



# Unexpurgated Raw first draft: "The Author's Cut"

## Implementing E-Learning

by Jay Cross and Lance Dublin

### The opportunity

In this knowledge era, the constraint to innovation and success boils down to one factor of production: people. Companies in the forefront are discovering that human resources are the biggest constraint on business progress. Technical talent and the ability to innovate are in short supply. The soft stuff is the hard stuff.

Competing successfully requires teams of inspired workers who are mentally equipped to make sound decisions on the fly...to initiate and innovate relentlessly...to execute on good ideas in a snap. The people you put on the front line with customers don't have time to run every idea up the management flagpole. You must equip them with the resources they need to do it right in real time.

Consider today's working environment. Cycle time shrinks, demanding that all the moving parts of the business work together in real-time. The organization must be able to turn on a dime. Buffers are disintermediated out of existence. Prep time gets squeezed. Slack disappears. People are challenged to act from their individual understanding of the big picture rather than following orders and procedures. The whales of the old Fortune 500 are being surpassed by schools of minnows, each swimming where it will but at the same time synchronized with the school.

Traditional approaches to training the corporate workforce are time-consuming and excruciatingly slow. Old style trickle-down training with its one-style-fits-all approach simply cannot keep the pace.

Enter eLearning.

eLearning keeps people at the top of their game. eLearning leverages technology in new and powerful ways to develop enthusiastic, skilled people and keep them current and operating in peak form — in real-time, in internet time. At some

companies, eLearning has radically improved productivity, fueled innovation, reduced administrative overhead, inspired employees, accelerated the internal flow of intellectual capital, and built competitive advantage.

## The problem

eLearning fails to significantly change the behavior of many who stick with it all the way through because they forget the lessons before they have an opportunity to apply them, the content is not applicable to their work, or they just get tired of rebooting out of the Blue Screen of Death.

This book is about making sure you do it right. It's a complex problem. It's pointless to blame the training department, corporate IT, line managers, trainers, or employees for eLearning's failure to meet expectations.

## What's important?

At the January 2001 meeting of the eLearning Forum [i] in Menlo Park, Hewlett-Packard's Rob Harris spoke about the difficulty of gaining internal agreement on a common definition of eLearning. This got the Forum wondering whether the "e" was causing more problems than it was worth. Jay mentioned that perhaps the Board of Directors should consider dropping the "e," making us the "Learning Forum." From the row behind him, Cisco's Peg Maddocks agreed, without skipping a beat saying, "Second the motion." We kept the "e," for it's a great marketing gimmick, but we knew in our hearts that it's the learning that's important.

Or is it? Management thinker Stan Davis says that no company should aim to become a "learning organization." A company should be a business organization. On the other hand, Peter Drucker, the noted management guru, says that all companies are learning organizations; if they weren't – and there are many examples – they'd be out of business.

Regardless of your perspective, learning plays a supporting role. Learning is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

So, what is the end? Douglas Smith, a well-known expert in learning and performance, said in a recent article in the online newsletter LineZine, "I don't believe learning is the primary objective for most people in any organization. The primary objective is performance ... Most people in organizations are motivated to learn when it makes a difference in their performance and the performance of their organization."

It's not the "e" that's important. It's not the learning that's important. What's important is the doing. If learning isn't producing measurable performance and advancing execution of the corporate strategy, it should be redirected or abolished.

“If you build it...”

In the movie *Field of Dreams* [ii], a voice in a cornfield tells the Kevin Costner character, “If you build it, he will come.” He takes this to mean that if he creates a baseball field on his farm, the ghosts of Shoeless Joe Jackson and seven other Chicago White Sox players banned from the game for throwing the 1919 World Series will show up to play. As Roger Ebert noted in his review, “Sometimes you can get too much sun, out there in a hot Iowa cornfield in the middle of the season,” and, “The ghost of Shoeless Joe does not come back to save the world. He simply wants to answer that wounded cry that has become a baseball legend: ‘Say it ain’t so, Joe!’ And the answer is, it ain’t.” [iii]

## **Two Sets of Tools**

One of us, Lance, is a noted authority and consultant in change management and corporate learning. He is the founder of an industry-leading company that developed custom learning solutions and implemented large-scale organizational change initiatives. His co-author, Jay, is an expert in marketing and design who has helped millions of knowledge workers take responsibility for their own learning.

Both of us have successfully implemented extensive learning systems in corporations in the United States and internationally. Real-world experience has taught us to differentiate what really works from the pie-in-the-sky nostrums of consultants whose only experience is giving advice. By our standard, eLearning that does not change employee performance on the job in support of corporate objectives is simply not working.

We each have the generalist problem-solving framework that comes from managing companies of our own. Nonetheless, we each focus on the processes we know best in our consulting practices.

Lance looks at issues from an organizational perspective. Where is the company trying to go? Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns? What are the barriers to change and how can we remove them?

Jay starts at the other end of the spectrum, looking at things through the eyes of the individuals who make up the organization. How can we make each learner a partner in the progress of the company? What can we do to promote effective learning? How can we convert our learners into enthusiastic fans?

Lance sees the world through the lens of change management; his customer is senior management. Jay regards the world as a consumer marketing problem waiting to be solved; his customer is the learner.

## **Top-down and bottom-up**

“The customer is always right,” and eLearning has lots of customers.

Executives market to their organizations. Functional managers market to field managers and supervisors. Supervisors market to their direct reports. Training departments market to learners.

If we wanted to, we could talk about executive-customers, manager-customers, supervisor-customers, and learner-customers. We won't. It would be too confusing.

Rather, when we say "customer" or "consumer," we mean the learner. We will call executives, managers, supervisors, and other participants in the process "stakeholders."

When we're looking at preparing for eLearning, launching eLearning, and sustaining eLearning, we will talk about how to apply change management from the top and how to apply consumer marketing from the bottom.

## **How this book is organized**

Your situation is, well, your situation. We won't presume to dictate some lowest-common-denominator solution to your needs.

We encourage you to jump around as you read. If something's not working for you, ignore it. Go on to the next topic; there are plenty here.

The next section, Fundamentals, sets out the basics of decision-making, change management, consumer marketing, and eLearning.

The sections that follow address the critical phases of successful implementation:

- Preparation and research
- Design and launch
- Keeping customers and sustaining

Let your heart be your guide. Keep your organization in mind and hop around from one section to another when it feels right to do so. In the real world, you don't actually leave one phase as you go into another. Everything is interconnected. In the midst of a launch, you continue to research customer needs and you look ahead to how to keep customers. Your primary focus shifts from planning to doing to improving but you always maintain a marketing and change management mindset.

If you come upon a term you don't understand, visit the Appendix for definitions of common marketing and change management concepts.

## **Companion web site**

Both of us help organizations implement learning and change every day. Our customers teach us new approaches all the time. We post our new discoveries on this book's companion website.

By definition, the book is not the final word on implementing eLearning. For that, you need to contact us directly or visit us on the web at <http://www.internetttime.com>.

<sup>[i]</sup>eLearning Forum is an 800-member strong non-profit, eLearning think tank and advocacy group. See [www.elearningforum.com](http://www.elearningforum.com).

<sup>[ii]</sup>Field of Dreams (1989), Directed by Phil Alden Robinson, Writing credits, W.P. Kinsella (book) and Phil Alden Robinson (screenplay).

<sup>[iii]</sup>Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times, 04/21/1989