

TLX Xchange FORUM Podcast with Karen Sinotte, Robert Walker, Erin Schieman, and Patricia C. Robinson

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[Patricia Robinson:] Hi, everyone. I am Patricia Robinson, faculty facilitator with the TLX. Welcome to another episode of Xchange Forum in which I interview our faculty colleagues from across the college. Today I'm joined by three faculty members from the Centre for Business. So let's get started with some brief introductions.

[Karen Sinotte:] I'm Karen Sinotte and I teach in the School of Business, School of Management. I'm in office number 705 with my two colleagues today.

[Robert Walker:] And I'm Robert Walker. I'm also at the Centre for Business teaching in the finance side of things. And I'm a roomie with my two colleagues.

[Erin Schieman:] My name's Erin Schieman. I also teach in the Centre for Business. I teach accounting and tax and yes, here as well with my colleagues from the famous room 705.

[Patricia Robinson:] Great. So, thank you, Karen, Robert, and Erin, for joining me today. I really appreciate your time. And so, it seems like the three of you have been working quite closely over or during this pandemic. So, can you tell us a little bit about that and how that all began or how that happened?

[Erin Schieman:] Well, as we stated a minute ago, we're officemates in the normal times. So hopefully one day again. And we do teach, we all teach in the same Centre for Business, but we all teach pretty different courses. So, it's kind of nice to bounce ideas off each other just with respect to teaching. And so, when this all started, Karen had suggested that we keep a weekly meeting started. So, we've been meeting every Tuesday at 3:30. We can't always all make it every week, but it's been really great to have that opportunity to share ideas and sort of feel connected back to our office at the college.

[Patricia Robinson:] That's great.

[Robert Walker:] Yeah, I think that in a lot of ways, it's kind of like being regular roommates. You, at the beginning of the of the arrangement, everybody is very focused on being professional and businesslike and sticking to the nitty, and all that kind of thing. But gradually, over time, as you all get to know each other and learn about each other, you become a little more flexible in how we all get along. And some of us like plants, some of us like other things. And, you know, it all turns out well.

[Karen Sinotte:] And I think it's fun that to share not just business stories, but also our personal stories, because the lives intertwine as we listen to each other on the phone with the families before, in the normal times. And it's funny how even though we didn't see each other every day in the week, that you do miss that social connection.

[Patricia Robinson:] So, Karen, are you saying that you would eavesdrop on your roomies before the pandemic?

[Karen Sinotte:] I'm not sure that it was eavesdropping because our desks are on top of each other.

[Erin Schieman:] Some of us talk kind of loud.

[Robert Walker:] Like I said, we're all getting to know each other, right?

[Patricia Robinson:] Yeah.

[Erin Schieman:] And I actually think it's the fact that we didn't see each other every single day that made us get along better. That's why we have remained friends this long, because we don't get too much of each other, I don't think.

[Karen Sinotte:] And surprising the commonalities of sisters and our, you know, the family dramas that make us more connected. And then you can relate a lot of other things that are happening in the work life. And Robert and I did our, you know, full time faculty—

[Erin Schieman:] Faculty Academy.

[Karen Sinotte:] Faculty Academy together. We went camping and everything.

[Erin Schieman:] What?

[Robert Walker:] So, Patty, there is a past history going back in time, right. So, this is the evolution of where we've been.

[Erin Schieman:] Wait a minute. You guys got to go camping?

[Karen Sinotte:] Well, I don't know, just some—

[Erin Schieman:] I never got to do that. Aw man.

[Karen Sinotte:] Well, they cancelled it your time —

[Erin Schieman:] I guess so. A whole year.

[Patricia Robinson:] So I just wanted to go and I'm going to ask you some questions here. So, I do have another question for you. So, you know, as you just described, you do spend, you meet once a week now over Teams. And how would you say that you've been a support for one another? So, besides kind of getting to know each other, what have been some other ways that you've supported each other?

