

Nate: Thanks for joining me today, Beth.

Beth: It is a pleasure to be with you, Nate. Thank you for inviting me.

Nate: Of course, of course. I'd love to start by way of a quick introduction to sort of who is Beth Davies, if you will. I, of course know a part of the story as you and I were colleagues for my entire four years of Tesla, but I'd love to hear the rest of your story, especially what you've been up to lately.

Beth: Yeah. So even though you said lately, I'll go all the way back to the beginning. I started my career as a lawyer, I practiced law for 13 months and 22 days, and then really realized that that wasn't for me, and I realized that I wanted to work more with people and be more proactive in helping people. And so that's when I transitioned into HR, and more specifically into learning and development.

Beth: I've spent my career in learning and development inside some big companies. I was at the Gap, I was at Apple, I was at Microsoft and Tesla, but then also some time as a consultant. So learning and development has been my specialty, I spent six years recently at Tesla and left there and really then started to think, "What is it that I want to do next?" And it was really time for me to do something a little bit newer, and so that's what I'm doing now, I'm doing teaching.

Beth: I'm a professor at IE University in Spain, teaching learning and development. I am speaking and inspiring people around how to do HR in new and innovative ways, and then my most exciting new project is I just yesterday launched my own podcast, very focused on careers, and so it's called Career Curves. I'm really at this stage of my career now where I'm trying to inspire the next generation, give back and influence as opposed to doing learning and development myself.

Nate: Yeah, that's amazing, and I'm really thankful that you took the time here today. I'm not much for hyperbole, and I don't think I can overstate this, but you are recognized as one of the most creative and innovative learning and development experts out there, and I can speak to this because I saw you in action.

Nate: I'm interested because way back L&D, maybe were some classes put on at your work site? Maybe some reimbursement or something for your own continuing education, I'm interested to hear your take on the evolution of L&D over the years.

Beth: Yeah. Throughout my career, I've been driven by one question, and it's actually a question that I think everybody should be asking themselves and to adapt it to their particular area. But the question is, if learning and development were invented today, what would it look like? So when I started in my career back in the early 90s, the answer to that question was very much what you're saying. It was classroom-based training, and the answer to, if it was invented today, what would it look like? Would encourage me to do things like make sure my graphics look better, make sure I'm creating exercises in the class that are exciting.

Beth: But in the last 30 years, as technology has changed, that's caused me to look at learning and say, "Hold on a moment, we need to go online." Now, not only do we need to go online, but it can't just be click through, it's got to be dynamic, and then fast forward to where we are today, and we really say, "A learning strategy now needs to start with technology first," and there still is a place for the classroom, but it's now the answer to a specific question like, when is the classroom the best answer? And many times it's not the best answer, many times it might be, let's do something with some dynamic e-learning or with some podcasting or with some videos that meet people where they are at that point in time.

Beth: We need to see that learning isn't just about a class, it's all the ways that people learn.

Nate: I'm really interested on the notion, and you're a thought leader in this transition to something called invisible learning and development. Tell me more about what we're talking about there.

Beth: Yeah, in the past with learning and development, if you were in this field, it was very much about you being in the front of the room, so very visible, and also the idea that people needed to leave their jobs, leave their work, step away from what they were doing, to learn. And that clearly is the case if you're going to a class, I need to stop what I'm doing, pick myself up, and go to a class.

Beth: It's also true that with e-learning, I need to shut down what I'm doing and go do my e-learning. And what we need to do in invisible learning and development is become more omnipresent and really meet people in the flow of their work, where they are, so that they can get what they need. And so this might be things like, if I'm working on Excel and I'm stuck and I need to do a pivot table, how am I finding that answer? And what is embedded and granted?

