham Edmondson:** Well, I was or have been part of what I think was a really successful network for a number of years. And that's really driving some of the thinking and things we're going to talk about today because this network in Europe that I was part of, it actually came about originally with a group of people who all came out of Price Waterhouse Coopers consulting.

At the time there was a headcount reduction exercise. So, they were letting a lot of people go and a lot of people banded together as they went to saying, "Hey, we can do stuff. You know?" They decided to form a network of PWC alumni and the network -- now this is going back a number of years.

But I think, when I say a network -- It was actually back in the day when people used to meet each other. So, we physically had like a monthly meeting when we would physically get together. That really was the idea, that as a group of people, we could actually share business leads and opportunities. And I know a number of people in that network who never worked outside of that network.

What I mean is all their work came to them through the network, because it was a group of people who had initially all worked for the same organization. So you knew that were all skilled that were all trained in certain disciplines and professional behaviors, et cetera. We had great confidence in everybody.

And then suddenly you were working on your own. Yet leveraging this network to help you. And it grew, and it grew beyond just the core who went out, we added all kinds of other, originally ex-PWC people. Then we let a few ex-EY (Ernst & Young) people come in and they were okay. You know? And then we had a view ex Accenture people, and they were equally, okay.

So, it began to, we began to think this isn't just about ex-PWC. This is about, highly qualified, and in that case, people had to be recommended to join the network. So, but it was it, I think it was just really, really effective. I certainly found it when I was living and working predominantly in Europe, I found it literally invaluable.

[00:03:56] **Joanne Bentley:** That's really helpful. It reminds me a little of the network that I belonged to when I went to graduate school. My professors did a lot of extra contractual work, and they give the top graduate students [opportunities] and found them projects to work on. There wasn't always a lot of work within the university system for graduate students and certainly not work that paid well.

So, we loved working on these projects and that's where I got my taste for building a network, working with people that I've worked with before, people that I had confidence in and working on interesting projects. And a lot of the work that we discovered was where we went after in a particular area, in a particular industry, in a particular location that we wanted to work in.

So, we were always looking for something really cool to do that challenged us, that pushed us and that helped us to really play to our strengths.

[00:05:03] **Graham Edmondson:** Yeah. And that “looking” it's actually quite a hard job if you're just looking on your own on behalf of yourself. But if you've got a network of people who are connected and that are effectively looking for themselves, but also other things that could help other people and sharing those things.

I guess that's what'd you call a gearing or leverage, you know, the fact that suddenly you got 30 pairs of eyes or 50 pairs of eyes looking, not just your own. For me it's the real advantage or benefit that our network can bring. If you can connect people in that kind of way. To kind of, I guess, develop that almost collective responsibility, you know, that people feel responsible for helping each other because they know they themselves are going to get help.

So, it becomes a kind of reciprocal kind of deal. That's how I've seen it work really, really effectively.

[00:06:02] **Joanne Bentley:** I'd have to agree. You have to have a certain degree of trust that your review of someone else's proposal may or may not lead directly to you being on that project, but their help when you are looking at work is going to be there.

You've invested into the network and now it's paying dividends for you. I worked on a lot of really interesting projects that other people found. And I had confidence that they would help me out when I found projects and that I was looking for resources or feedback or reviews. It was just really a congenial place to invest and to think about cool stuff in our field. And that's not always available within a corporate setting. So, I think a network can add a real boost to your creativity and a real boost to true friendships because people that survive in a network only do so because they're willing to invest ahead of time in others.

And they're willing to bring them in and to share what they have with others. And it's not always the case in industry.

[00:07:08] **Graham Edmondson:** Yeah. No, absolutely not. And when you talk about sharing, I mean, are you literally talking about somebody that like yourself, myself, any member of the network saying to that network? Hey, I'm working on something, a topic here.