[Erin Schieman:] -- I think that it's been nice to have, like, you kind of lose that water cooler aspect of work because we're all at home. So, there are times when we meet at 3:30 on a Tuesday and we talk about American politics or how our families are coping, how our sisters are doing as Karen mentioned. And then there's other times when we get on more work-related topics like how to engage students in online learning, how to use the technology. Karen's our resident expert because she's been teaching online longer than I have anyway. So, she's always the right person to ask when you have a question about the technology. So, both of those things have been helpful. Just the interaction with each other on just casual topics, but also actually talking about work and how to do it more effectively in these very difficult times.

[Karen Sinotte:] And I think that we're like our own little learning circle in that even though the question starts with being about, perhaps about Blackboard and technology, it's really about how can we adapt an assignment? So, Erin's teaching an accounting course and I'm teaching business courses. But how to -- but we have a lot of similarity in how we can translate an assignment within the limitations of what Blackboard is. So, it's not really the technology. It's more like what's the experience look like for the students and how can we create ways to set it up so that it's easier to grade and easier to update? So, we share ideas of how to adapt to the technology.

[Robert Walker:] Yeah, I think from my perspective, that's true, too. And when I think about it, I think we're all kind of evolving. And not only that, we're kind of evolving on the go in real time. And in a lot of cases, you don't have time to investigate or go to courses or do all these other things that we would normally do in other situations. So now we're kind of relying on each other to find out, you know, Karen, what do you finding in your classes? What's going on there? Erin, what are you doing over here? And it kind of helps us understand there's some flexibility in how we can all deal with these things.

[Patricia Robinson:] Right. So, you're all a resource for each other and sharing what you know and helping each other improve your work.

[Robert Walker:] Absolutely.

[Patricia Robinson:] So that's great again because you can, you know, share what you know with each other. And I'm just wondering, I just want to ask another question. So, you know, there's been lots of changes in this last year or so. So, what might be some things that, you know, once we actually get back to being in the classroom, what do you think are some things that you could bring back into your class that perhaps you didn't do before? So based on what you've learnt from each other and what you've been learning from teaching fully online, you know, what could be some of those things that you would want to bring back into your face to face classroom when that happens, when we come back to that?

[Robert Walker:] Oh, sorry.

[Erin Schieman:] I was just going to say I might try this idea of the flipped classroom, which I've heard a lot about in the past, a little bit. And I've sort of been experimenting with it this semester because I have a number of sections of the same course. So, I've organized it in a certain way where there's a lecture that's recorded for one of those sections ahead of time. So all of my interactions with them have been after they've already, allegedly, consumed all of the content and done some of the questions on their own. So, when they come to me, it's a lot more casual and fluid and it allows for a lot more interactivity, which is really difficult in online, I'm finding anyway. So I'm thinking about how amazing it might actually be in class together to work the classes that way just because it's just so much easier to be interactive when you're face to face. So that's something I think I might try when we -- in the after-COVID. Whenever that happens.

[Karen Sinotte:] And I'm thinking that, I used Padlet a couple of times before in some activities on campus, but then even more so going online, like I'm totally on board with paperless activities, and integrating technology within the classroom. So, I think I'll continue to use the

Padlet instead of using activities on the board because it makes it easier to save the conversations, and beyond the beyond the classroom.

[Erin Schieman:] And we'll work on Robert with his piles of paper. Maybe one day we'll get him on Padlet.

[Robert Walker:] Well, I'll go on a different tack on this one. And the thing that I'm thinking about, Patty, is we talk with this, with each passing week or semester that we go at this, I'm beginning to think about what it's actually going to be like to go back into the classroom, right? And in a lot of ways, it's going to seem perhaps just as stressful to do that as it was to leave the classroom to do this. So, it'll be kind of interesting. It'll be an interesting twist to see what -- I've haven't really thought of what specifically I would do. But I think it's the process of learning and perhaps unlearning some things and constantly evolving going forward. So, it'll be an interesting experience to go back into the classroom.

