

LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #10 *Using Business Language Instead Training Language*

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Mary Kay Lofurno: Welcome to the next episode of the [Syberworks e-learning podcast series](#). I'm Mary Kay Lofurno, marketing director of [Syberworks](#) and your host. Today we are beginning a new seven part miniseries about the business, of [learning management](#). The miniseries will consist of a series of interviews with Mark Bower, President and CEO of Bower and Company Incorporated, a learning and performance management consulting firm, located in Colorado. Over the course of the series we will discuss practical issues that impact learning professionals and training managers in a corporate training environment. The series will focus on business fundamentals in [learning management](#) to help [training](#) managers and learning professionals to run their departments more effectively and more efficiently. In today's segment we will discuss the use of business language rather than training or professional language and why this is important to your [e-learning](#) or training programs.

And now we will begin our [interview with Mark Bower](#), President of Bower and Company Incorporated, a learning and performance management consulting firm.

Good afternoon Mark, great to have you here today.

Mark Bower: Great to be here Mary Kay. As you know I live in Denver, Colorado and you may have seen we've had record snowfalls this year. The snowplows and front loaders have graciously made a sledding hill out of one side of my driveway, but it's great for the kids.

Mary Kay: Well that sounds [inaudible]. Mark, why don't you tell us a little about yourself before we get started?

Mark: OK, Mary Kay. Well, I've held a number of [learning management](#) positions with IBM and other industry leaders bringing over 20 years of experience to my clients. My background includes responsibilities as an executive, entrepreneur, management consultant and training manager. In addition I have sat on a number of national advisory committees directing the effective use of technology, designed a number of nationally recognized information automation projects, have experience in all paths including management, having managed and provided over 220, 000 hours of professional services to learning leaders and developing the strategies, processes and governance, will maximize staff impact in achieving business objectives.

I believe that a successful learning and performance organization must empower employees with the skills, knowledge and beliefs that facilitate both change and achievement of business objectives by optimizing strategy, design, delivery, and technology.

Mary Kay: OK, thanks. You know I'm pretty excited about today's topic because I think it's going to be really useful for [training](#) managers and learning professionals. So why don't we begin?

Mark: Sounds good to me.

Mary Kay: All right, why do you think business language as opposed to training language is important, Mark?

Mark: Mary Kay, that's a great question. Can I start with a story?

Mary Kay: Sure.

Mark: I remember a while back, a close business associate of mine worked as a [training](#) manager in a large technology company. She worked in sales training and developed a new strategy for train delivery that reduced costs and increased sale's effectiveness. Excited by the prospect of making a difference for her company, she rushed to talk to her manager about rolling out the process company wide. She was disappointed to find her manager was not as thrilled as she was about the new idea, and was actually somewhat irritated. Despite very little positive reinforcement, she prevailed on the manager to sponsor a presentation about her ideas to the corporate learning committee. Undaunted, she prepared for the presentation with great anticipation. When the time came to present her ideas, she was once again greatly disappointed with the outcome; no one in the room supported her ideas. She was so frustrated, she left the company to join a competitor. Several months later, a similar concept was presented to the steering committee, and accepted for [implementation](#). The new program was a great success; increasing revenue, and reducing costs.

Mary Kay: Interesting story, Mark. But how does it relate to the use of language in business, and specifically to training managers?

Mark: I think the story illustrates the importance of communicating ideas in a way that is relevant to your audience. We are selling ideas and solutions and we have to remember a very important fundamental axiom, that is: The best idea does not always win; it's the best presented idea that wins.

Mary Kay: Mark, that's absolutely true. Tell us a little more about that.

Mark: You know, many of us in the learning industry believe the sheer intellectual brilliance and insights of our ideas will carry the day and win support, but generally, that isn't true. We need to sell our ideas and this involves six major steps. Important to realize that selling ideas is job number one, far from being a mere afterthought or something that once the idea is ready for launch can be thrown over the wall for the marketing and sales team for support. Convincing the audience is a constant need and never-ending requirement.