Beth: Some of this was happening years ago with Microsoft and things like, they used to have this paper clip that would pop up, but now we can do that even better. And some of that now is even happening around leadership skills, so now there are even programs and things coming out that are ping a manager to say, "Hey, according to your calendar, you've got a one-on-one coming up with somebody on your team. And you've said that you're focused more on listening, so friendly reminder as you're going into this one-on-one to focus more on listening, here are some tips for how to do that."

Beth: There's all these tools that are emerging that in the flow of your work can be giving you these reminders or that can be allowing you to learn where you are instead of going away from your work. For some of us in learning and development, that's tough because some people got attracted the field because they like being in front of the room, they like being visible, and now we're more behind the scenes creating these tools, creating these platforms, curating content that fits our company culture, and we become much more invisible heroes as opposed to visible. But that's where learning is going and it's what we need to do.

Nate: As you know, I'm sure working for Tesla for as long as you did, they love to hear about that organization and how it operates and what it's like, and I think people can visualize some of what they think it is, but talk to me a little bit about if you would share how diverse learning and development is in an organization that is a, a hypertech organization, and b, a real manufacturing organization, and c, also has a massive retail arm, and d, X, Y, Z. Right?

Beth: Right. One of the things you're describing there is a fast growing organization that's very distributed and dispersed. Whether it's distributed in a single factory or across now, many factories, distributed across retail locations across the world, which really points out right there that if you're going to use a classroom-based strategy, it's broken before you begin because you just can't reach that many people fast enough. So what it ends up looking like is a lot of videos. I'm going to give you a real concrete example of something we did that I was really quite proud of.

Beth: Compliance training. Most people hear the word compliance training and frankly they want to stick a fork in their eye. Like it just sound -

Nate: Yeah, I think I just fell asleep.

Beth: Right, yeah, exactly. Right, it's just painful, and everything about it turns off adults. Like compliance, you want me to comply with something, you're taking away my free will and my choice. Even the word training, which some people think means something boring. And so there was this time I had our chief general counsel at Tesla come to me and he said, "Beth, we need to do some training for people. Two topics, anti-gifting and anti-bribery training."

Beth: I was like, "All right, can't we cover that in three minutes? What if you and I sat down tomorrow, I interviewed you, we capture this in a three minute video, and then we send that out to people and we use a technology platform to be able to track that they did it, and maybe we ask a couple of questions afterwards to make sure they got the key points." And he was like, "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah." And that's what we did. And so we got a single camera, we shot it on the office floor so that people could see what the ivory tower looks like, to demystify corporate, and that was it. And we actually had people come back going... And we didn't call it compliance training, we called it three minutes on, three minutes on gifting with our chief general counsel, three minutes on bribery prevention with our general counsel.

Beth: People would come back to me and go, "I love those videos that you guys did. Those are fantastic," and we didn't call it compliance training, but we can get that out and we can get it out distributed and we can get it out fast. So now in a fast moving organization, any topic, we were able to go, "Oh sales, you're about tomorrow to announce that you're taking orders for the model three, let's do a three minute on video for the stores and how to manage that traffic and how to manage the media if they come by." Boom! Bang! Did done, right? It just happens. That's some of the way that we were doing it.

Beth: But we were also looking into things like, how do you even beacon technology in everybody's phone so that if you're in a factory and you walk into a zone of a factory and the factory recognizes you, the beacon can send you a video that says, "Hey, you're in this part of the factory. Don't forget these four safety tips for being safe in this factory. You must have safety glasses, you must wear a hard hat, whatever it is," well, people may not think of that as training, but it certainly is, and it's modern and it's fresh and it's current and it's much better than, "Let me take you to a compliance class yawn, or a training safety class yawn." That's some of the ways that we did it.

Nate: Yeah, I love that. It's such a simple yet elegant solution. And I think you've probably found the same experience while you were in the Tesla organization, but that environment really did breed some amazing, simple solutions to problems. When you don't have time, and you don't have money, and you need to get stuff done, sometimes that pressure and that environment really creates better results.

