

LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #15 *Understanding the Generations in Today's Workforce*

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Mary Kay Lofurno: Welcome to the next episode of the [SyberWorks e-Learning podcast series](#). I am Mary Kay Lofurno, Marketing Director for [SyberWorks](#) and your host today.

[SyberWorks](#) specializes in [custom e-Learning solutions](#), [learning management systems](#), and [e-Learning course development](#) for corporations, governments and non-profit institutions. Today we are [talking with Jim Kissane](#), a noted workforce development expert and author of the Workforce Development Blog and a fellow at Redvector.com, an engineering construction focused [e-Learning content](#) company.

In today's podcast we will discuss some of the changing demographics in workplaces today and how they impact [training](#).

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Mary Kay: Now we will begin our [interview with Jim Kissane](#), a noted workforce development expert and author of the Workforce Development Blog.

Good Afternoon Jim. Great to have you here with us today.

Jim Kissane: Great to be here, Mary Kay.

Mary Kay: Jim, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself before we start.

Jim: Be glad to. I've been involved in workforce development as a passion for about 35 years. I started working in workforce development with the U.S. Army in the late 1960s. I've been involved for three decades in business turnarounds across multiple industries. I've noticed some of the same kinds of issues coming to the forefront and in the work that I'm currently doing am a research fellow with RedVector.com. I'm having an opportunity to look at the marketplace in a slightly different view to try to drive some new perspective into what some of the issues and solutions might be.

Mary Kay: That sounds great. Jim, I have to tell you, I'm pretty excited about our topic today because it's very interesting stuff and it's very timely.

Jim: You couldn't be more correct.

Mary Kay: OK, well let's get started. Jim, why don't you tell us about the various generations that you find in today's work force.

Jim: Glad to. Today's generational work force is often defined by when the people in that work force were born. For example, in 2007 terms, a traditionalist-era person would be somebody you'd think about that is age 65 or older. Your baby boomers are running from about age 47 to 64; Generation X, age 26 to 46 and then age 25 and younger in the work force, we call them the Generation Y's.

Each of these working generations has been uniquely shaped by the effects of the generation that preceded them as well as the state of the world that they grew up in. For example, baby boomers arrived to postwar affluence and the indulgence of parents who wanted them to have a better life than they had. More aware of their political and social

issues, and became more and more disillusioned with big government, big business, traditional religion, and parents – and they had some other issues affecting their values including things like the increasing divorce rate, working mothers, and the sexual revolution.

Compare them to the generation X that had quite a different experience where they grew up in a difficult time both socially and financially. The struggling economy plus the increase in single-parent households, created a lot of latchkey kids who came home from school, waited for working parents to arrive while the parents were out striving for self-fulfillment and monetary and career success. Their children were feeling abandoned and longed for meaningful relationships. As a result they became very skeptical of big organizations through things like Watergate, environmental pollution, AIDS, threatened shortages of natural resources and a lack of good jobs. All of these things influenced their world view as they started to enter the workforce.

Generation Y had a different set of experiences altogether and their experiences are radically different from Generation X in that they have, because of their parental exposure and the world experiences they've had, plus growing up on the Internet – really the first generation to do so – they have found a much more connected, much more hopeful outlook, and that may seem a little strange when we take a look at the state of the world today. But they have learned to define their community not by geographical, regional or neighborhood boundaries. These are really global citizens.

Mary Kay: So how do all these impacts play out in the work force where what you're saying is we have a traditionalist who's very close to retirement. We have a boomer that is probably in the later stages of their career, Gen X'ers who want to make sure they get home every night for their kids, and Y's who are just out of college. How does that all play out?

Jim: Well, in a couple of minutes it's difficult to cover what I normally do in a full one-day workshop but let me see if I can boil it down to a few of the critical elements.

Mary Kay: That'd be great.

Jim: The traditionalists, for example, have a very practical down to earth behavior and attitude. The baby boomers, their outlook on life tends to be very optimistic, whereas I just mentioned the Gen X people tend to be more skeptical, and Gen Y as we discussed, are now the hopeful generation. The work ethic, because of those outlooks, is different as well. Your traditionalist is the dedicated, esprit de corps-oriented work ethic, whereas your baby boomer – there's your workaholic. They're driven and loyal, and committed to the company. Gen X-ers are looking for more of a balanced perspective between work and life and work ethic. Gen-Y's, very ambitious, again, very hopeful for the future but they're looking for fulfillment in a different way. The traditionalist view of authority, very respectful, salute the flag.

