

Get Addicted to Learning with The Mind Lab

Upskill and invest in yourself without the time commitment of a traditional university degree – all you need is a laptop and an internet connection.

“The landscape changes so quickly. There are new platforms and tools popping up all the time, so I knew there was more to learn and I wanted to challenge myself” - Jess Connors, student at The Mind Lab.

A few years into your career, upskilling with further education can be daunting. Doubly so if you're looking to change paths from one career to another. On top of that, there's the uncertainty of the Covid-19-era and the fact that Kiwis in particular tend to be apprehensive about further learning. Plus, most people just don't think they have time.

Enter The Mind Lab, founded and led by Frances Valentine, offering post-graduate learning for busy adults. The 'bite-sized' micro-credentials are NZQA-recognised courses designed to fit in with a full-time-working life. They're achievable short enough that they don't feel like a massive commitment, while the applied skills that the courses teach directly benefit both work and personal life.

Jess Connors is one such student stacking up her qualifications well after she studied Human Resources Management and Public Relations at Humber College in Toronto, Canada from 2006-2009. Her 'Jill of all trades' career has seen her with roles in everything from administration to corporate affairs and teaching - on three different continents. Since settling in Aotearoa, Jess has been working in HR, communications, and public relations.

She started with The Mind Lab's Postgraduate Certificate in Digital and Collaborative Learning. “I was inspired because I had such a great experience with my first programme and I knew that there was much more that I could learn, especially in the digital and tech space,” she says.

So, from that first course, it snowballed. Jess took on two micro-credentials, Digital Skills for the Workplace, and Leading Beyond Sustainability, and is currently part-way through her postgraduate certificate from The Mind Lab's sister organisation, Tech Futures Lab, where she is studying Human Potential in the Digital Economy. Jess will be done around June, and is already eyeing up another Tech Futures Lab programme.

Jess has found what The Mind Lab has long suspected - that learning is addictive.

A self-professed active relaxer, Jess was also able to fit all her courses with The Mind Lab around her career. She admits that she hasn't had quite as much time to spend chilling out and watching Netflix but made that sacrifice very purposefully in order to invest in herself instead.

“I've learned how to be more proactive and conscious about where I spend my energy and I have found that really fulfilling,” she says. “Schooling has cut into my social life for sure, but I

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have gained a great social circle of likeminded people through my studies, too.”

And for her hard work, Jess has been rewarded in her career. “Absolutely, my studies have enriched my career. They have broadened my perspective and enriched the depth to my thinking, and way of being.

“In fact, I have recently moved into a more tech-related role, working in the digital assets/crypto space. Without my studies and willingness to learn new things and pivot, I don't think I'd have had the confidence to move into this career and tech start-up (Easy Crypto).”

The learning easily fits in around a working life, with some courses requiring around 10 hours a week, consisting of videos, reading, and facilitated live classes. But it's also really flexible, with students able to focus deeper on areas that suit their interests and less on areas that aren't so relevant to them personally or professionally. Jess notes that when she's been unwell, or had a lot of work, The Mind Lab were flexible and accommodating with her courses. But more than that, the flexibility of The Mind Lab's courses is built around the way students learn.

“There has also been acknowledgement and flexibility around students with different personalities and comfort levels in terms of speaking in large groups,” Jess reports. “We have been

given assignments, of course, but have had the choice whether to complete an essay, or a report, or to record a video, create a presentation, and so on. So, this has really allowed for people to present their work and their learnings in the way that feels most authentic and comfortable for them.”

In comparison, her previous traditional schooling felt very old-school, “with ancient textbooks and teachers speaking at the students rather than collaborative learning.”

The Mind Lab's courses on the other hand utilise a diverse range of learning methods, including videos, readings, discussions and facilitated live classes. “We've done a whole lot of group projects as well as individual assignments. It feels very contemporary, practical and fit for the times we are currently living in.”

Though taking the leap to do the first course seems to be the tricky part, it's just the thing that will revolutionise your career, your CV, and your skills base, to get that 'new you' you're hoping to get out of the new year. And if you're still hesitant, Jess's message is to go for it: “I genuinely can't rate The Mind Lab and Tech Futures Lab more highly!”

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