Beth: Yeah. And the tools today allow it in ways that it didn't before. So now some people assume like, "Oh, you're making a video, that must mean that it has a long lead time that you're scripting it, that you're then reserving a recording studio, and then you're doing a big editing," and it's like, "No, the equipment exists today that you can shoot today, do a quick edit, and release tomorrow." And even there, people don't necessarily want the highly polished, perfect... It's like go to YouTube, see what people are producing. They're producing great stuff that is normal, it's not highly polished and it works. So the tools are there, just go for it, do it.

Nate: Yeah. And I love that it humanizes, as you said, the ivory tower or the people who are sort of behind these policies and procedures, I love that aspect as well.

Nate: Hi guys, this is Nate. Illuminate HR is supported in part by our patrons. Aaron Bergquist and David Grubin, thank you for your support of the show. For more information on the benefits of becoming a patron, please visit our website at, [illuminatehrpodcast.com](http://illuminatehrpodcast.com). Now, the last half of the discussion with Beth.

Nate: Yeah. Let's transition now to your podcast, Career Curves, congratulations on that. I've been listening to all of the episodes and they are amazing. I'd encourage everybody who listens to this to check it out, even though it's going to make mine look subpar.

Beth: No, it's not. There's so much space in this world for lots of different podcasts, on lots of different topics. I'm glad we're both doing this.

Nate: Absolutely, and I really am impressed, it's amazingly fascinating. So Career Curves, I love this concept. What was your genesis behind that idea?

Beth: Yeah, so it's actually a funny story. I have a partner on that podcast, a guy named Dan Henkle. And Dan and I worked together early in our careers, then we went our separate ways and then recently got together to say, we think we should do something together. And we actually had been thinking about doing an HR focus podcast, but every time we would get together we would talk about the journey our careers had taken since we had

first met, and he had stayed in that same company and I had gone out other places and we still would compare the stories and the journeys of our curvy careers.

Beth: And we started to realize that these stories are fun, they're fun to talk about, they're fun to tell, and that we need to demystify what real careers look like compared to what people think a real career looks like. So people tend to think of real career as linear. I'm going to start junior, and I'm going to work up, and there's going to be a career path, and it's going to be a ladder, like it's linear, and yet careers, when you talk to real people are curvy. They take twists and turns and they make decisions they didn't expect to make, and these decisions sometimes are scary or hard, but we started to say, "How can we normalize it for people?" Or "How can we inspire people to get unstuck by having real people tell their stories?"

Beth: And so we left behind whatever idea we had originally started to have and decided we were all in on this one. It's fascinating, and so we're talking to people in all different industries, in all different stages of their careers, and finding out that some things that are conventional wisdom aren't true, and so we're excited to be able to get out there and say, "No, it's not that, it's this." Let me give you an example because you're probably going to say, "What's an example of one of those conventional wisdoms?"

Nate: Right. Right.

Beth: So for one of them is we know people say to young people a lot, or people who are stuck, "Well, what have you been passionate about since you were a child? Like if you can tap into that passion, you might find the answer to what you want to do in your career." Okay, well that sounds like good advice, but as we're talking to people who have been successful, what we're finding, and I'll say to them, "When did you discover this passion?" And they'll say, "Not until much later. It wasn't till I started doing this work and got exposed to it that I learned that it's something I love. I didn't know that this work existed when I was younger." So this idea that there's something in you when you're a child, when you don't even know what all the work is, is a fallacy.

Beth: We also have people saying, "I just tried a bunch of stuff and there's great power in closing doors and discovering what I don't like because in the process I discover my passion." So that's like one example where if we can instead say to people, "You're not failing because you don't know your passion, you're just on your journey, and embrace that and go on your journey." That's an example of some of the busting that we're looking forward to doing as the podcast rolls out and emerges.