I need you to give me any inspiration, perhaps maybe share even a deliverable from your own experience or even just reviews something that I've done. Just reaching out for that literally for that kind of help and assistance. Have you seen that work in reality?

[00:07:45] **Joanne Bentley:** I have. In fact, one of the folks in the BCR network shared in our platform that they were doing some work in Europe and in the UK.

And I said, well, let's set up 20 minutes, we'll have a quick coffee virtually. And chit-chat about how did you get the project? What kind of work is it? Is it fun work to do? Would you recommend it to others? And how do we get another project like this started? And it was a really good conversation. I would love to work in Europe.

I'd love to be able to travel to the UK or do it virtually. How do I begin that connection? I've worked in lots of places. I've worked in Egypt, worked in Australia, worked in New Zealand, all across the Pacific and a lot of the US. But I haven't had a project in the UK. So, tell me how you got there. What did you do?

If I wrote something, would you have a look at it? And he was supportive, really sharing, volunteered right from the get-go anything you need. I'd be happy to review. Those sorts of connections, I mean, I wasn't paying for his time to chat to me and probably there's no money up front to be able to pay for him to review.

But if I get a project, he was going to be top of my list to bring him in and to participate or at least to offer he may have other work. So that kind of thing, he knows that that investment of his time is going to pay dividends because you've worked up social capital.

[00:09:19] **Graham Edmondson:** And I think that's what you're looking for in a network.

I mean, it only really works when people are prepared to put something in, in the anticipation that they will ultimately get something out. So, I think that's the reality of it. And I think, you know, the trick is to make it as easy as possible for people to be part of and to use. And I think that idea of you do actual help on projects is something that I've certainly seen happen.

You know in situations in the network I was describing in situations I would be chasing some work with a client and maybe, I don't know, an example, I can't really think of a specific one off the top of my head, but for example, you know, maybe they wanted, as some sales training, I could reach out to that network and say, Hey, I've been asked to put together a basic sales training workshop. Has anybody done something like that? Or does anybody know where I could go and look for something to get me started? And those kinds of practical help things I think are really useful for everybody to be able to have a group of people that they can just turn to, to say I don't know that I've got anything here is anybody have, and people were absolutely willing.

I mean, people treat information with respect and, treat it very discreetly. And of course, you know, debrand it and presented in a way that's appropriate. Nobody's ripping anybody else off, but it's helping people by being able to leverage other people's knowledge. And even concrete deliverables, things that can really, really help.

[00:10:58] **Joanne Bentley:** Well, just the other day I was working on a project and one of my colleagues at BCR reached out and said, hey, I haven't done a high-level design in a long time. Can you share the last one you did so that we're working from current resources. They're in the network and absolutely here's the document -- stripping out, you know, client details that aren't appropriate to share -- but those kinds of things, where you get a massive step forward when you're able to leverage off of other people's work.

And they're sharing in a way that expects that that investment will pay a dividend in the future to them, when they have something that they could share [with you].

[00:11:38] **Graham Edmondson:** Quid pro quo, isn't it? You know, you prepared to do it and therefore you prepare to or hope to benefit from subsequently yourself.

I'll be honest, Joanne. I think for me, the biggest benefit to anybody is the sale opportunity. What I mean is the opportunity to find work. And if people can begin to share opportunities that they become aware. Then obviously many of us can benefit from that. We can benefit from it because we'll put ourselves forward and that's a place if you like for us to find work.

And that happens a lot. Doesn't it to any independent contractor and independent consultant working on their own in a client will form these relationships. And the client will from time to time say, Joanne. Do you do anything about diversity for example? They will ask you because they get to have confidence in you.

They'll ask you for, to look at things that may not be in your immediate skillset. It may be something that you think in truth. Maybe. I don't know that topic well enough to, to offer my help. So maybe it's quite frankly, maybe in your area, but you're just frankly too busy. You haven't got the capacity. So, in any situation, when you hear those kinds of opportunities, those are kinds of things that you can bring into a network.

