

Executive Interview

2020



For over 35 years, AllenComm has partnered with Fortune 100 companies to create and scale unique, innovative learning solutions. Extensive instructional design experience, innovative learning technologies and agency-level creative teams enable AllenComm to stand out in the learning landscape. Considered one of the top-10 firms of its kind in the country, AllenComm wins more than 40 awards year after year for its tailored learning solutions. With internal workforce and experience, AllenComm is uniquely positioned in the learning space to meet multiple needs from small to very large change management projects.



The Columbia University Department of Psychiatry is one of the largest in the country in terms of faculty size as well as state, federal and foundation research support. It is among the top-ranked in the nation for Psychiatry in the US News & World Report's Best Hospital rankings as well as in psychiatric research funding from the National Institutes of Health. It has extraordinary clinical, educational and research resources. Its faculty includes more than 400 psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses and neurobehavioral scientists. Clinical facilities and laboratories of the Psychiatry Department are located in a large number of institutions and healthcare systems.



RON ZAMIR
Chief Executive Officer
AllenComm



BARBARA STANLEY
Ph.D., Medical Psychology
Columbia University
Director,
Center for Practice Innovations
New York State Psychiatric Institute



ANNE MARIE ALBANO
Ph.D., Medical Psychology
Columbia University

Founder
Columbia University Clinic for
Anxiety and Related Disorders



RACHEL COOKE
COO and Podcast Host
Brandon Hall Group



About Ron Zamir

Ron Zamir has been the CEO of AllenComm since 2003, and has led learning and business organizations since 1991 in Israel, South Africa and across the USA. He spends his time partnering with clients to discover how learning and development can scale to have a real impact on learner engagement and retention. Ron brings 22 years of experience in marketing, sales and education methodologies to the field of corporate training.

Ron's thought-leadership articles have been featured in training magazines, blogs and eBooks as well as at conferences worldwide. Ron is an Honors graduate of Hebrew University and has academic degrees and certifications in multiple fields such as International Relations, Business, Archaeology and Instructional Design. He is the recipient of the Raoul Wallenberg Fellowship for Leadership and Democracy and volunteers his time in local community affairs, economic development and local charter school boards.

About Barbara Stanley, Ph.D



Barbara Stanley is a Professor of Medical Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University and Director of the Suicide Prevention Training, Implementation and Evaluation (SP-TIE) program in the Center for Practice Innovations at New York State Psychiatric Institute. She is also a Research Scientist in the Division of Molecular Imaging and Neuropathology at New York State Psychiatric Institute, where she is the Principal Investigator/co-Investigator for the National Institute of Mental Health, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Veterans Administration. Her research focuses on all aspects of suicidal behavior, non-suicidal self-injury and borderline personality disorder, including assessment and intervention with suicidal individuals, clinical factors relevant to suicidal behavior and self-injury and neurobiological and biobehavioral influences on suicidal behavior. She also oversees the development of suicide prevention training for clinicians throughout New York State. With her colleague, Dr. Gregory Brown, she developed the Safety Planning Intervention that is used throughout the VA and on crisis hotlines across the United States. Dr. Stanley is a member of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Research Grants Committee and was the President of the New York Metropolitan Area Regional Chapter for Foundation. She was the founder and the first president of Applied Research Ethics National Association (ARENA), on the board of directors of Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research (PRIM&R). She is the former Chair of the Committee on Human Research for the American Psychological Association. She has served on several Institutional Review Boards and has been a consultant for the NIH Office of Protection from Research Risks. Dr. Stanley served as a consultant to NIMH in developing guidelines to investigators, including handling suicidal patients in treatment trials, and was appointed to the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on IRBs and Social Science Research. She was a standing member of the NIH Center for Scientific Research Adult Psychopathology and Disorders of Aging Study Section. She is on the Executive Committee of the International Academy of Suicide Research and editor-in-chief of its official journal, the Archives of Suicide Research. She also serves on several journal editorial boards. She is the author of more than 200 publications, several edited and co-written books and has received several awards for her research and leadership in the field.