The Baby Boomers you'll find tend to be – they either love something or hate something, there's no middle ground. The view of authority with Generation X person is pretty much unimpressed because government big business – their parents didn't show them much. The Gen-Y's on the other hand are said to be more relaxed, more polite and not amazingly, they also are the generation that has found new respect for their parents, the respect that Gen-X didn't have.

As result of these things, the leadership expectations are different as well. Traditionalists have looked for leadership and authority in the [hierarchy](#), in the organizations that they participate in and work for. Baby Boomers tend to try to get things done by consensus and teamwork. Gen-X is looking for something different irrespective of time and grade. They are looking for people that exhibit [competence](#) and they're going to go way after the moral authority not the

institutional authority and that's where they're going to take their cues. Gen-Y are going to be loyalist. They're going to be looking for that sense of involvement and participation and meaning that makes sense for them.

Mary Kay: How does this make things different from the way it used to be?

Jim: Well, Mary Kay, today's world is quite different from the way things used to be. For example, in the past companies could pretty much lump worker generations into three categories. You had the older generation that was expected to retire and they were primarily concerned with their pensions. The middle generation was the bulk of the workforce focused primarily on things like compensation, earning potential and benefits. The younger generation would come up and ultimately support the future recognizing that these folks are in need of opportunities and education and [training](#).

Today, however, due to the stark differences in the generations and compounded by the worsening global skilled labor shortage and significant shifts in corporate focus, the entire workforce equation has gotten somewhat turned around. For example, today it's not uncommon to find that the career path is considered to be the employees' problem not the company's. We have more project workers or just in time employees. The company's focus tends more often than not to be on cost reductions. Our businesses have changed significantly because of the web and other like advances.

We have more 24-hour businesses. Productivity is a constant pressure now and the response most management takes to productivity issues is reducing head counts. Another outgrowth of that, of course, is outsourcing or off-shoring wherever possible, and then there's the global competition for jobs. Workers today are not limited to a job in their own backyard, in their own city or their region, because of technology; they may become an employee of an overseas organization.

So, the talent pool that used to be pretty much captive is no longer captive. But the sad part of that is the fate of U.S. workers no longer is typically figured into large corporate business decisions.

Mary Kay: How would you think that these generational differences impact the process of recruiting talent which is a big high pushing button issue today?

Jim: Well, recruiting talent is a big issue. When you look at recruiting value – you're really talking about the Holy Grail in the [talent management](#), talent development arena. Let me share with you a few thoughts though if I can briefly. The things that are most important is: what people are looking to do and what types of feedback and reward systems exist and are recognized by each generation.

Your traditionalist, because of the time and grade element, is going to tend to be looking for more senior level positions. Sometimes you'll find them as organizational consultants or hired guns. They tend to be very black and white; very demanding so they need an organization where they will be tolerated and accepted. They demand respect regardless of their level of confidence because they feel they've earned the right.

Your Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are workaholics as I mentioned before and they're going to expect people to be like them. So, a fit within an organization is going to be very critical in terms of the organizational dynamic or whether they will fit or can fit into an organization. They tend to be a lot more political because that's the environment they came up in and they tend to live to work and are not tolerant of others that don't see the world the same way.

Now, you come in to the Generation X community that have very high leadership [competency](#) expectations. They've been force-fed politics as they've been going through school and through their growing up years.

They're really looking for personal achievements that they can add to their resume and they put that sometimes ahead of the company goals. So, it's important to recognize that distinction contrasted to the Baby Boomers that is live to work. You can usually find a stereotypical Gen-X is work to live, quite a different shift.

Then your Generation Y, these folks are the most technology oriented. So, in our increasingly sophisticated technological environment, these folks should be highly sought after. They're also very culturally skilled because as I mentioned before, they have learned to network in a radically different way than the generations that have come before them. They are children of the Global Society. So, their colleagues are all over the globe talking about a lot of different perspectives and situations rather than what they might run into in their local community. They demand fast results. They're looking for feedback now! The ideal situation is, "Give it to me on my BlackBerry or iPod."