Nate: Yeah. It's fascinating as you started with this idea that there's a linear track, some of that is propagated by the narrative we all create inside of ourselves so that when we introduce ourselves to a potential business colleague, a potential account, a potential whatever it is, or we're speaking on a stage, or we're at a dinner, we want to be able to tell a story about our careers that make sense. So it's almost like we all straighten out our curves, is that kind of what you're discovering as well?

Beth: That's such an interesting point, I love it. There is, I think for all of us, this need to be able to knit together what we've done and be able to tell a story about it, and there's great power in the story, but sometimes that story is, "I was doing X, I learned about myself that while I'm really good at this part, this other part wasn't so much me. So now I'm pivoting and leaning more towards doing Y, but we do want to be able to tell that story."

Beth: There's another part that I'm starting to see though too which is, we always are a whole person and so through our story, we're always there and we're always present. So like in my own story for instance, while I may have been very focused on doing learning and development inside a company, I'm recognizing in myself that I got interested in learning and development because my initial passion when I started was helping individuals.

Beth: I wanted to help people succeed in their job. So I wanted them to have the tools to be a great salesperson, to be a great production associate, to be a great leader. I wasn't as focused though on the organizational development, which is very much how the learning and development field evolved. It evolved more into organizational development. And to a certain extent, I wasn't personally as motivated in that. So now I see myself in this career space going, "Oh, I'm tapping back into exactly what caused me to be passionate in the beginning." So I never really left that in all my years in learning and development, I'm just getting now to explore that even a little bit more. So there always is in our narrative us and we do want to tell our story, but we're always there. We're always... Yeah, we're us, we're evolving human beings and we need to celebrate that, not be apologizing for it.

Nate: Yeah. Yeah. And it's super interesting stuff. I was reflecting the other day when I first listened to your podcast about sort of what my career curves have been and why things have happened the way they have, from losing jobs, being laid off, the financial meltdown, Washington Mutual going out of business, to moving to California, and just all these things that happen. Some of it happens to you in some extent, but I've reflected that some of my career has happened because I've always been extremely impatient as you probably know, I think we're both pretty similar in that way. Some might say [crosstalk 00:22:12] -

Nate: Yeah, some might say stubborn, but I've always had this idea of sort of what's next? What's the next project I can take on? What's the next thing I can learn? What's the next experience I can have? As people navigate their career, what advice are you able to give people as they see curves, as they see maybe what looks like a wall? What sort of advice would you give people who are trying to navigate those career curves?

Beth: I love what you just said, about next, because that's a real powerful framing for thinking about your career. Some people think about, "What do I want to be? Like? What do I want to be doing? Where do I want to be in five years, 10 years?" And again, I think we're oftentimes encouraged to think that way. Yet when we're really thinking about our career moves, some of the best way to think about it is, "What is the right next move?" And next might be because it's going to allow me to learn something new,

stretching some new ways, explore a new city, pull me out of my comfort zone in ways that allow me to grow as a human being.

Beth: And so there's nothing wrong with saying, "I've got some long-term goals for myself," but sometimes that's more paralyzing than just saying, "What is my right next move?" And embracing that. Especially frankly, as fast as the world is changing now, there are new skills emerging that people need, new industries coming out, and so if you're not staying flexible, you're not even going to realize, "Wait, there's a whole emerging field that interests me." So thinking about next is I think a great way.

Beth: And I think another is, I hear people sometimes use very limiting terms like, "Well, I don't know how to do that." There's great power also in the word yet. So if you could say, "That's not something I've done yet, I don't know how to do that yet," and then you start to go like, "Oh, that's right because I can learn or I can take that next job that's going to give me exposure to whatever that is." And so yet is very empowering. Those are some of the things I think for not allowing us to get stuck.

Beth: We don't have to have the perfect solution for our lives, we just have to be doing what's right for where we are now and next.

Nate: How important is it to be given opportunities to stretch your legs so to speak? What role do managers or design culture, play into the career decisions I should make?

