Podcast Transcript

In the Classroom 63

Why You Should Be Working Out Loud as an Instructional Technologist

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast, I certainly appreciate it. I know you could be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me. How are things going with this COVID-19 self-isolation? Things have honestly been quite busy for me. I have been employing one of my favorite strategies. It's a strategy called working out loud. I believe it can be extremely useful for other instructional technologists, but also educators. Let me tell you a little bit about this. Last week, I was discussing strategies that could help instructional technologists and designers in the work they did.

The week prior to that I was talking about ways that educators could rapidly move their instruction to an online presence, whether asynchronous or synchronous. But last week, when I was talking primarily to instructional technologists, I was focusing on this strategy called working out loud, or I mentioned this strategy called working out loud. It is one of my favorite strategies.

Since leaving the Air Force, this has been a prominent strategy in my toolbox basically to help answer questions that others may have, but also, to document my learning journey, the things that I'm learning; and when I learn, I want to share with others so they can learn along with me. I'm not the only one who uses this strategy. It's definitely not unique to me. Over the years, I've read a number of books and I'm going to share some of those books. I've listened to podcasts where others have talked about this strategy and how they employ it.

What is working out loud? My understanding of working out loud has morphed over the years, my definition of it. At the moment, I use working out loud to share answers to questions that those around me may have. It is also, as I noted, sharing my learning journey. I typically do this through blog posts, podcast episodes like this one and YouTube videos. I go ahead and extend my reach by using social media.

I'll go ahead and share these things that I create through Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, LinkedIn, and social media platforms like that. I also put them together in newsletters. I send out a newsletter to the faculty, it's called the TI Digest. The things that I've created or I've pulled together that I think is beneficial to them, I will put that out into a newsletter. It took a pause because I had other focuses. Because of this COVID-19 virus, I've pulled it out. I'm now sending out those newsletters more regularly. In fact, I've sent out two probably in as many weeks.

I find this idea of working out loud to be a force multiplier. I would love to be able to handle everyone's question one-on-one in a highly personalized-from-scratch

message, but I don't have the capacity to do that. Instead, I craft very extensive blog posts and add video to them and then I will share those out and then I can reuse them. What does this idea of working out loud look like? Well, basically is two parts or two different-- similar strategies, but for two different reasons. One is answering questions that are asked. On a normal day, I will get quite a number of email messages coming in.

I'm probably very similar to your email boxes that you get in all these emails, people have questions, they want to know how to do different things, they want to know how they can improve what they're doing. As instructional technologists, it's our responsibility to help them get to the next level to succeed. What I do is, I will write a blog post. I could send them a very short answer and provide the instructions and send them on their way but then somebody else is going to have the same question. Instead, if I've never had that question before, I will write a blog post and then I share the blog post as a response to the query.

Not only does it help the individual who had the question, but because it's out on the interwebs, other people who are doing a search trying to solve that problem can find it. Ideally, if my faculty are out searching the internet looking for that answer, they can find the answer that I've crafted. Also, I can reuse that blog post now. Somebody else has the same question, I can go ahead and pull out the blog post, see if it fits the question and send that off and provide them with a very rich set of instructions and video and things that will help them. This has helped countless people throughout my career by doing this.

These blog posts become a resource, they become a library. I can go ahead and I can make improvements to those blog posts, I can use them repeatedly, as I said when I'm faced with similar questions. When I do that I personalize the message. They're not getting just a template, "here's the answer". I will certainly personalize the message. What I'm doing is I'm using content that I have already put together because I see a lot of the same messages over and over. A blog post is certainly one way I do this. But also, I will craft a video, I will put together a podcast episode depending on what's the best way to respond.

Those are dealing with questions that are answered. I also have, as part of my personally learning environment, I have systems or sources set up where I will get new things delivered to me all the time, and I'll see new strategies and I'll see new ways of doing things that excite me. I think I'll spend time learning about these. Then I feel it's important to share this back out. This is where that personal learning journey comes, that I'm sharing what my learning journey is with others. I will craft blog posts about those kind of things, to answer questions that have not even been asked yet from my faculty.

