



# Sophia Associates

## A NEW GENERATION OF LEARNING

*One-fifth of this country's established companies will be losing 40 percent or more of their top-level talent in the next five years* according to a recent study by Development Dimensions International, Inc., a Pennsylvania-based organizational development firm. Additionally, we can expect a 15 percent decline in the number of people between the ages of 35-44. Are you planning now for the next generation of leaders? The future leaders, now the GenXers and the Millennials, hold very different values and have been weaned on video games, the Internet and learning pods at school. Are you incorporating learning modalities that are integrative and observable AND geared to this new generation of learners, learners that will not sit in a classroom lecture and who are looking for convenience and instant gratification and affirmation of their learning?

What are the greatest challenges facing organizations today? They are talent recruitment, talent retention, and succession planning and leadership development. In a recent survey by Bersin & Associates, 37 percent of respondents listed leadership training as the first or second training priority for their organizations. Without a pro-active stance now, organizations will find themselves without the high performance executive talent and leadership competencies required to stay competitive in the global marketplace.

## A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL

Well-known Ken Blanchard Companies uses what they call a Blended Learning Model for Leadership Training that meets the trend toward dispersed work units. They blend different learning modalities with technology using e-learning and their LearnCenter, a portal that hosts information that the client requires for traditional coursework. This provides a flexible training delivery that allows employees to build their skills anytime, anywhere. Alternatively, many companies use WebEx based conferencing as a support to virtual learning.

In my practice, clients express similar concerns as it relates to the generations at work. To address these concerns we take a multi-dimensional approach to learning that engages the GenX and Millennial individual – the future of business. Using a combination of coaching, training and now, simulations, this generation of learners can participate in alignment to their (generational) learning style and apply the learning directly to work immediately. Providing a comprehensive learning model that is real-time, integrative, measurable and focused on your strategy, tailored to your organization's desired outcomes provides a solution to the challenges of learning for the next generation of managers and leaders. This three-way approach includes learning simulations based on developmental needs and is aligned with

corporate strategy. The participant can take their training and coursework and implement and practice their new skills real-time while receiving immediate feedback from the on-screen virtual coach.

You may already be using training and executive coaching, and perhaps e-learning and WebEx, in your organization, all valuable modalities. You may not, however, be familiar with simulations. What is a simulation? A simulation is not e-learning. Simulations are interactive programs that aim to mimic real-life situations. Lori Kavle, CEO of Simulations International, LLC of Annapolis explains: "The goal of a simulation is to immerse the participant so completely into the reality of the simulation that the learning and retention of the material sky-rockets. It is truly "learning by doing"

I asked Lori how her company has applied simulations in learning for organizations? She referred to a number of applications.

1. Leadership Execution – "Based on models developed for executive education in the world's leading business schools, leadership and business acumen simulations act as tools to facilitate a way for corporate management teams to interact and learn from each other. These simulations mimic the strategy behind operating a global company and how you deal with various parts of the world that have their own economic issues. In good simulation design, time is compressed, therefore you can see 5 years of your decisions and business consequences in a 2-day program. The objectives of these types of programs are to build business, financial and interpersonal skills as well as to foster the enterprise-wide capability of future leaders."

2. Leadership Competencies – Emotional Intelligence, Effective Feedback, Interviewing Skills, Coaching Skills for Managers and more may all be applied in the interactive environment of a simulation without any risk to the learner or to the organization.

3. Sales – "We combine the practice of effective sales techniques and responses using realistic scenarios that incorporate your products, services and clients and that provide a risk-free yet realistic environment and typical challenges," says Lori.

Lori suggests Sophia Associates three-way approach of customized training, professional coaching and Simulations International interactive simulations, so that companies can apply this training immediately therefore increasing retention of the skills and observable behaviors that training has strived to achieve in the past with limited success. "You get a greater ROI on training and development dollars and an innovative approach to training the next generation." claims Lori, whose company holds the largest simulation library database for all skills and industries.

