



Articles

When Chief Learning Officer recruited me as a columnist, I wanted the freedom to write about whatever came to mind, so I chose the topic of “Effectiveness.”

Nine years and fifty columns later, here’s proof that I’ll tackle any subject.

JAY CROSS



- The Happy Bottom Line.....3
- Serving enterprise customers.....3
- What Counts.....3
- Who Knows4
- The Other 90 Percent of Learning.....4
- Get Out of the Training Business4
- Whose learning are you responsible for?.....5
- Changes Ahead.....6
- Time is Money6
- Choose the Right Tools to Get the Job Done6
- What about tomorrow?7
- Time is all we have7
- Making Sense of the World7
- Succeed in business: mimic sardines8
- Learning in the 21st Century Means Adapting to Change.....8
- Learning is the new work.....8
- The Case for Communities of Practice9
- Come together, right now9
- Productivity in a Networked Era – From Yesterday’s ROI to Tomorrow’s ROI (or Not Your Father’s ROI)9
- Become a Chief Meta-Learning Officer.....10
- The Learning Mixer.....10

JAY CROSS



Don't Call Them Trainees.....	10
Intangibles Rule	11
Why wiki?	11
We've Got to Start Meeting Like This.....	12
Courses are Dead	12
Semantics	12
The Low-Hanging Fruit is Tasty	13
It is the best of tools; it is the worst of tools.....	13
The Learner Lifecycle	13
Extreme Learning: Decision Games.....	14
Meta-lessons from the Net	14
The Business Singularity	15
Improv	15
Personal Intellectual Capital Management.....	16
Informal Learning, a Sound Investment	16
Whatever Happened to Performance Support?	16
Foreword to The Handbook of Blended Learning	17
Learning in the 21st Century Workplace	17

The Happy Bottom Line

by Jay Cross

Humans are driven by emotions. We make most decisions subconsciously, in the emotional brain. That's the massive parallel processor that has evolved over millions of years and fills most of our skulls.

The prefrontal cortex, the more recently developed logic processor, puts things into words and puts a positive spin on our gut feelings.

"If you threw a rock skyward," says neuropsychologist Michael Gazzaniga, "and embued it with consciousness at the top of its flight, its prefrontal cortex would have an explanation for why it fell back to earth before it hit the ground." We deceive ourselves into thinking we're rational. [MORE](#)

Serving enterprise customers

by Jay Cross

Knowledge workers learn three to four times as much from experience as from interaction with bosses, coaches, and mentors. They learn about twice as much from those conversations as in structured courses and programs.

The shorthand label for this viewpoint is "70:20:10." 70% experiential, 20% coaching, 10% formal. It's a handy framework to keep in mind, particularly when someone mistakenly thinks all learning is formal. As Charles Handy has written, "Real learning is not what most of us grew up thinking it was." [MORE](#)

What Counts

by Jay Cross

Businesses exist to create value, and the source of value resides outside the training function. As Peter Drucker has pointed out, "Neither results nor resources exist inside the business. Both exist outside. The *customer* is the business."

Try to imagine a business without customers, perhaps an insurance company on a desert island or a manufacturer that never ships. No value, right? What goes on *inside* an organization is just rearranging the furniture.

Training directors bemoan not being able to demonstrate significant business results, AKA “Level Four.” If they remain entirely within the training function, they never will, because they don’t own the yardstick that measures business results.

Who Knows

by Jay Cross

What would you think of an assembly line where workers didn’t know where to find the parts they were supposed to attach? “Hey! Anybody see any fenders?”

Absurd, you say. Heads would roll. Yet for knowledge workers, this is routine.

Consider a knowledge worker stymied by a lack of information, hardly an uncommon situation. In fact, in many professions, knowledge workers spend a third of their time looking for answers and helping their colleagues do the same.

How does our knowledge worker respond? She’s five times more likely to turn to another person than to an impersonal source such as a database or a file cabinet. Often she asks whoever happens to be close by, the denizen of the next cube or someone getting a cup of coffee. Half the time this person doesn’t have a clue.

The Other 90 Percent of Learning

By Jay Cross

The only way to keep up is to work and learn with others. People we’ve overlooked, workers with experience, have to learn every day, too.