Those are really the two ways of how I go about doing this idea, working out loud. Part of my working out loud is I do book reviews, and I post those regularly. Matter of fact, I got a stack of about 17 books in front of me that I need to do reviews on. I will be working my way through those things. That is how I approached this idea, working out loud. The reasons I do this? Well, primarily, the first one is I'm a type two on the enneagram scale. One of my driving motivations is that I want to be helpful to others.

This idea of sharing allows me to do that. Another primary motivation is somebody else's already helped me in life. Matter of fact, not just once, but countless times that others have created these explanations, they've created these instructions that I have benefited from.

I think it's really important that I give back. That's also a reason I'm a fan of OER is because others have been sharing selflessly and I think it's important that we add to this knowledge and provide those instructions. If others benefit from my instructions, great, and that's what I look for. Another reason is, it is simply a force multiplier. If you go ahead and look in your email right now, your sent folder, count how many messages are in your sent folder. Now, multiply that by two or three and the two or three is minutes. A normal email response takes about two minutes to put together.

Maybe you do it quicker, but say two minutes. Multiply your email sent folder by two minutes and you'll see how many minutes you have been spending responding to answers over and over and over again. By building this repository that I can direct faculty to, and I do this in the signature block of my emails since I have a link directly back to my website so they can go do searches on their own. Ideally, somebody has found the answer before they even ask me the question, and I have helped them. I'll take credit for that. Like I said earlier, I'm not the only one that's figured this out.

There's a lot of books out there that I have read that have added to my thoughts about this idea, working out loud. Some of the books happen to be in the educational realm and some focus on social media marketing and business marketing and things like that. I want to share some of those books and I'm going to put those into the show notes so you can benefit and go check them out later. One of the books is called *Working Out Loud: For A Better Career and Life*, and this is by John Stepper. I wrote a blog post around this and some of the things that I had to say is that my foray into actually blogging did not happen until probably 2011.

That's when I actually really started blogging. I used to craft PDF documents and things like that. I just found out that blogging really suited my needs a lot better. Even before that time, some of the things I was doing was sharing things on social media and getting information back and developing connections. John Stepper, as he's talking about in his book, *Working Out Loud*, that it's not very natural for us to share things, that we typically are very private. We need to take these small steps of sharing. On my team, I asked my teammates to write blog posts. Historically, my team is-- not jumped into it with two feet.

I do probably 80% of the blog posts that are out there on our team blog, but I'm getting them to try to do more and more of this. By helping others, this all comes back to you and a lot of these books talk about that, the fact that by helping others recognize this and start providing assistance back to you may be asked to give a presentation or you may be asked to work on different projects simply because you have stepped up and are willing to share. You get to be recognized as an expert because of this willingness to share and help others. When I find things I share throughout-- it could be the history department. I find some interesting tool or repository.

I share it with them. They may not know about or the English department, Math department, it doesn't matter so I'll share. That's John steppers *Working Out Loud: For A Better Career and Life*. Another book is *Show Your Work!: 10 Ways to Share Your Creativity and Get Discovered* by Austin Kleon, and he talks about in order to be successful in today's world, you need to be able to be found.

When I applied for this job, one of the things that I challenged in my cover letter was to do a search on Google because I knew that I would be found in that search and I knew that they would see the work that I have done. And so, one way to be found is to share your work, show your work, work out loud that others will be able to find you. In our world today, we're seeing that the folks that are really successful are actively sharing their products, their processes, their ways of thinking, and so I just want to continue to encourage others to do the same thing.

You may think that you are not good enough. There's this idea of imposter syndrome that "who would listen to me?" The fact of the matter is you are one step ahead of somebody. It can only be one person. It doesn't matter. You're at one step ahead. By sharing your learning journey, the things that you're learning, others can also benefit from this. The key to this is trying to share something regularly, consistently. Ideally every day put something out there, let people know what you're working on, what challenges you're having. Find teachable moments, share cool ideas, anything but go out there and regularly share. If you do not exist online, you pretty much don't exist. There's some other books that really talk about that.

Another book is *Show Your Work* by Jane Bozarth. I've seen her at an association for talent development conference. I've seen her speak, I've read her blog posts. She definitely works out loud. One of the things that she talks about is that by sharing your work or showing your work, you can preserve organizational knowledge. You can improve customer service, you can make leadership more transparent. Those are some of the things that she wants to share. I believe this is the organizational knowledge part of writing your blog post is this is how we do business. This is strategies that we use. These are tools that we use and you can just continually to reinforce that as you do, as you write in and create videos and such.

