



Chapter 7:

Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule

*"You can judge your age
by the amount of pain you feel
when you come in contact with a new idea."*

Pearl S. Buck



Chapter 7 Intent:

To clearly demonstrate how one learner can plan her customized learning schedule . . . so that everyone can see that the MCL vision can be operationalized and that the vision is scalable.

Chapter 7 marks a transition in the nature and intended outcomes of *Inevitable: Mass Customized Learning*. In case you haven't noticed, heretofore we have worked to persuade. We have forcefully and maybe even a bit redundantly told you of the values, philosophy, research, and rationale for implementing MCL while sprinkling in a few "how tos." With "Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule," we move our focus to the "how tos," while sprinkling in a bit of seasoned guilt. Guilt that you should/will feel if you don't do what is best for learners and learning which, of course, is MCL. In short, do what we tell you, darn it!

Chapter 4, "Through the Learner's Eyes" took you through Lori's typical day. Chapter 7 tells how her schedule came to be and begins to identify and describe the transformational technology that enables the personal customization of learning experiences. We again wish to bring your attention to what we believe is the proper role of technology in today's learning communities: technology is not the teacher but the *enabler* of the professional educator. Teachers will always play an important role in the learning process; MCL simply makes professionals more efficient with their time and resources.

Make no bones about it. MCL will not come easy. Nothing this important seems to come easy. Educators have dreamed about "individualizing instruction" for at least fifty years. If it were easy, we would be doing it now. If it had been possible before, we would be doing it now. But MCL will come to be because:

It needs to be done. Our schools must be modernized to take advantage of what today's technology offers. We must begin to meet the learning needs of tomorrow and not continue to focus on the needs of the past. And we simply have to become more effective and efficient in doing what we do.

It can be done. What we are proposing couldn't have been done ten years ago. The "customizing technology" didn't exist until now. But it is here now and it has been proven. All that needs to be done is to transfer the technology now in place in other innovative organizations/businesses to school systems.

It will be done. When the NetGeners are in control of school systems . . . all types of systems for that matter . . . they will quickly integrate what they know about learners, learning, and learning organizations with the transformational technologies that they have experienced their entire life. MCL makes too much sense to not become a reality. You might even say that it's *Inevitable*.



LORI'S 60-DAY LEARNING PLAN

My Dad introduced me to you in Chapter 4, "Through the Learner's Eyes," but to help you remember how he described me, let me again share his rather idealistic description.....there are things that even Dad doesn't know:

- * 14 years old, parents are both educators, middle class*
- * Quite responsible....but a teenager*
- * Interested in pop music, athletics, math, and technology*
- * Knows that she is college bound*
- * Thinks Christopher is "cool"*

I am working through my learning program at the Lincoln Unlimited Learning Center. The LULC serves about 4,000 learners from four- and five-year-old preschoolers to 17- and 18-year-olds who are completing their programs. Our schools have changed significantly over the past few years. Five years ago the community went through a future-focused planning process that resulted in a school name change and a new way of scheduling our learning activities. Today we all have individual learning plans, and based on our past behavior and accomplishments, my friends and I have a lot to say about our learning schedule.

*I am doing my schedule for the first two months, and I will explain what I am doing and why I am doing it. There are a few learners in our learning community who have their schedules planned for them, but most everyone has gradually learned to do their own planning as they progress through their learner outcomes. We are the only school system in our area that is doing **MASS CUSTOMIZED LEARNING** but we are getting many visitors who want to learn about how our learning community operates.*

***MCL** works well for my friends and me. We go through the learner outcomes at our own pace and most of the graduates of LULC are well ahead of those who graduated from the old program that moved everyone along at the same pace.*

Today is August 1 and I will be planning my schedule for September and October. I have found it best to schedule my learning activities in advance so that I can get into the seminars I want and my friends and I can coordinate our activities. I like to stay at least one month ahead with my schedule.

I talk with my Mom and Dad about my schedule all the time and they make suggestions as to what I should do . . . actually, they probably have veto power but it never seems to come to that. Ms. Trezona is my learning coach and she definitely has veto power over my schedule. Ms. Trezona knows me well. She has coached me for the past two years and I actually got to pick her to be my coach. She is a tough cookie with high expectations and I actually like her for that!



Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule

Today I am doing my schedule with my Dad. I pretty well know what I will do but Dad wants to be involved and sometimes he has pretty good ideas. Ms. Trezona does not think that she has to be involved in planning my schedule, but she will review it and respond soon after I hit "send."

Step 1 is for me to review my learning portfolio. What learner outcomes have I completed and which outcomes should I be attending to next? All LULC learner outcomes matched to my electronic learning portfolio are available online from the LULC web page.

System Structures/Practices Supporting Lori's Plan

What made Lori's scheduling process possible? What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create her schedule for the next 60 days?