Mary Kay: Given some of these differences, what are some of the things that you can do to motivate and manage these various generations of employees present in today's company setting? It sounds like it's quite a handful for most managers today.

Jim: [laughs] Indeed it is, given that the definition of what constitutes a manager has evolved as well. There's two key things that we need to be aware of and understand. The first is to understand what is most important to the members of each specific generation and to be sensitive to how each expects to be managed, and the appropriate feedback style that they see.

For example, if you look at your "Traditionalist," their expectations in the company setting have been responsibility. They seek public recognition. Money is an indicator of their success. A strong desire to lead and very strong organizational loyalty and identity.

Your "Baby-Boomer" is really geared toward an organization setting where there's going to be a lot of promotion, public recognition for what they do, desire for a large span of control, many subordinates, and a strong sense of loyalty to self.

Contrast that to your "Generation X" worker that is looking for more workplace flexibility.

So that implies a set of organizational settings, benefits, and behaviors that are radically different than what the "Traditionalist" or "Baby-Boomer" would feel comfortable in. They often feel very uncomfortable in that kind of a setting.

They're looking for mentoring because these are folks that are seeking growth and opportunity. They're looking for boss's recognition but I'm not talking about the annual performance appraisal. We're really talking about the ability to stick your head in the office and say, "Hey boss. How did I do on that project I finished up yesterday?" So, it's more an expectation of real-time feedback on performance.

Skills training is very important to your "Generation X" worker. That's a sign of acknowledging them as an individual. They want to be exposed, as they have been growing up to the latest in technology.

Take that one step further to "Generation Y", the new workers just coming into our workforce who tend to orient very quickly. They encourage mentoring because that's very important to their personal and self-development. They don't want to be looking for something handed to them in a book or on a CD; they're looking for hands-on situations.

So immersive [learning simulations](#) and experiences are going to be very, very helpful for them. You'll see a higher "Y" from those experiences. They're looking for more workplace flexibility just like the "Gen. X." They have an increased emphasis on teamwork.

Now the teamwork is going to be manifested not in getting a bunch of people together in an office it goes far beyond that. They're looking for the ability and the opportunity to [collaborate](#) across multiple domains. Because of that, I think we're going to see a significant change in terms of "How we see team problem solving occur."

Mary Kay: Well, that makes a lot of sense. This sounds good. What are the implications for training and educating each of these various generations? Now I know you just mentioned say for example, "Generation X" likes more hands-on learning opportunities, [simulations](#), and things." What about the other ones?

Jim: Well the learning implications for each of the generations, is a function of what they're comfortable with. For example, the "Traditionalist" if you think about it employed what we'll call the "Correspondence" model of education. They took information and in many cases still take information primarily from the print median.

"Baby-Boomers" were brought up in the multi-media generation. So in addition to print, they were exposed to things like [audio](#) tape, and video tape, early [computer-based training](#) experiences, and some inter-active video – either disc or tape related programs. That's what they feel more comfortable with.

The "Generation X" tele-model, if you will, is very comfortable with audio teleconferencing, video teleconferencing, any form of audio-graph communication, broadcast TV, radio. Audio teleconferencing is very common place for them. That's what they're going to tend to gravitate to as far as learning sources.

Then "Generation Y" who grew up with and are comfortable with the Internet. More so than the previous generations, they're really looking for the fully immersive, interactive multi-media, Internet based access to web based applications and [learning resources](#). Anything that's a computer mediated communication and generally any learning facility that they can find on the web. That's going to be where they go first.

Mary Kay: OK. Well, Jim this is great stuff. I'm glad you joined us today. I know you have to go but it's been great talking with you.

Jim: You're welcome—speak with you soon.

Mary Kay: OK. This Mary Kay Lofurno, Marketing Director at [SyberWorks](#). Thanks for joining us today. We're [talking with Jim Kissane](#), a Workforce Development Expert, and a fellow at Redvector. Next time we are going to be discussing whether or not there really is a labor shortage."

Talk with you soon. Thanks. Have a great day!

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