About Anne Marie Albano, Ph.D.

Annie Marie Albano is a Professor of Medical Psychology (in Psychiatry) at Columbia University and Founder of the Columbia University Clinic for Anxiety and Related Disorders (CUCARD). Dr. Albano is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, Founding Fellow of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy, a Beck Institute Scholar and is board certified in clinical child and adolescent psychology. She is past-president of the Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology of the American Psychological Association and past-president of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. She has published more than 150 articles and chapters, and is the co-author of several cognitive-behavioral treatment manuals and of the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children, all published by Oxford University Press. Dr. Albano served as a Principal Investigator (PI) of a six-site National Institute of Mental Health-sponsored study entitled “Child/Adolescent Anxiety Multimodal Treatment Study” (CAMS) and was the Principal Investigator for the “Treatments for Adolescents with Depression Study” (TADS). Her book with Leslie Pepper, *You and Your Anxious Child: Free Your Child from Fears and Worries and Create a Joyful Family Life*, received a 2014 Seal of Merit from the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group’s Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst.

She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company’s project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 15 years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.



Q **RACHEL**

What resources are you offering organizations that can help companies during these challenging times?

Q **RACHEL**

Can you describe the necessary coping skills and the science behind them for COVID-19?

A **RON**

We need to start the discussion by realizing that in the new normal we're in.

We're overloaded with resources between our social media feeds, our companies pushing out information and our proactive engagement; if it's on the news or it's what we read. The key is how those resources are curated and what resources empower us to function better in this environment. Columbia University has been a partner of ours for many years; in discussions, we realized the amount of resources is contributing to the anxiety. Once we put aside the very critical issue of health and function under this COVID-19 cloud, we have to realize there's a mental-health issue. For us, we wanted to make resources available that have a guide so people can reflect and find a better method to function in this new environment. One of the first resources I used is the course we did to help myself sleep better by being able to create some prioritization and understand what I was going through.

A **ANNE MARIE**

The science behind what we will recommend here and what we know has a long history in understanding that first and foremost, what we're experiencing — the anxiety, the worry, sadness, grief, uncertainty — these are all normal reactions to an extraordinary time. Anxiety is very much a part of the human condition. It's an emotion that is hard-wired in us, to help protect us from danger, prepare how to deal with things, and make plans for coping and moving forward. If you're more anxious now, that is good. Your inborn anxiety alarms are working for you. The key is to manage the anxiety rather than have it control you. Going back to the literature and the science that has studied the ways of managing excessive stress, and also keeping healthy and well, we know a few things. First of all, you have to take stock of what is happening around and within you.

(continued)

If we think about it right now, we are pretty much locked at home for the most part except for people who have to work, our healthcare providers, grocery store clerks and such. Our working environment, home life and surroundings have drastically changed. Take stock of how that affects you. Are you feeling closed in? Are you feeling more scared about venturing out? Are you scared about being out and maybe contracting the virus and then transporting it to others? You have to take stock of your surroundings. Think about what you are saying to yourself.

Think about the coach in your head. Is the coach in your head repeating misinformation and exaggerated information and fear that you may be picking up in the media, on Twitter and all over the place? Or is it factual information delivered by experts, like the CDC, for how to protect yourself and how to stay safe? Is it giving you details on how to keep distance, and are you focusing on that and the things that you can do and the things you can control? Pay attention and push yourself to talk back to anxious thoughts with factual thoughts and with ideas that help you move along in your every day and cope well.



RACHEL

What tips are in the digital guide for managing anxiety?