Knowledge workers learn three to four times more from experience than interaction with bosses, coaches and mentors. And they learn about twice as much from those conversations compared to structured courses and programs. [MORE](#)

Get Out of the Training Business

By Jay Cross

“Next week, we will close the training department. We are shifting our focus from training to performance. Any remaining training staff will become mentors, coaches

and facilitators who work on improving core business processes, strengthening relationships with customers and cutting costs.

“I’m changing my title from VP of training to VP of core capabilities. My assistants will become the director of sales readiness and the director of competitive advantage, respectively. The measure of our contributions will be results, not training measures. We’re scrapping the LMS posthaste. Wherever possible, we’re replacing proprietary software with open source. [MORE](#)

Sponsor Relations

By Jay Cross

When you talk with a business person, you must speak as they do. Executives only care about training as it relates to execution. Their interest is in moving the corporation forward. You should share that interest. That is what they pay you for.

A sponsor is the person who pays those bills. Sponsors are responsible for championing the case for change (i.e., the vision), visibly representing the change (i.e, walk-the-talk), and providing reassurance and confidence (i.e., the implementation plan).

Someone interrupted me at a webinar with a question when I was saying that trainers need to be aware of corporate objectives and rate their contributions by their impact on the business. "Wouldn't that require us to understand how the business worked?" he asked. Yes, of course. How could you do your job right without knowing how the corporation worked? Several others jumped in, saying essentially that organisational success and helping meet strategic objectives was "not my job." [MORE](#)

Whose learning are you responsible for?

By Jay Cross

Last month I conducted several workshops to inject informal/social learning practices into hidebound organizations that are anxious to ramp up to the future. I encouraged them to address the needs of people who had traditionally been left out of the corporate training agenda.

In the old days, corporate training departments focused solely on workers on the payroll. Most of the effort went into getting novices up to speed and grooming fast-trackers as future leaders. Training departments largely overlooked improving the skills of seasoned employees, despite the fact that these were the people whose efforts were paying the bills. [MORE](#)

Changes Ahead

By Jay Cross

Is your organization ready for massive change? Have your people learned how to cope with ever-faster cycle times, increasing ambiguity, and avalanches of incoming information? Do you have a Plan B if your current structure proves too brittle?

Futurists warn that we're rounding the knee of an exponential curve of communications, business, and technology. It's hard to imagine change of this magnitude. It's sort of like what I saw on a recent trip to Abu Dhabi. [MORE](#)

Time is Money

by Jay Cross

The sooner workers are productive, the larger their contribution to the organization. This makes time-to-performance, the amount of time required to begin performing at target levels, a vital metric. Here's an example.

At the end of the last century, Sun Microsystems was a high-flier in the workstation business. Sun was bringing 120 new salespeople a month to a one-week immersion course in Santa Clara. The new hires went through briefings on equipment, applications, competition, Sun, and more. Undoubtedly, most of this gusher of information pouring in one ear and out the other. Fifteen months later, the graduates were selling at quota: \$5 million/year. [MORE](#)

Choose the Right Tools to Get the Job Done

by Jay Cross

Sedona is a magic spot in Arizona's high desert, about two hours north of Phoenix. You've seen Sedona's majestic red sandstone outcroppings in many a cowboy movie. In February, three dozen people interested in improving the process of learning convened in Sedona for an unconference and retreat.

Most of us would say we're designers, but not instructional designers. We saw ourselves as change agents, experience designers, game developers, software nerds, and problem solvers. We came together to compare notes, find connections, and share the tools of our craft.

What about tomorrow?

The future's all we've got.

by Jay Cross

Most CLOs I talk with are so busy taking care of today's business that they spend little time preparing for the future. We all know in our hearts that fixating on the short term is foolish in the long run.

Short-term thinking is good for responding to incremental change, but deciding things one step at a time doesn't prepare you to thrive in a world of systemic, wholesale change. You can't leap a chasm in small jumps.

To get beyond immediate concerns, you have to make the future tangible. Examining scenarios -- stories about alternative futures -- makes the future imaginable and potentially real.

Time is all we have

by Jay Cross

Networks arise when isolated entities link to one another. Improvements in communications technology (e.g. the invention of language, writing, printing, mass communication, computer networks) encourage connections. The denser its linkages, the shorter a network's cycle time. Speed begets speed.