1. The leaders of LULC completed the Strategic Design process described in Chapter 3 that identified the exit learner outcomes for their graduates. Not a simple task, but one that is meaningful and doable.
2. The Curriculum and Instruction people of the organization . . .with input from teachers of course . . . worked back from the exit learner outcomes to create enabling outcomes for all levels of learning. Not a simple task, but one that is necessary and doable.
3. The Information Technology people . . . with input from the curriculum and instruction people and teachers of course . . . created an electronic portfolio system that automatically documents the learner performances that are required for proof of learner mastery. Not an easy task but one that has been accomplished by some learning systems.

With some coaching from Ms. Trezona, I have learned that there is a planning sequence that saves me from having to make major revisions just when I think that I am about finished with my schedule. The tip: first schedule those activities that are the least flexible and cannot be easily changed, and save the flexible stuff for the end. I love gymnastics, I do all-around, and I compete for the LULC gymnastics team. Gymnastics is my most rigidly scheduled activity so I will schedule it first. Practice is from 3:30 to 5:00 Monday through Friday except for the days when we have meets scheduled. It's a simple process to schedule my practices and my meets when most of my days are blank.



Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule

What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. LULC creates and publishes an annual online calendar of events that includes everything learners will have to know to create their personal schedules. The calendar includes all scheduled gymnastics meets.
2. The system has adopted the Microsoft Exchange Calendar throughout the system. (They could have chosen a scheduling calendar from a number of competing companies, but designating one specific calendar makes the integration of calendars more friction free.)
3. Lori's schedule is made available to anyone "with a need to know" . . . and those with a need to know will have a password that ensures privacy. Lori, her parents, her learning coach, and the LULC principal are designated as people "with a need to know."

The next least flexible type of learning activity at LULC is the in-depth seminars that are designed around complex learner outcomes that require interaction between the learning facilitator and me and between my classmates and me. You might recall from Chapter 3 that I want to schedule:

- the *Interpersonal Communications seminar* (a 30-hour commitment)
- the *Diversity seminar* (a 24-hour commitment) and
- the *Creating and Defending a Business Plan seminar* (a 27-hour commitment)

After thinking it over, I think that I could also complete

- the *Forms of Government seminar* (a 20-hour commitment)

during the next 60 days . . . it will crowd my calendar a bit but three of my friends . . . including Christopher are scheduling it too.

Each of the four seminars I want to take is scheduled at least once during September and October. I will schedule those that are only offered once first and hope that I get them . . . you can see now why I like to do my scheduling at least a month before the activity is to happen. If I can't get the seminars I want when I want them because they are filled, I will schedule them next time they are offered so I can be sure to complete them sometime soon. Well here goes, wish me luck . . . and wish my friends luck too because we are trying to get into the same seminars.



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What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. The curriculum and instruction people . . . input from teachers of course . . . went through all of the LULC learner outcomes and answered the following question for each of them, “How is this learner outcome best learned?” A **most important question!**
2. For those learner outcomes best learned online with a computer, they identified or created online learning opportunities. These online learning activities, including a built-in learner assessment, were made available on the LULC web page 24/7. More, and more sophisticated, online learning programs are being developed every day. Most systems will not have to reinvent the wheel. (It is important that as many learner outcomes as possible be placed in the “online learning” category. The middle and high schools with whom we have worked estimate that a minimum of 50% to 60% of what we now teach could be learned effectively online. The more learners can learn online, the more time ~~teachers~~ learning facilitators will have to teach the outcomes that require the professional working with small groups of learners.)
3. For those learner outcomes best learned in a seminar format, the curriculum and instruction people . . . with much input from specific teachers of course . . . developed seminars much like colleges and universities create, describe, and schedule courses. Each seminar topic can be directly traced to an exit learner outcome and to one or more Spheres of Living from the Strategic Design planning process.
4. The online seminar-scheduling program is coordinated with the individual learner’s scheduling process. If the Interpersonal Communications seminar only accommodates 18 learners and it has been filled, anyone attempting to schedule that seminar will be informed that the seminar is filled and informed of other available dates with openings.

Much of my science is online . . . even many of my experiments are conducted via virtual reality. But there are things that our science learning facilitators want done in the science lab and I enjoy that. It gives me a chance to meet other learners and to actually touch things. Scheduling my science lab time is usually quite easy. Scheduling lab time seems to be more flexible than scheduling seminars. So after I have my seminars scheduled I block out times to be in the science lab.

Some of the lab work requires preparation so when I get to a certain place in my online learning outcomes, I am automatically informed of when that lab experience will be offered. I look for empty spaces in my schedule and schedule lab times at times and places that are easy to coordinate with my other activities of the day. After doing my schedule for a couple of years I have learned how to save time and travel.



Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule

What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. Virtual reality has made it possible to conduct many experiments online. But for those learning activities requiring labs and other hands-on experiences, the curriculum and instruction people . . . with input from specific teachers of course . . . create, describe, and schedule activities much like science labs in high schools and universities and much like our best Technical Training Institutes. These hands-on learning experiences can be scheduled much like the seminars described above except that the location of the learning activity, by its nature, must be more site specific.
2. Seminar and lab attendance is monitored. Attendance is taken at all sessions and parents are automatically contacted and informed about a learner absence. Learning Community leaders know where each student is to be at any time of the day. Their name or number is entered into the master schedule program, which instantly brings up their daily schedule including activities and locations.

Doing online learning by yourself makes it easy to schedule . . . I am the only one I need to be concerned about, but it can be a bit boring after awhile. I have three good friends . . . all girls with whom I do my online math. We all are at about the same place in math and we go at about the same speed. We have fun of course and we help each other when one of us needs some quick tutoring. We set aside 6 to 8 hours each week to work together on math . . . we find a time that fits into all of our schedules by using our Microsoft scheduling calendars to automatically find times when all four of us are free. Sometimes we do our work in the learning community computer lab and sometimes we meet in one of our homes. We live close to each other and often coordinate our travel time. Everyone at LULC has a laptop and access to the Internet of course.

What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. The Microsoft Exchange Calendar makes it possible to coordinate the personal calendars. This technology is also available from many other IT companies. The LULC would have to make that service available to all staff and all learners.



Lori Does Her Learning Plan/Schedule

The LULC is very good about meeting my learning needs, but there are some things that I want to learn and want to do that don't fit into the MCL program. When I have something that I want to do and don't know how to go about it I schedule a time to discuss it with Ms. Trezona. For instance, because I have an interest in music and want to learn how businesses work, I would like to do a project that would help me to learn about how the music business works. I doubt that I will ever be an entertainer, but I think that I might be interested in a career in the business side of the music industry.

My Mom has a friend who works at a bank who used to be a professional entertainer in the pop music field. I have talked with Mom's friend and she seemed excited to think that she might mentor me in my study of the music industry . . . her banking experience would help with the financial part of the industry and she too was looking forward to learning more about what I wanted to learn about.

One of our learner outcomes from the Economic Sphere of Living is about business plans. Although the LULC has a seminar on that outcome I am allowed to do a personal project in place of that seminar as long as I can demonstrate the learner outcomes. Ms. Trezona has the authority to OK that project for me and she has agreed to facilitate a planning meeting between my mentor and me. I am really excited about it; who knows, one day I might be a talent scout! I have a friend who is thinking about joining me in this project. Christopher is interested in this topic too.

What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. The key to this type of flexibility lies in writing learner outcomes that are demonstrations of learning. That is, outcomes that are clear about what the learner must do to demonstrate mastery of that learning outcome. Traditional curriculum tends to be about “topics, about what the course will cover.”
2. This type of flexibility will be difficult to find in school systems that do not have a learner centered, outcome based, open and flexible culture. Creating that culture is everyone's responsibility but it must involve and begin with the system's leaders.
3. We frequently hear phrases like “the community is our school” which usually means that people volunteer to help out in classrooms. A good thing; but that's not what we are suggesting here. A real Learning Community goes far beyond that and it does it intentionally and systematically. Economic seminars take place at the bank and bank directors facilitate; biology seminars take place in hospitals and are facilitated by doctors and nurses; and mentors from all professions and occupations are eager to coach a young learner through a meaningful and real project.



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The last thing I put on my learning calendar is the online outcomes that I do by myself and can schedule at my convenience. Mom and Dad think that it is best if I schedule my days much like someone with a regular job would do, which means a minimum of a 40-hour week. I carry my Netbook wherever I go and so I can work on my online learner outcomes whenever I have the time . . . but I do schedule them in advance to stop me from getting lazy.

I can also work on the online outcomes from anywhere, which helps a lot with my schedule. My preference is to work on them at home but I find that many times I have gaps in my schedule when it would be difficult and time consuming to get home and then back to another activity. So most of the time I just try to find a quiet place, open my Netbook, call up my learner portfolio and go for it. Our Learning Community has many places where we can work online. Even businesses seem to like to see us working in their places. Internet hotspots are everywhere . . . wish I could afford Starbucks more often.

My friends and I have become a little competitive about our progress. I think that my three girlfriends and I will complete all of the exit learner outcomes and be eligible for graduation before we are seventeen. That is our target anyway.

What did the LULC do to create the systems that allow Lori to create this part of her schedule?