ANNE MARIE

A There are things you need to do for yourself. We're not moving the way that we move in everyday life. We're not getting up in the morning, going to the car and driving to work — or in my case, taking a subway, walking in between offices and meetings, catching up at lunch with someone. We're not moving; we're not going to the gym unless you have something in your home that you could do. We're not moving in the typical ways that we usually do. We're much more constrained, we're sitting more and it causes more fatigue in addition to muscle tension, eye strain and all kinds of things. What you have to do is try to build movement into your day, even if this means that you are doing home-based on-the-floor Pilates that you're getting from the web in your 700-square-foot, little tiny New York apartment. Perhaps you can run around in your backyard because that's where you can run around or do something like that. You have to look for ways to get moving and build this in. You have to make routines for yourself that manage your work and give you a separation of your work and your home.

There are a lot of places online now that are giving you low-impact exercise that gives you a workout, and you don't need any equipment; I learned this today in a class I was teaching with our psychiatry residents. I was asking them how they are coping and what apps they're using, and one of them said that.

(continued)

Also, there are other apps for doing mindfulness, relaxation and deep breathing, which are great for soothing yourself because the other thing we have to bear in mind is our soothing time. The time we ramp up in the morning and get ready for work, the way we ramp down in the evening — these kinds of things have been pushed out, especially if work and home are in one space. We have to think about ways of getting into soothing. You're not selfish by taking care of yourself before you take care of your work, your family and your kids.

The biggest thing I would say to folks is to focus on what you can control.



Another significant coping resource is that we have to reach out. We have to remember some people are living alone. Maybe it's because they're single or they may just live alone and so for them unless they reach out to someone, often they are forgotten in a sense because maybe the family or a spouse, the kids or someone else is crowding out your time. We have to reach out to our friends who are alone, and we have to reach out to those who are vulnerable, vulnerable meaning the elderly or people who have specific disabilities that keep them more isolated and such. By reaching out to others, one you're making an essential social connection, but the other is you

could help somebody, which gives you a more prominent purposeful role in helping others and being of value, of being gracious to others and extending yourself. That is important. The other thing is you'll get support for yourself, too, because the other people that you're talking to can get your mind off of things; you can relax and have a little fun. Even online Zoom happy hours or something like that is essential. We're doing that for our team because it's healthy; it's the connection and it's a way of coping.

The biggest thing I would say to folks is to focus on what you can control. You can control how much news you consume; turn it off. You can control your attitude, you can control how you follow the recommendations for staying safe, you can control your kindness and grace, as well as finding things to do at home and your social distancing. You can't control what other people do. You can set limits on your kids; you can ask the folks you're in contact with that you love and care about, to give you time and space, and set times for sharing, but you can't control the actions of others. You can't control how this virus is going to do its thing. You can have comfort and understand that there will be treatments and there will be a vaccine over time. But we have to let science do its thing and we have to trust that it's going to happen. But other people's motives and predicting what will happen and when — that's out of your control. So, focus on what you can control.

RACHEL

Can you describe the necessary coping skills and the science behind them for COVID-19?

BARBARA

The module that I worked on was a bit about isolation, but it was also about being together and what to do when you are together when things get a bit too hot. Another thing it was about was not so much for people who get anxious, but for people whose life experience is more, so feeling extraordinarily frustrated and for people who tend to get angry and have outbursts. When you are living in small circumstances, it can be unusually difficult. Whether you're living alone or with a group of other people, whether you are socially isolated or not, the place that I start with people is where we all have to start, which is with acceptance.

We have to accept that this is where we are right now. I learned the importance of acceptance and that we are where we are; we didn't want to be here, but this is where we are. If we don't accept that this is where we are, we can't do anything about it. It may sound a little crazy, but we almost have to embrace where we are, and then we can move forward and do something with the situation. I learned about this concept of acceptance. I was on my way to work on

Riverside Drive, which is an extremely busy street. I was late for a meeting; I was rushing and a cab hit my car. I ended up halfway across Riverside Drive; my car stalled out and cars were zooming in both directions. The first thing I said to myself was: "This can't be happening; this cannot be happening." Then I thought, this is what acceptance is about because if I don't accept that this is happening, I'm just going to sit here forever. That's step one. The other thing, which I think is extremely important, is we're living in an era of uncertainty and we have to focus. There are so many uncertain things, and we have to focus only on the things for us that are certain and that we do have some control over; this is where acceptance comes in. We are living in a time of uncertainty and we just have to accept that.