You can literally say, I may not be the best person to speak to about that, but I know somebody who does know, or I've gotten a group of people that I work with, some of whom may have a bit more insights or a bit more capacity or whatever. And I think there's a real benefit there because the client is going to respond positively to that because. Oh, so, Joanne is not just working as Joanne Bentley. She's working as part of an extended group of people. That's interesting. So that, that's how, certainly in the example I was using, it's how the network got a really good reputation. Because you would say, I can't necessarily help myself, but I know someone who can. Let me get back to you on that.

And they throw that opportunity in the network and a great person is able to step forward and they themselves become chargeable in that kind of situation. That's how it's really worked for getting and finding these work opportunities.

[00:14:11] **Joanne Bentley:** It requires you to have quite a lot of confidence in yourself and your own skills and have confidence in others.

If you come to the network with a very competitive attitude, we are always trying to one up or rip off other people, you very quickly find yourself kicked out of any network. So, you've got to be a good person seeking really to help. To survive in the network because the network can, I don't want to say be brutal, but they can be quite honest where if you're not contributing and you're just a taker, an energy vampire from the system don't be surprised if you get kicked out.

[00:14:56] **Graham Edmondson:** And that's what I was saying. What we're going to explain a little bit more about here is what we are doing in the United States here in creating a predominantly US based network of L&D (Learning & Development) professionals. To do just like what we're describing here. It's going to be free to join, but it's not like anybody can join.

It's a process of application, that sounds maybe a little bit over the top, but we are aiming to attract people of the caliber necessary. Because the strength of the network, the right caliber of people with L&D professional skills that are in demand and that can be leveraged and used and just the right kind of people.

So, I think that's quite important. You've got to have that confidence in the network and the brand of the network is dependent on that. So, I think that's really, really important.

[00:15:53] **Joanne Bentley:** I do too. And I think it could show up in a variety of different ways.

- A. So, if you're relatively new in the field, you might have a lot of academic credentials and project work that you've done. You'd have a portfolio, maybe not as robust as someone who has been working in the field for a while, but we would expect that you would come in and be able to demonstrate those skills in some visible way.
- B. Or perhaps you don't have a lot of credentials, maybe you've worked in the industry, and you came in through an associated field, but you have a lot of experience and a lot of passion. That's going to show up in your portfolio and on your resume in different ways.

Both are equally valid, but it is about having confidence in your skills and being able to describe how you can add value to the network.

[00:16:41] **Graham Edmondson:** And I know I'm obviously really focused on this, but I think it's a work finding opportunity and it's a revenue generating opportunity.

Cause I think we should explain to people that when people find the kind of opportunities that we're talking about here, things that they think are real prospects or opportunities for somebody to get chargeable. We will actually remunerate people for bringing those kinds of opportunities to the network.

If BCR is, if there's network resources, those opportunities then we'll pay a commission to people who find those. So, we're looking for people to share things are opportunities that they may just find advertise. I dunno, LinkedIn, and those kinds of places they're looking at it. Oh, that's quite interesting, but not for me, but it might be useful for the network.

We can share those on the network, but also, and I think perhaps most importantly, those things that aren't appearing on, LinkedIn, those things that they become aware of within their client relationships, which we'll call BCR opportunities, where you bring that opportunity into the network and we can resource it through the network and resource it potentially as a BCR project for which we will pay the originator a very healthy commission and obviously work out how best to resource a project like that. How the individual who brings that opportunity can play a part in that relationship with us as well as the resource who potentially could do the work. So, it's a real attractive proposition for people to make additional funds, make additional revenue through the network, as well as just find themselves work opportunities through the network.

You can find a link on the BCR website to the network, or you can find it through the URL BCRconnect.net.

[00:19:07] **Joanne Bentley:** Listeners, you've been listening to the Leaders in Learning Design podcast by Blue Consulting and Resourcing, a regular podcast for cutting edge learning design.

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