

Will the real modern learner please stand up?

BY MICHELLE HOWIE

Careers expos are interesting events. I attended one in 2021 and whilst I don't think it was an optimal experience for all the teens milling around, I sure had a life-changing experience at the age of 41.

As I browsed the stands, I ended up talking to a man from NZMA, a New Zealand vocational training provider, part of the Australasian UP Education group. He told me about a three-step model they use to onboard new students. He also said that – here comes the life-changing part – the model had radically altered the way their organisation talked internally about student support and connecting back to their core purpose.



The model goes like this:

- 01** Learn to learn
- 02** Learn to earn
- 03** Learn more to earn more.

Simple, well-worded, inarguable, timeless.

This model was so relatable to the contract work that had led me to be at a careers expo for teens. In my capacity as a youth-to-employment advisor, I have mentioned this story widely ever since. I hear it's quite well known in education circles, but what else does this model have to offer? Can we extend it beyond enrolled students at a training college? And how have I applied it personally?

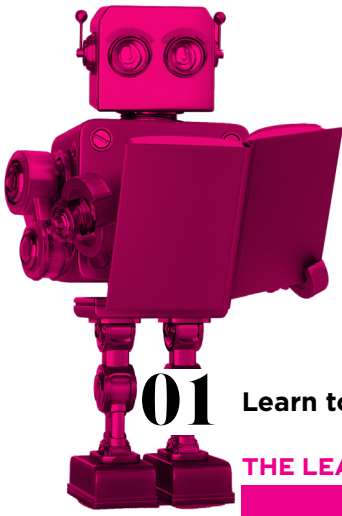
FINDING PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

One of the places it has been helpful for me is in the home. Like many working parents, I spent a fair amount of 2020/2021 arguing with our two primary-school-aged sons about home-based school activities. Sharing this model with them, particularly step one, helped position the value of school and education in their young lives. We now talk about what schoolwork might be helping them to learn about learning, not just focus on completing the exercises (although they still just want to do that – as quickly as possible!).

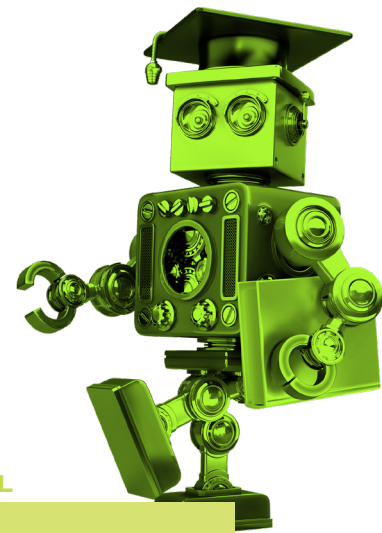
I've recently been reflecting on whether this model is a sequential ladder, moving us from a beginning to an end, or a spiral where steps one to three repeat in a snake-eats-tail cycle. The latter seems more suited to today's landscape of multiple career movements over our working lives.

Thinking about myself as the main character in all three stages, this model has plenty to offer in terms of reflection. There are many locations in my own life map where I am still learning to learn. I'm not done with step one after all! Thinking back over six years of self-employment, there have been many occasions where I have had to learn how to earn in a new way. I've worked on a lot of different contracts with my clients – university did not prepare me for what I do now! Looking ahead, if I want to optimise my earning potential, there are always ways in which I can learn more in order to transfer greater value to my clients.

This model works for me just as well as it works for a freshly enrolled trainee hairdresser. This model also holds powerful opportunities for us to reflect as L&D professionals on the learners we are connecting with at each stage of the model. A learner is just another way of saying workshop participant, coachee or training student.



Let's explore the three components of this model through personas or archetypes, both from the learner and the L&D professional perspective. Take a look at how I have framed the three archetypes below and ask yourself which of the roles you can relate to – and why?



01 Learn to learn

THE LEARNER

Who am I?	<p>The Child I am a natural learner; I always will be. I will get stuck at times and feel uncomfortable.</p>
What might I want to learn about?	<p>Myself! Who am I? What are my strengths? How do I work at my best? Learning preferences: What do I find easy to learn? Am I visual, auditory or kinaesthetic in my learning? Strategies: What models or tools suit me and the way I think? How can I optimise the tools around me for greater success?</p>
What do I need?	<p>From the L&D professional, I need patience, encouragement and empowerment while I figure this out.</p>
What would hinder me?	<p>Directive, forceful language that tells me the answers before I've worked it out myself.</p>