Another important aspect is focusing on the [benefits](#) not the features. Will your new product or service save the customer time, improve his or her social standing, resolve a problem better than existing solutions? Every respected sales professional knows to concentrate on such benefits; prospective buyers don't care a whiff about how your gizmo works, how many toggle switches it has or anything else about its features, they can't care until they buy into the gizmo's [benefits](#).

Emphasize the role of persuasion, constantly emphasize the need to win friends and influence people internally and externally, work on communication skills and energizing creative briefings, descriptions, board room reports, etc. Focus on crafting messages so that people pay attention; make everyone on the team an ideal evangelist.

Try the ideas on skeptical thinkers first. Your friends are likely to give you the positive feedback you want to hear. But before you really decide to commit all out to an idea, try it out on your toughest critics, humbly invite them to tear it apart and find its weaknesses. Then see how you feel, if you are still convinced you've got something, go for it. If not, you probably don't have the fire in the belly to see it through to fruition.

Speak the language of people you are selling to. Effective idea evangelists find out as much as they can about the thinking style of those they are pitching. Are they analytical or quantitative? If so, feed them numbers. Are they emotionally driven? If so, come up with anecdotes that demonstrate the message you want them to embrace. If they are big-picture oriented, don't bore them with details. As for our topic, use the language, [business training](#) or whatever that they use and understand.

And finally, help others visualize your idea. A picture is worth a thousand words and the more they can feel, taste, touch, and most of all, see your idea, the greater your chances of getting a green light. People don't like to admit they don't understand or that they are confused; but as any champion knows, people don't buy what they don't understand.

Mary Kay: OK. So Mark, you're saying the [training](#) managers and learning professionals need to communicate in a way that promotes their training ideas to the non-training audience that can help make their ideas a reality. Right?

Mark: Yes. I think that is the best approach.

Mary Kay: Being in marketing, I can completely understand the importance of language, but how do you feel also important within a learning organization?

Mark: Well Mary Kay, I believe that using the language of your internal clients is especially important for learning professional. Every business has its own [terminology](#) and customs and [training](#) is no different. You'll be more effective in a business function if you use the terminology and customs of your audience. This ties both to the questioning and data gathering phases as well as the presentation phase of any internal project.

Many companies do not consider learning performance important. When initially presenting your ideas, many times you are starting with a credibility deficit that you must overcome. Using proper language will increase your credibility and your ability to sell ideas. There is probably nothing more frustrating than having a great idea that will positively impact the company but not being able to get a buy-in from decision makers. Using language that resonates with your audience and articulates the benefits of your suggestions will increase your success rate. Language will establish you as a trusted advisor and consultant. Understanding the language of business function is essential to success.

Mary Kay: Sounds good Mark. But you know the buzzwords that can be used in business context sometimes really make you cross-eyed, especially depending on how they are used.

Mark: That is so true, Mary Kay and sometimes what's a fashionable word one day isn't a fashionable word another day. Here are some terms that should be a staple in any learning professional's vocabulary. Familiarity with these terms will help them to relate and communicate with various internal and external audiences.

The first one is key performance indicators; [return on investment](#); strategic advantage; speed to market; window of opportunity; reskilling; shareholder value; workforce productivity; increased margin.

Mary Kay: You know Mark that is a good list, but how can one translate learning professional or [training](#) speak into phrases like these that the rest of the organization can understand?

Mark: That is a good question Mary Kay. Let's try a few. It will be fun.

Mary Kay: OK. Sounds good.

Mark: Let's start with in front of a presentation and you are doing a presentation and you use the words learning objectives.

Mary Kay: OK.

Mark: Nobody pays much attention but maybe if you use the words instead of learning objectives use "training initiatives that are aligned with key performance indicators". Might get a little better with soft results.

Mary Kay: That sounds good. OK, how about another one?

