

Season 4, Episode 3 Transcript: Lisa Gevelber

Host Ruth Watkins [00:00:01] Hi, I'm Ruth Watkins, and this is "Lessons Earned." Today, my guest is Lisa Gevelber from Google.

Lisa Gevelber [00:00:11] We are trying to create truly a more equitable and inclusive job market where it doesn't matter what your educational background or experience level is. You can get and succeed in a great job.

Ruth Watkins [00:00:30] From Strada Education Network, this is "Lessons Earned: Putting education to work."

As a country, we spend a lot of time thinking about four-year institutions. We care about their research. We follow their sports teams. And historically, a lot of policy focuses on four-year institutions too. Maybe all of that attention is a little bit misplaced because most Americans never actually get a four-year college degree. Now that remains something to work on. But in the meantime, we should figure out how to serve the majority of Americans who are taking other paths to the workforce. This is exactly what Lisa Gevelber was thinking about when she founded Grow with Google. Grow With Google does many things, but their flagship initiative is particularly interesting. It's a series of professional certificates. These certificates can be done cheaply and remotely. Maybe the most exciting part, though, is that they really seem to work. More than 80 percent of the people who complete these certificates report a positive career change, a new job, a promotion at their existing job, or a raise. And because almost half the people who get the certificates are from the lowest income bracket in the country, Grow with Google, and other initiatives like it, can have a huge impact on economic mobility and opportunity, particularly if we reach those who will benefit most. Here's my conversation with Lisa Gevelber.

Well, Lisa, I wonder if you could take me back to 2016 or thereabouts when you were about to found Grow With Google. Tell me about what you were seeing at that time that made you think about this and what kind of were you observing about workforce that seemed like this would be a good thing for Google to pursue?

Lisa Gevelber [00:02:44] Yeah. So back in 2016 and early 2017, as we were thinking about ways that Google could help society, we really started to think about what was happening with technology, and we wanted to make sure that the opportunities that were created by technology were truly available to everyone. Everyone should benefit from what technology has to offer. And obviously people benefit in all kinds of ways. But the ways we started to hone in on were economic opportunity and mobility. So, you know, Google is a very data-oriented place. We like to make decisions based on having, you know, concrete information. And so I started digging into the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and I found a very interesting stat. Essentially, unemployment was pretty low back when I was looking at this. But unemployment for young people, for people 16 to 24, was at, I think, something like a seven-year high. And I thought that

was really interesting. Like, what's happening with young people? Why are young people not doing as well as everyone else? And we started digging into degree attainment. And, you know, lots of folks don't know this, but about two-thirds of Americans never get a four-year college degree, right? And so if you look today, that's about 80 million American workers who don't have a degree and who feel reasonably locked out of a lot of good, you know, well-paying jobs. And so we honed in on this idea that we could really make a difference for folks without a college degree because society needs that. We can't we can't have a country where two-thirds of people are locked out of good jobs, and we really thought we could start to make a dent on that. So we had this data and then we started looking into which jobs, what could we offer, and Grow With Google is what we ended up naming this initiative, which is Google's commitment to helping drive economic opportunity and mobility.

Ruth Watkins [00:04:57] You know, I'd love to know more about the programs themselves as you talk about programs that can make a big difference. Tell me more about the programs themselves, about the focus and about the kind of thinking behind those areas of emphasis.

Lisa Gevelber [00:05:14] Yeah. So we do a lot of things in Grow With Google. But one of my favorite things and I think one of the cornerstones of Grow With Google is this Google career certificate program. And we started it based on the insight that people without a college degree were feeling locked out of great jobs. And so we again turned to data and we started researching job fields that were in demand today and had projections to keep growing for the next 10 years. These are jobs that weren't going to go away anytime soon and that we believed you could do without any sort of college degree and where Google had real expertise to contribute. Those were our criteria. And the first fields that we created career certificates for that meet those criteria — right now, we have four fields: IT support, data analytics, user experience design, and project management. Those are all in-demand, high growth, well-paying career fields that Google has real expertise in and that I think, importantly, you can do from anywhere you live. So these are not jobs where you have to pack up and, you know, move to Silicon Valley or move to a coast. There are jobs in data analytics everywhere, for example, and in every kind of industry, right? So maybe you love retail? Well, there are data analytics jobs in retail. Maybe you're passionate about health care, right? There are tons of great data analytics, jobs and health care, right? So these are really fields that regardless of, you know, your personal passion or where you live in our country, there are jobs to be had. That's how we decided, you know, on the fields. And then we knew a few things had to be true. First is, we had to build these certificates from the job back, because our goal isn't to train people, it's to give people real economic mobility, which means they have to be successful in these jobs. Right? You can't just train people in stuff. They have to get a great job and they have to be successful in the job. So we built them all from the job back with experts from Google in the field looking at the skills and the job task analysis. We did job task analysis to see what you have to do in these jobs to be successful. And when we got the curriculum, you know, written out, we then vetted it with employers so that we knew that when employers were going to hire people for those fields, we were teaching what they wanted to hire for.