1. Earlier in this chapter we described what the Learning Community must do to make their online learning activities available for learners 24/7. Selecting or creating, organizing, testing, and making online learning activities available is a large task and must be one of the first projects initiated soon after a MCL vision has been agreed upon. The good news is that there are already good programs available and more are being created all the time. Learning Communities, educators, and learners will soon have alternatives for most learner outcomes that are common to curriculum. Today's digital world has made choice ubiquitous.
2. Credit card companies have programs to determine the amount customers must pay on their account each month and customers are contacted . . . and probably threatened if the minimum amount is not paid. Walmart has a computerized system to know exactly when one of their products must be ordered to ensure that the product will continue to be available to customers. That type of technology could easily be used to determine when individual learners are falling behind on their online learner outcomes. Learning systems will want to implement a feedback loop that will automatically inform "those with a need to know," including parents of course, when a learner is not meeting expectations. They will also want to inform the "need to knowers" when a learner is exceeding expectations. And the acceptable rates of progress can differ for learners. Not all learners learn at the same rate. The danger will be in having lower expectations for some learners simply because of their socio-economic status or some other indefensible criterion.



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So there it is, my learning schedule for September and October. You can see everything that I hope to accomplish these two months. My Dad has given it an OK and I will now hit "send" and it will go to Ms. Trezona, my learning coach, my Mom and Dad's inbox, my gymnastics coach, all of the seminar and lab learning facilitators whose learning activities I have scheduled, and to the Learning Community Central Office. The only one on my list that may want me to make a change in my schedule will be Ms. Trezona, and she always gets back to me right away if she thinks I should make a change.

My parents, who refer to themselves as "digital immigrants," are afraid that I might depend on the computer and the Internet too much, and that I won't have enough opportunities to interact and work with other kids. So Dad and I always do a check of my learning plan to see if we can keep it about 50 - 50. It doesn't have to be exact but he wants me to have about the same amount of time with group experiences as with individual online learning.

Letting the Fast Runners Run

You may think that Lori is an exceptional kid and that there aren't many like her, but in our experiences as teachers and principals, there are a lot of Loris out there who only need to have the ceiling on learning removed so they can excel far beyond what they now are allowed and encouraged to do. We confidently estimate that if **MCL** were a reality for our learners, far more than 50% of our students would outdistance what the top 5% now accomplish. When we combine the learner motivation that is fostered by **MCL** with the tools to learn that encourage rather than impede acceleration, test scores are sure to rise significantly. And a love for learning is retained.

And none of this is at the expense of the slower learner. They too will have their daily learning needs met without the stigma of being in a special program. They too would most likely see their motivation and achievement increase. Although we believe that today's schools place too much emphasis on high stakes testing, we believe that composite test scores in the United States would increase to the point that we would again lead the world in learner achievement. The potential of **MCL** is great.



Restating the Purpose of Inevitable

There is much to agree upon in regard to education and much on which to disagree. Not everyone agrees on the *purpose* of education. At one end of the continuum we have those who would like a rigorous traditional curriculum, a curriculum determined by the state or by a blue ribbon committee. Would **MCL** work for these people? On the other end of that continuum, there are those who prefer learning opportunities that focus on the “whole child,” learning opportunities that cater to the unique talents, gifts, and interests of the individual learner. Would **MCL** work for these people?

As regards degree of *control*, there are those who believe that schools need to be very directive, that adults should determine what is learned, when it is learned, how it is learned and how students should be assessed. Would **MCL** work for these people? At the other end of the control continuum, there are those who believe strongly that learners should be allowed choices of the what, when, and how of learning . . . and at a relatively young age. Would **MCL** work for these people? There are strong beliefs and feelings along both the *purpose of education* and *degree of control* continuums.

Our intent is not to convince you as to the purpose of education, nor is it to suggest the level of control adults should have over the learning process.

Our intent is that you become convinced that the Industrial Age, assembly line delivery of instruction is wrong for learners and educators alike and that there is a better . . . a MUCH BETTER . . . way!

Once you break free of the assembly line and all of the negative controls that this outdated format puts on your options, you will be free to customize in any fashion you choose. You can design a learning system that fits on either the purpose or the control continuum. We of course have our own personal biases as to the purpose and control issues, but those are not what we are preaching or promoting. We are not telling you what to do, we are telling you what to stop doing. Stop doing assembly line learning! We are not imposing anything other than a much more efficient and effective learning model that is flexible enough to meet your community’s beliefs and aspirations.



Chapter 7 Takeaways:

The technology to create personalized schedules/agendas exists and is easy to manipulate. Hard to create and organize for sure . . . but easy for the user to manipulate.

*Once the organizational infrastructure for **MCL** is in place, the technical part of creating a personalized learning schedule is relatively easy . . . it's the importance and critical nature of the decisions that require time and deep thought.*

***MCL** moves control and responsibility from the educator to the learner . . . and in the process creates Self-Directed, Life-Long Learners.*