RACHEL

What tips in the digital guide for managing isolation?

BARBARA

In terms of strategies for people either living in social isolation or people who are living in tight quarters, I can address each of those.

(continued)

For people who are living in isolation, there are a million ways with the internet to reach out to other people. Now, there are things like online meeting groups, people who play bridge, etc. There are a zillion ways to do meetups online and it's a way that people can meet other people. If you have access to the internet, you don't ever have to be alone. I do think that people have to be careful about it, though, the kinds of social media and meetups they're exposing themselves. When I work with my patients, I always ask them, and this, of course, applies to everybody: Is this going to make you more upset or less upset? If it has the potential to make you more upset, move on and find something else. There are ways of cutting through social isolation, whether or not it's through the internet. The other thing we can think about is, what are the ways that we can contribute virtually? For example, I'm well, I live alone and I have an elderly neighbor. I went to the grocery store; they had a lot of two-for-one deals and I gave all my seconds to my next-door neighbor who was old. She appreciated it and I felt good doing it. What I would say is think small. I think what can be more difficult and more challenging, is if you are living in a family group, or a small group of people and in a small environment. Tempers can flare, people get frustrated with each other and domestic violence is actually on the upswing. One simple thing to do is to take your emotional temperature and we can all do this. Think about it on a scale of one to 10, and you can do an inventory of this in advance when you're sitting alone — how do I know I'm going to blow; I'm going to get

too upset and I'm going to explode? Then, think about what the signs in your body are and what the kinds of thoughts you have are. When you feel yourself going down that path, figure out a simple way to remove yourself temporarily. It may mean just standing outside your building; it may mean putting on your headphones and removing yourself; it may mean going in the bathroom and taking a shower. But just take yourself out of the situation and allow your emotions to calm down.

**RACHEL**

What are businesses doing to handle this new situation?

**RON**

It's a good question and I've spent a lot of time on this, as you could imagine. I've been privileged in my younger years of serving in the military, and one of the things you encounter from boot camp onward is how you take on challenges. You see around you and in yourself how people react to a challenge. Some challenges are adversities, some challenges are things that build you up — and I think in these times, we are dealing with challenges.

(continued)

These courses we've done are free, can be put on any company's learning management system and we provide for free, SCORM files.

They're a way to empower people to help themselves. When you look at businesses in these challenging times, you're suddenly dealing with, from a leadership perspective, somebody who's responsible for people in the market to the individual employees and their families. How we build resilience; we don't know what the future is going to entail, it may get tougher or it makes get easier. It reminds me of when you go into a course or a process that's going to take three months and you know that you're going to deal with new things. One of the ways that we're handling this, and we also talked to other CEOs and other companies about how we encourage our employees is to see this as a set period with a lot of uncertainty. You have to persevere; you have to have tenacity. The best tip I can give businesses is to engage your employees, keep them busy. It may not be that they can be working on your typical projects but reach out and find a partner.

For example, we immediately reached out to the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry. We reached out and said, we may be derailed a bit now on some of the stuff we usually do, but let's do something else. I find that to be resilient; one of the first things you need to have a purpose. The courses that we have on mental-health issues, they have businesses build purpose for their employees and through that purpose, can handle this new situation. Resiliency is the name of the game.

Contextualizing is critical. Look for that purpose that you can always find in life, even in the hardest times, and I think you can sail through this and end up stronger than when you started.



**To Listen To The Interview
On Brandon Hall Group's
HCMxRadio**

CLICK HERE