Ruth Watkins [00:07:40] Is there any particular story of a student that helps illustrate your dream for Grow With Google?

Lisa Gevelber [00:07:48] Oh my gosh, there's so many. We had a student, Ray Giusto. He was a fireplace installer and unfortunately lost his job because of COVID. And he and his wife and his four children lost their home as well. So he moved in with his grandparents, and he discovered that the workforce board in Sacramento was able to take some CARES Act dollars and work with a nonprofit partner called Merit America and offer the Google career certificate program to folks in Sacramento. And he signed up and completed, and now he has a job in IT support and his family has moved back out into their own home. And it's just such a great story of someone who is going from, you know, fireplace installing to being an IT support professional, all because he leaned in and committed to this learning path. But the ecosystem supported him, right? There was a nonprofit. There was a workforce board. They were CARES Act dollars. There was the Google content. And it all came together for Ray and his family. And there's so many amazing stories like Ray's, but I'm inspired by every single one of them. I'm inspired every time I meet someone who has bet on themselves and invested in this learning program to get to a better place. And every story is amazing, and together they feel like the world is slowly but surely changing for the better.

Ruth Watkins [00:09:30] Now, I'm really trying to envision what day-to-day life would be like for a student in one of your programs. So maybe we can just, I'll just try to imagine with you, me at this particular stage, if I were in your IT support program or your data analytics program, what would my kind of day-to-day life as a student of Grow With Google look like?

Lisa Gevelber [00:09:50] You know, we built it for working Americans. And so part of the premise was it has to be, you know, on demand online, right? Available to you whenever you have time to do it. Not everyone has the luxury to sit in a classroom, you know, hours every week. And so that was the first premise that has to be flexible, on demand, online and so anyone can do it whenever they want. It's all available on demand. But we also found that there's a bunch of learners who wanted to do it in a cohort-based environment, who wanted a little extra support or just the feeling that other people were doing it with them or in an instructor-led environment. So we also provide those options. One example of instructor led opportunity is over 100 community colleges in our country teach the Google career certificates. So if you want to have a teacher as part of your experience, that's also a great option. And we announced last year that we will be in 100 career and technical high schools as well. So we're super excited that we're making really good progress toward that goal this year as well. You know, regardless of which way you want to learn, there's an opportunity, either through one of our partners or one of these educational institutions, to get that learning.

Ruth Watkins [00:11:05] Well, tell me a memorable success story. I'd love to learn about something that just worked really well and that has stuck with you as a success.

Lisa Gevelber [00:11:14] I guess in this journey, the thing that sticks out to me the most is, you know, what we're trying to do is so important and so ambitious, right? We are trying to create

truly a more equitable and inclusive job market, right? Where it doesn't matter what your educational background or experience level is, you can get and succeed in a great job that is in demand today and will be in the future, and that pays well. And that takes more than just a training program, right? And so we've approached it with, you know, two core pillars. One is providing this high-quality training that will make you capable of these jobs. But the second thing we've really invested in is taking an entire ecosystem approach to helping, right? And that's why we have nonprofit partners all over the country who provide extra support. That's why we're working with educational institutions and we're working with local workforce boards to make sure that this training is accessible to unemployed Americans everywhere. But we're also really working with employers to understand what do they need for people to be successful. And I think what we're seeing is that more and more communities are actually joining us on this journey to create an entire ecosystem approach to this problem where, you know, meetings that I join every week have employers and an educational institution and a nonprofit and sometimes the workforce board. And you've got everyone in the room in these communities trying to say, we want the people in our communities to have better lives and we're going to use the Google career certificates as one way that we do that. And I think that's where the success will be long term, right? This is giant systemic change. When you are trying to make a job market that works for everyone, it's going to take a lot of different types of organizations working together to create economic mobility for folks. And you know, that's one of my favorite things.

Ruth Watkins [00:13:28] Well, Lisa, you just said a few things that are so fascinating to me, and I've really wondered about employers. How do you urge along employer buy-in recognizing the certificates or does that happen naturally? Tell me more about that.

Lisa Gevelber [00:13:43] Actual employers have a really important problem to solve. They have jobs where they need people with certain skills and they cannot find the people with those skills, right? So PWC did a CEO survey recently and four out of five CEOs say that a real inhibitor to the growth of their company is their ability to find people with the right skills. So this isn't lost on employers, right? The idea that they need to have people trained for these jobs and also what I think is really a positive change is so many employers are really doubling down on their efforts to create more diverse workforces. They're really trying to bring nontraditional talent into their organizations, and I think that this is an outstanding way to help them do that. But the other thing that's interesting that we're seeing is companies who are committed to reskilling their existing employees. So, you know, we have insurance companies who have thousands of employees where the skill set or the need has changed and they're looking at the Google career certificates to reskill those folks.

Ruth Watkins [00:14:53] So I'm really wondering about that buy-in question. You talked a little bit about employer buy-in. How about traditional institutional buy-in to the value of these certificates?