[Erin Schieman:] Like public service announcement: Do not wear your pajamas when we go back, okay, guys?

[Patricia Robinson:] Definitely not. And, but Robert, I think you brought up a good point there. Because, you know, all the learning that you've been doing over this last year, you know, and then going back into a classroom, which, you know, you have so many memories of what you used to do there. So how can you integrate, you know, or the challenge could be, all the things that you've learnt now, what you do online, how can you integrate that into your face-to-face teaching? So, I think it's good that you're starting to think about that now because, I mean, there might be some things that you're like, "Yeah, this is going to be easy to do." And other things where you're like, "You know what? Actually, I'm not going to do what I used to do", right? Or this does work better in the classroom? So, you know, definitely it's going to be a bit of a trial and error, I guess, when we go back.

[Robert Walker:] I think so.

[Karen Sinotte:] I think we'll all be complaining about having to be back on campus.

[Erin Schieman:] Depends which ones of us are extroverts. I can't wait. I need to be around people. I miss it a lot.

[Patricia Robinson:] So, I've got another question. So, you know, you've talked a little bit already about what you've been learning from each other, you know and how you've been helping each other. And you talked about meeting with each other every week. So, can you share a little bit more about what else you've learnt from each other?

[Erin Schieman:] I don't know. You go.

[Robert Walker:] Okay, yeah. I guess the big thing for me, Patty, is this whole idea of kind of this group learning environment we've created. Having the ability even, you know, outside of our normal meeting time to communicate and to use each other as sounding boards for trying new things. You know, do you think this will work? I just tried this, and it was a complete bust, any idea why? Or where can I find resources that could come up that would be helpful? All that kind of thing. The idea of learning in real time and using the camaraderie to reduce stress as we've ploughed through this experience.

[Patricia Robinson:] Right. So, you're not, you're not alone in this experience. Right. You've got two other people who can share that with you.

[Robert Walker:] -- Pretty much.

[Erin Schieman:] I think another, if I can tack onto that, is there's plenty of resources available in the college for all kinds of training on Blackboard and on many of the other technologies and things that we use. But sometimes it's, especially at the beginning of all this, it was so overwhelming, that you don't always have an hour or two hours to set aside, to go through a structured course on how to do something. And so, to be able to just put out a quick email or ask in the meetings to say, "Have you guys ever dealt with this?" And, "Can you give me, like, you know, the five second rundown or show me a website that will walk me through it or a five-minute YouTube video?" So that I found at least points you in the right direction. And sometimes the answer is, "Sign on to Cornerstone and do the one-hour long training course," which is fine. But that has been immensely helpful, and just in terms of like being able to do it efficiently.

[Karen Sinotte:] -- Also I think there's a lot of loneliness, right? Because you don't know who's going to answer. And one of the things that I really appreciate, Robert and Erin, is that, you know, if you send out an email, you'll always get an answer back.

[Patricia Robinson:] Nice.

[Karen Sinotte:] Right? So there's always, you know that there's someone there.

[Robert Walker:] -- Right?

[Patricia Robinson:] Nice. And it helps that you have this prior history with each other, and you've developed those connections with each other. That's great. So, my next question. What would you say that you've learnt about yourself over this past almost year already? Erin?

[Robert Walker:] I -- Okay.

[Patricia Robinson:] Or Robert.

[Robert Walker:] Okay, I can start off on that one. I think that what I've learnt is that to some extent we're all really creatures of habit. And sometimes we, over a period of time, we kind of fall into patterns and maybe even ruts. What I've learnt about this experience, this whole virtual learning thing is, you know, you do have the ability to adapt, and you can try and work smarter. So, it's not something that can't be overcome. It's just a matter of how you kind of work through the process.