THE L&D PROFESSIONAL

<p>The Parent I am here to clear the path while you naturally learn and progress, as you are designed to.</p>
<p>I might be trained and skilled in personality profiling, life coaching, career development. Deepening my knowledge, skills and experience in these areas will benefit my learners. I might want to stay up to date on workplaces trends, tools and practices that help people feel productive and engaged in their work.</p>
<p>I offer the learner space, guideposts, celebration, faith. I may need a space of my own to reflect and debrief the work I do. A coach or supervisor could be helpful.</p>
<p>I would find time pressures or output expectations difficult. This work is about relationships and can take time to yield results.</p>

02 Learn to learn

THE LEARNER

Who am I?	<p>The Apprentice I want to earn, that's why I learn. Earning a living is my motivation, that's why I need to learn from you. I recognise that you have information and experience I need to access.</p>
What might I want to learn about?	<p>Beyond the expertise I am learning, I want to know about careers and options in my future, once I have learnt what I need to know. I want to know how to succeed and progress in this learning – so I might need to revisit some learning strategies.</p>
What do I need?	<p>I need to see a connection between what I am learning and how it will become earning. I need encouragement and belief, but I need to be kept on track as well.</p>
What would hinder me?	<p>I would be hindered by vague, disconnected teaching that does not remind me about the way I can earn in the future.</p>

THE L&D PROFESSIONAL

<p>The Master Builder I am here to teach, train or coach you about how to earn a living. I have a knowledge or skill set that you don't yet fully understand, but I am willing to teach it to you. I might be a trainer, workshop facilitator, or assessor.</p>
<p>I might want to learn about optimising the transfer of knowledge and skill to a student or a group in a way that works for them. I might need to learn about the industries and careers that learners will want to access after I have worked with them.</p>
<p>I need to be relevant and informed about careers in my area of expertise. I need to be meticulous in preparing the learner for success in this area.</p>
<p>Pressure to teach more broadly than the expertise or skillset I hold would dilute my impact on a learner. If a learner needs more than I offer, someone else needs to step in.</p>

03 Learn more to earn more

	THE LEARNER	THE L&D PROFESSIONAL
Who am I?	<p>The Seeker I am aiming higher than my current state; I am willing to put in the work to earn more. I am dissatisfied in some way. I am naturally ambitious or intensely curious.</p>	<p>The Sage I might be a speaker, coach, writer or facilitator. I inspire others with stories, examples and my own life experience. I love to communicate and articulate wisdom in ways that people can access it.</p>
What might I want to learn about?	<p>I want to broaden my gaze, consider new perspectives and ideas. I want to learn about new pathways as well as successful people and what they did to achieve their goals. I want to study techniques, strategies and methods that can be monetised or that can increase my value to employers.</p>	<p>I might want to learn more about how to help people convert everything they know and understand into income. I may want to hone my storytelling. I may be seen as an inspiration, but I actually know that my client can also achieve whatever they desire. I might want to learn more about how to stay true to this principle and avoid ego and arrogance.</p>
What do I need?	<p>I need to be inspired and enlightened to make a change in my life. I need to see a clear way to convert this extra learning into earning. I need someone to listen deeply to what is motivating me to seek more – and tell me what they hear.</p>	<p>I need to know what I offer and not bend to everyone's wishes. I need to constantly stay in my wise zone and decline to step out of it. I need self-compassion for when I get things wrong.</p>
What would hinder me?	<p>I would be hindered by someone who just wants to please me or who isn't courageous enough to challenge my false steps on this journey.</p>	<p>I would be hindered by the pressure to say what people want to hear and meet expectations from clients that are not aligned with my core values.</p>

The learning/earning model has given me so many rich insights in less than a year.

Professionally, I believe we cannot avoid the deep work of asking who we are serving and what they need from us in the moment. By using this model, I have located myself in different roles with each of my clients – and also seen when to shift gears and move on to a new archetype. So helpful!

Perhaps there is one thing that needs to be amended: step four is missing and it should read, 'Repeat steps 1-3 endlessly'. I hope you also enjoy the wisdom in this model.



MICHELLE HOWIE

Michelle Howie works with leaders, individuals, and organisations in New Zealand. As a facilitator and coach, Michelle creates spaces where people can hear their own voice and speak honestly. She is a writer, inflicting her words on innocent readers as she tries to make sense of the world. Behind all of Michelle's work is a rock-solid knowledge that we are equipped to handle life – and that from this place of knowing, life can be lived with more ease, more laughter, more creativity and lots of practical action! Read more at www.michellehowie.com or contact michelle@michellehowie.com.