Beth: That's a great question. We need to be in organizations that allow us to grow. There is something though that's broken, which is this the internal career path thing that happens in companies right now. Because if you think about career pathing, it's built on our old structures. When we had lots of hierarchy and you could look at a company and say, "Okay, in this department there's five or six different levels and so we're going to create a career path that takes you from level one to level two. Then when you're in level two, do something lateral to broaden you then go to level three," and you can almost picture the pyramid that somebody is moving up in this path.

Beth: Well, in the last 20 years, there's been this whole movement towards flattening of organizations, and so now as an organization is flatter, the ladder just kind of doesn't make sense. It's almost like what are the stepping stones in a river, if you will, right? So to take you down the path. And so we should be getting some help and guidance from our managers to be able to say, "Hey, here's where I'm thinking I might want to move next. What stones do you see that might help me get there?"

Beth: But this idea that the manager is going to be responsible for our careers isn't going to work anymore. And it also doesn't work for us to even say to our managers, "I want to be a manager someday," and then as if we dropped that on our manager's doorstep, we need to be able to say, "I own my career, what advice do you have? What can I do next? What opportunities do you see me?" But the organization still needs to empower employees to do that, and the best organizations also do create some infrastructure that help employees take charge of their own career.

Beth: So whether that's even putting in place some learning platforms like U-2-Me for business, or LinkedIn Learning that allow people to learn what they want whenever they want, and help and grow their careers, those types of things will work exposing them to more people, but in general, we need to be sending the message that you as an employee are responsible for your career, but we are absolutely here to support you and enable you, but it's not your manager who's going to own your career. That's an outdated concept.

Nate: Yeah, and I love this thought. I think that just the idea of managers are outdated, there really is a need for a team lead to organize and make sure that things are getting done. But that old idea of becoming a manager, managing people, and that success, is really sort of a false one. And I would encourage people that really want to be in that kind of a role, to think about why. And if it's just the next step that in your career, because you've got an old hierarchy type of organization, that's not going to be successful for you. Now, if you really love helping people, giving people opportunities, then that is a role which I would call mentor, not necessarily manager, and that's extremely important and some people are good at it and some people aren't, and the worst thing is when you've got a horrible mentor in a manager position.

Beth: I love that you just used the word mentor in the way that you just did, because one of the things I've seen over the course of my career is... Again, I started my career in the early 90s and in that more hierarchical structure, and when there was also a better expectation or more of an expectation that somebody would stay with a company for a long time. And so my manager was very much kind of coaching me through how to get to the next level in this stair-step way, and there wasn't as much talk about mentors. I had some mentors, like I had people whose advice I really valued, and in that sense, a mentor.

Beth: Fast forward to where we are today, and people all the time say, "We need mentor programs, I need a mentor." And then you say to them, "Tell me about the relationship which you have with your manager," and they're like, "Oh my manager doesn't... I don't get any of this from my manager." That is so broken, like we shouldn't have people looking for a mentor when their manager isn't acting as their mentor, but their manager should be acting as a mentor. So I agree with you that we need to think that you're... When you're in a company, your first mentor should be your manager or your leader or whatever title you're giving them. It's that old, flip the pyramid.

Beth: Other than when the leader is assigning the work, setting the direction, after that, they need to flip it. And a leader should be saying, "I now work for you. How do I make you successful both in your current role and beyond? And in that way I should be your first mentor for you. Doesn't mean you shouldn't have other mentors in an organization, but if I as your boss, manager, or leader, I'm not acting as a mentor to you, something is very broken."

Nate: Well, really good stuff, Beth, thank you so much for taking the time today, and keep up the amazing work that you're doing. I'm a huge fan.

This transcript was exported on Aug 31, 2019 - view latest version [here](#).

**Beth:** Thank you. I loved having this time, I think we have a mutual fan society going on now, so keep up what you're doing, and I'm thrilled to have had this opportunity, all the best to you and all your listeners.