[Karen Sinotte:] And I like that we're all very different and as a result, I think we're taking some of the good, good practices from each other and applying that. So, I'm usually like a really process person and it's black and white. And Erin's a bit -- takes in more of the story. And Robert's just, he's never, I've never seen him in a kerfuffle, right? Like, he's just very, very calming.

[Robert Walker:] Just keep my head down and keep going.

[Karen Sinotte:] --Keep going. Right. You've always been that way. And so, it's kind of balanced. It balances us out, right? In that some soft, some unflappable and lighten up on the procedures, Karen, a bit.

[Erin Schieman:] Yeah. At the beginning of this whole thing, I definitely had, did not have a lot of faith. It was really hard when we shut down all of a sudden and we had like a week turn around to figure out how to deliver things online, which I had never done before. And I thought, I'm never going to be able to do this. But as Robert sort of alluded to, you know, we can adapt, and it feels so much more manageable now. I'm so much more confident in the teaching that I'm doing now. I guess I should apologize to the students out there from last March. Maybe we all should.

[Robert Walker:] We all should.

[Erin Schieman:] But yeah. So, yeah, it just gives me a lot of hope and kind of confidence that, you know, I can adapt and over, because I still have many years left at this career. So that part. And to have the support of your colleagues is just, like, it's hard to beat that. It really is. It allows you to grow and it allows you to mess up sometimes and they're always there anyway even when you do something stupid. So that has been -- they've helped me learn that about myself, I guess.

[Patricia Robinson:] So it sounds like I mean, it sounds pretty amazing the type of, you know, kind of network that you've created. And I'm hearing a few different things when you're saying this. So, you know, one of the like, I guess, advice for another group of people, you know, if they want to make kind of a learning circle or make connections with someone, try to find people who are different from you. Right? So that you can kind of balance each other out. So that perhaps might be a tip. And then just this, you know, being flexible, forgiving yourself. You know, we all make mistakes and we're learning from them as we go and, you know, everyone is at a different stage in their learning. And, you know, we've got a lot to learn, and we're still learning as we go and just putting those things into practice that we're getting good at. So, I do have one last question. So, we're coming to the end of the podcast. So, what is one word or phrase that you would use to describe how you've been a support for one another over these last several months?

[Karen Sinotte:] And I've thought of something, guys, Robert and Erin.

[Robert Walker:] Go for it.

[Karen Sinotte:] You're my feel-good group.

[Erin Schieman:] Thank you.

[Robert Walker:] There you go.

[Erin Schieman:] I can't beat that.

[Patricia Robinson:] Nice.

[Robert Walker:] I would say from my perspective that it's the whole idea of shared experiences, right? We all have different experiences. We all react to them differently, but

we're all sharing what we're going through, and the others can take from that what they want that would help them dealing with their own situations.

[Patricia Robinson:] Nice.

[Erin Schieman:] -- Yeah. I would agree with both of those, I would say it's helped maintain my sanity in these times. It's a lot to juggle. I have young kids at home, and they've been home for a lot of this time. And so, to have these guys who don't -- none of them have young children at home like I do, but they've always been so supportive and understanding and like saying, "I don't know how you're doing it." And so that has been -- because I don't know either, how I'm doing it.

[Robert Walker:] Keep it up though, you're doing great.

[Erin Schieman:] -- Yeah. Well, I think -- you'll know you'd know this. Your kids are older. I don't actually know how they turn out until they're like your kids' age, right?? Who knows what's going to happen? So, yeah. So, maintaining my sanity throughout all this, I would say, has been how I describe it.

[Patricia Robinson:] Amazing. So, thank you, Karen, Robert, and Erin. Again, I really appreciate your time in sharing with us your experiences and how you've been a support for one another during this last year, as we've, you know, working from home and teaching online. So, thank you so much for your time.

[Music]

[Karen Sinotte:] See you next week.

[Robert Walker:] Yeah. Thank you for the opportunity.

[Erin Schieman:] Thank you.

[Music]