She also stresses that we need to encourage making these materials as public as possible so that others can benefit from the learning opportunity. You never know when a learning spin-off can happen and that's what I find quite often is I'll see something and I'll put a couple things together and then I'll have a new way of doing it. That is very powerful. Those are really three books lean on the educational side.

These next three really focus on more of the business side and reasons why you want to do this. This one gentleman Marcus Sheridan wrote a book, *They Ask You Answer: A Revolutionary Approach to Inbound Sales, Content Marketing, and Today's Digital Consumer*. I know you mentioned business and education together and people tend to get their feathers ruffled, but there is a lot to learn from strategies that businesses are doing. The first one is to show up in a Google search, you have to have content and you have to regularly post content. Rich Brooks, who I'll talk about in a second, he talks about this idea of electromagnetism and I'll tell you more about it in a second.

But Marcus Sheridan, back in 2008 in a weekend, he lost a quarter million dollars and this is when everything started to collapse. He was in the pool business. Five customers said they did not want a pool. So, he and his partners, what they started doing is starting to write article for their blog. They wrote articles that address their customer's questions and concerns and it dealt with costs, product problems, what have you. As a result, they gained their customers trust and the customer started buying from them and it led to 3 million in sales.

Higher ed. Higher ed can benefit from this strategy and I'll explain more in this next book, but we need to go and continually share what we are doing. The fact that we don't share hurts us in Google searches. We have a lot of great content. We have a lot of great strategies, we have a lot of great tools. We have, there's so much out there that we just need to show up and we're not showing up.

Once again, fan of working out loud. This book I was talking about, *The Lead Machine: The Small Business Guide to Digital Marketing* by Rich Brooks. One of the things that he talks about is this analogy of electromagnetism. If you think back to when you were in middle school that your instructor gave you this big battery, some wire and a nail, and when you wrap the wire around the nail, what could you do? You hooked it up to the battery. What could you do? You can pick up paperclip if you put more wraps on it, what would happen? You picked up more paper clips.

Search engines work the same way. The more content you put out there, the more of this electromagnetism, the more leads that you will get, the more people that will find your content. I'm totally in agreement with this and we should like I said, going out there. It not only helps your faculty, but it also attracts others to your institution. You're helping your overall community by doing this as well as helping the world answer questions about whatever instructional technology issue is going on. The last book that I wanted to mention was is called *Launch: How to Quickly Propel Your Business Beyond the Competition*. It's by Michael Stelzner.

Michael Stelzner runs a conference called social media marketing world and I am a regular attendee to this conference. He cannot emphasize more that the key to his success has been consistently creating content to help others for no other reason than just creating that content to help other. And he has done it with the support of others. Fascinating book on how to move your organization forward, but it all comes by sharing. Those are some books I think we can all benefit from those books. I'm definitely going to put those out there and I just want to tie this up.

Here's some of the benefits that I've found by working out loud. One, by working out loud, you can create your own opportunities for the future. It has happened to me. I've had opportunities come my way simply because other people have found what I have put together. As I noted, very successful people that we are seeing are going out and publicly sharing everything. They're sharing their products, their processes, their thinking, they're helping people. We do this by working out loud. We're adding to the world's knowledge base. Everyone can benefit from your knowledge. And email. Emails disappear. When, if I was to leave JCC, the community college I'm at, my email disappears. All that knowledge is gone. Poof, it's gone. Unless somebody keeps it in their email, but it's gone.

But blog posts, they'll stick around, right? They'll be out there. Another benefit. Others come to understand what your role is in the larger ecosystem. You become an expert in your part of the domain and this comes about because of this idea of working out loud. It also becomes a repository where you can dig back and find posts that you have created and that you've shared with others in the past. Leave you with this last quote, "Knowledge is not power. The sharing of knowledge is power." This is from Douglas Merrill. At one time, knowledge was power, right? The guy who held the knowledge, everybody would have to grovel and come to them, right? That is no longer true. You can bypass that individual and Google allows us to do that.

Now, the sharing of knowledge is power and you become more valuable to your organization because you're sharing this information. That is a little deeper dive on my thoughts. I'm working out loud. Before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.