Lisa Gevelber [00:15:03] So, interesting. I started by saying that we started this program initially to help people without college degrees get into high-paying, high-growth jobs. And when we are doing that for sure. Sixty-one percent of our graduates have no college degree. But we

found that 39 percent of people did. And we started really trying to understand that. Why? Why if you had a degree, were you, you know, interested in also doing a certificate from Google? And in today's economy, I think the stat is about 40 percent of today's undergraduate graduates. People who are, you know, recent grads of four-year programs are working in jobs that do not require a college degree. So 40 percent of undergraduate graduates today are actually what's called underemployed. And I think there are, unfortunately, a lot of folks out there who have a degree and still are interested in making themselves more employable at higher a wage. And there's a lot of great data that backs this up as well. So if you look at Burning Glass data, for example, you can take almost any liberal arts or humanities major and find that if you added one of a credential in an area like data analytics, for example, that you could become much more employable at higher a wage. So I was a psychology major. And today, if you're a psychology major on average, when you graduate, you'll make about \$39,000 a year. But if you compliment your psychology degree with a data analytics certificate, you'll make something more like \$60,000 a year and hundreds of thousands more jobs will be available to you.

Ruth Watkins [00:16:55] It's really kind of a remarkable move, I think. And I just want to ask you, as I listen to you, I wonder if you think we've overemphasized the importance of traditional baccalaureate degrees.

Lisa Gevelber [00:17:06] You know, I mean, I think college degrees are great, and for lots of folks, that is an outstanding path. But the reality is it's not a viable path for lots of people at the minute in our country. And so there have to be high-quality alternate paths for people to have a great career and a great life. And I think that career certificates are one, you know, great option for folks. And as I was just saying, like, more and more people are choosing to do both and it's an and, not an or, you know? They want to get a degree and, you know, a career specific credential. So I think, you know, different people have different paths. And the good news is we're providing good options for people on either path, with or without a degree.

Ruth Watkins [00:17:56] Lisa, you just have such a big vision, so be wildly optimistic with me here for a minute and think about five years from now. What's happened with not just Google, but the influence of short-term certificates and credentials and the role in the workforce, thinking really big about where we'd like to be in five years?

Lisa Gevelber [00:18:18] Gosh, well, there's I think there's so much opportunity to help people get the skills they need for these jobs. I mean, we're only teaching a handful of fields at the minute. And there's lots of fields that were not the best people to teach, right? But what we're seeing is other people jump in to build on top even of what we're doing. So one example is health care. So there's obviously lots of need in the healthcare field. And Johns Hopkins, of course, saw that need and built a credential, a short-term credential, a certificate for healthcare IT support. And because we had already built the fundamentals of IT support, all they had to teach was the healthcare portion. And I think we'll see more and more of that actually, high-quality institutions contributing their expertise to make high-quality, short-term credentials that help people get into these career fields. And we're certainly encouraging lots more of that.

Ruth Watkins [00:19:20] So does society look different when this happens?

Lisa Gevelber [00:19:23] Gosh, I hope so. I mean, I get up every day and get fired up about this work because I truly believe it does make a difference, and I see it. I've met so many of our career certificate graduates who literally have a better life and their family has a better life because they took this opportunity, they invested in themselves, and now they're doing something they never would have had the opportunity to do before. I think the world looks different when people can do that, and we do that for people at scale. And when there really is a whole different chance for everyone, regardless of your background, to get a great job and have a thriving career.

Ruth Watkins [00:20:03] I wonder if you think higher ed looks different, too.

Lisa Gevelber [00:20:06] You know, I have a lot of conversations with people in higher ed. I think not a week goes by where I'm not talking to someone and I really see so much change happening there. You know, I believe the first person to work with us was Northeastern University, who, as we all know, is super forward-thinking about all kinds of things. But they took our Google career certificate in IT support and, you know, made it so that if you did our certificate, you could get 12 college credits at Northeastern. And they literally wrote on their website, you know, that that's over a \$6,000 savings in tuition. But so many higher ed institutions, as I said, are now either building our certificate into their curriculum — and a bunch of them are doing some pretty interesting bundling things where they'll take our curriculum and some other things they want to teach and make like a concrete bundle, which I think is very exciting — or they're doing as Northeastern did and giving credit for prior learning so that folks who do a credential like the Google certificates, who then want to stack it into a full degree program, can easily do that. So I think there's a lot of opportunity. And I think, you know, COVID has taught everyone, I think, that online learning is a real accelerant. You know, there's lots of ways it's not perfect for our younger, younger school kids, for sure. I don't think any parent wants their kid necessarily to do online learning all the time, every day, and thank goodness, knock on wood, hopefully, children won't have to. But for adults and adult workers, having the flexibility to do this kind of learning on demand and when it's right for you is very powerful and game-changing. I just think it is this moment in time that is game-changing. We have an opportunity as a society to build back an economy that works for everyone in a way that it has not in the past. And that's why I think now there's kind of this moment of urgency where we all have to contribute our part.

Ruth Watkins [00:22:28] That was my conversation with Lisa Gevelber. Thank you for joining me on “Lessons Earned.”

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