### METIS - The Future of Learning



Self-Learning – Independent Study, One-to-one Coaching, e-Learning

Social Learning – Traditional Classroom, Peer to Peer, Cohort and Team Coaching

SIMbolic Learning – Interactive Computer Simulations

Optimal Learning occurs where all three converge.

## **SOLUTIONS TO TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES**

What are some of the traditional challenges to training a new generation whose model of learning is based on video games and immediate feedback?

1. Time – Training takes time. With busy schedules and the cost of having employees out of the office, training is often the last commitment made. Yet on-going training and development is needed to maintain a skilled workforce and to remain competitive.

2. Integration –Research has shown that on average training works for only 20 percent of the participants, has no impact on another 20 percent and for the remaining 60 percent is only marginally successful. The question becomes “How do we get more sustainable learning from training and development?”

3. ROI - How do companies measure the learning impact on business? Learning Officers are at odds to determine metrics that can quantify the impact of learning as it relates to business results. When utilizing simulations, the measurements surrounding it are a bit different than traditional scoring because you are interpreting “pathways of decisions” versus “yes or no” or “true or false”. Lori adds, “By defining clear learning objectives prior to the simulation development, the measurement and metrics can be defined, assessed, scored and uploaded into any learning management system. If one has forethought, good simulation design and execution with a reputable simulation vendor, a tremendous opportunity exists, not only for learning outcomes but bottom line revenue as well.” As an example, Lori shared, “Sprint, a large telecommunication provider, implemented a customer call center simulation to mimic real-life calls that came into the centers daily. Sprint trained 15,000 customer service representatives on various skills and has pointed to a \$50 million return on investment in a three-year period of time.”

4. Risk – Learning requires a change in what you are doing or in how you are doing it. This may mean taking risks with your decisions, with your approaches or risking a new strategy. In general, organizations are wary of any risk yet without risk, there is no learning, no innovation and ultimately no growth.

Promoting creativity, innovation and risk-taking is something most companies promote yet find difficult to actually achieve. The perceived danger in making an incorrect decision or damaging a strategic relationship keeps individuals from practicing new behaviors, approaches or implementing new ideas. Through the use of a simulation, the individual is free to practice new behaviors and responses to typical situations from start to resolution without any fear of criticism or impact on his reality at work while receiving immediate feedback on his performance from a “virtual coach”. Having a “virtual” experience of applying new learning helps integrate that learning and promotes the confident application of the learning at work.

## **GENERATIONAL LEARNING THAT GETS RESULTS**

By creating a learning tool aligned with the learning styles of GenXers and Millennials, training and development becomes fun and attractive with the ultimate result of greater participation, more positive attitudes and the immediate application of skills for quicker impact and results. Simulations provide interaction, much like a video game, and a path to resolution that entices the player to keep learning.

Combined with traditional approaches, the addition of a virtual experience increases retention of learning as well as promotes the application of that learning.

## **BENEFITS OF BLENDED LEARNING APPROACHES**

Companies challenged by the multiple learning styles of the generations at their workplace are looking for innovative and sustainable training and learning modalities. Documented benefits to combining traditional coursework, executive coaching and technologies such as e-learning and interactive learning simulations are:

- Learn in a supportive and risk free environment.
- Allow interactive application of knowledge.
- Create excitement and retention of that knowledge.
- See blind spots in performance.
- Challenge assumptions and hone problem-solving skills.
- Focus on the strategic opportunities of the business.
- Support internal and external business processes.
- Increase individual and organizational ROI

It's time to take a look at your future leaders and to ask yourself how you will position your company and its people to not only stay competitive in a global environment but to be at the forefront of learning so that your company leads tomorrow through the talent you have developed today.

(This article adapted from article for Smart CEO Magazine, Baltimore, MD)

© 2006 Alicia M. Rodriguez - Certified Executive and Leadership Coach and "Wisdom Partner", founder of **Sophia Associates, Inc.**, an Annapolis, MD based learning organization that provides coaching, consulting and training dedicated to enhancing leadership competencies, strengthening executive performance levels, creating opportunities for personal learning and developing high performing teams.

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