Mark: The next term is valuation, a term we use all the time. Maybe we might try “measuring return on investment and contribution to shareholder value”. [Adult learning theory](#): “Training optimized for learning effectiveness and productivity”.

Mary Kay: I never thought about that one. Yeah OK. Yeah.

Mark: Skills assessment: “Quantifying and measuring business impact”. One of my favorites, remediation.

Mary Kay: Yeah. I think of all kinds of different things when I hear that word. Go ahead. [laughs]

Mark: “A results orientation.”

Mary Kay: Aaaaaaa. OK. I get it. Yeah.

Mark: [Asynchronous](#) solution: “Rapid deployment and speed to marketplace based on workforce availability”. Blended solution: “A solution optimized for business impact and speed to market”. Finally, instructional strategy: “Training aligned with business objective”.

Mark Kay: That sounds great. Those are great translations, but are there any other factors involved in selling your ideas?

Mark: I think there are probably two more that are real important.

Mary Kay: OK.

Mark: The first one is pace and level of detail. It is always important to understand your audience and their information requirements. Set your level of detail and speed to match what your best sources say will be the information needs and time constraints of the audience. Many professionals in knowledge based disciplines such as learning, approach presentations as an opportunity to let everyone in the room to know everything that they ever knew. This can be a very bad approach. The best source of guidance in these eight areas would be your manager.

The second important factor is sense of urgency. You should always approach presentation situations with a sense of urgency. Your role is to present the least amount of information necessary to receive a positive response. They say don't go past the sell. Once you have the agreement and there are no additional questions, say thank you and leave the room.

Mary Kay: Makes sense. Pretty smart it sounds like to me. Can you offer any real life examples from your own experience when you have used these concepts?

Mark: Yeah. I have a couple. Let's start with this one. You are an internal [training](#) consultant and sit down with a client who says, “This whole systems division is not making their numbers. It seems that our business partner channels are having trouble submitting equipment orders. The contracts contain errors that keep them from moving through the system and establishing revenue. We are one-third of our revenue objective and we only have 30 days to fix it. Do you have any suggestions?”

I think there are three possible responses. Tell me, which of these responses do you think will be the most successful? Number one: That is impossible. We need at least 30 days to study the problem and another 30 days to develop a design document. Number two: That is truly a systems problem and we can't do anything about it. Number three: I think we can help. Your legacy systems are a bit difficult to use but I think we can identify a few critical factors, create some simple [training materials](#) around them and quickly bring the channels up to speed. So which one do you think will sell?

Mary Kay: It has got to be number three.

Mark: Number three. That is how I am thinking too. Let's try another example.

Mary Kay: OK. Sounds good.

Mark: Your company has an aggressive customer satisfaction objective. You have a plan that will reduce the new hire customer service training program from 16 weeks to 12 weeks. This will get more qualified customer service agents online more quickly. Clearly, a great initiative. How do you describe your idea to your manager? Will the following work?

"I think we can reduce seat time by implementing a blended instructional strategy for customer service on boarding that utilizes and [asynchronous](#) learning strategy in conjunction with a [synchronous](#) virtual intervention." I think this makes my point even without an English translation. Language is critical in getting acceptance of your ideas and establishing yourself as a trusted business consultant.

Mary Kay: Those are great examples and really good applications of what we talked about today. It is really useful information that you presented and I thank you for it.

Mark: Thanks Mary Kay. I really appreciate you spending time and having me with you, so hopefully we will talk to you soon.

Mary Kay: Sure. I know you are busy so we have got to fly.

Mark: OK. Bye-bye.

Mary Kay: This is Mary Kay Lofurno, Marketing Director at [Syberworks](#). Thanks for listening to our [interview with Mark Bower](#), President of Bower and Company, a learning and performance management consultant firm.

In our [next installment](#) of the [Syberworks E-Learning Podcast Series](#), we will talk with Mark about various aspects of training project management such as how to turn down a project and not lose your job. See you next month!

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