The connections that knit us together make us interdependent. Because other members of the network impact what you do, you lose even the illusion of control. The future becomes unpredictable. [MORE](#)

Making Sense of the World

by Jay Cross, July 23, 2011

As a reader of CLO, you're undoubtedly a concept worker. Like all informal, self-service learners, you are in charge of your own learning. You define your own curriculum and set up a personalized learning process that works for you. Let me describe how I am working on a current project, in hopes that a few of my routines and rationales for learning may help you refine your own approach to making meaning.

Work-life was simpler in the last century. Information work entailed following instructions, logical analysis, and left-brained procedures. Today's concept work is

improv: dealing with situations that aren't in the rule book. It's concept work that relies on pattern recognition, tacit knowledge, and the wisdom borne of experience. You can't pick this up in a workshop. [MORE](#)

Succeed in business: mimic sardines

by Jay Cross

It's not easy being a business leader these days. The rules changed at the turn of the century.

In the 1900s, a good plan, hard work, and a winning smile were the ticket to success in business. The 21st Century is a totally new deal. Consider:

Change. More happens in one of your minutes than in one of your grandfather's hours. Measured in terms of accomplishment, the 20th century will see not 100, but 20,000 20th-Century style years! Business has become a roller-coaster ride. [MORE](#)

Learning in the 21st Century Means Adapting to Change

by Jay Cross

Businesses talk about adapting to change quickly, but they don't take advantage of it. When a practice is not producing results, it's time to unlearn it.

Organizations that don't embrace new ways of operating and radically different approaches to corporate learning will not survive for three reasons. [MORE](#)

Learning is the new work

by Jay Cross

Workplace learning serves one purpose: getting the work done.

Work used to be simple. Tasks were mechanical. Things rarely changed, so initial lessons lasted a lifetime. This kind of work has largely been automated or outsourced to places where workers earn very low wages.

Next came information work. Information work was often complicated but it was linear. Procedural. Rote. Often information work came with mountains of details; these were put into reference databases, procedure manuals, and performance support systems. Workers could offload memorization and processing to computers and their "outboard

brains.” Information work has been commoditized; it no longer produces high value.
[MORE](#)

The Case for Communities of Practice

by Jay Cross

The book *Kitchen Confidential*¹ by Anthony Bourdain describes how he became a professional chef and how he continues to support the community of professional chefs. No one issues membership cards to professional chefs but they are not difficult to recognize. They wear funny looking hats and white tunics. They carry a set of knives that no one else is allowed to touch. Their fingers bear scars from calling it too close with those knives. [MORE](#)

Come together, right now

By Jay Cross

All of us know more than any of us.

Organizations have woken up to the power of people working together. Collaboration gets things done and is the most powerful learning tool in the CLO’s playbook.

Twenty years ago, colleagues at far-flung enterprises communicated by phone, mail, and fax. The world moved at a slower pace. FedEx slashed the time required to receive a document, but left us with a one-way medium. Expensive conference phones enabled remote meetings if audio was all you needed. Proprietary videoconferencing packages transmitted video back and forth but most people stopped watching the pictures once the novelty wore off. [MORE](#)

Not Your Father’s ROI

By Jay Cross and Jon Husband

The industrial age has run out of steam. A quick scan reveals unhappy workers, overcrowded cities, polluted skies, and economic meltdown. Look at General Motors. Look at Chrysler. We are witnessing the death-throes of management models that have outlived their usefulness.

¹ Bourdain, A. 2001. *Kitchen Confidential*. Harper Perennial

The network era now replacing the industrial age holds great promise. Networked organizations are reaping asymmetrically high rewards for connecting people, know-how, and ideas at an ever-faster pace. Networks democratize the workplace, enriching people's lives. Value creation has migrated from what we can see (physical assets) to intangibles (ideas). Look at Google and Cisco. [MORE](#)

Become a Chief Meta-Learning Officer

by Jay Cross & Clark Quinn

The scope of the job of the CLO is mushrooming. CLOs will neither prosper nor even survive if they fail to take responsibility for the overall learning process within their organizations. Here's why -- and what to do about it.

If you're looking for a way to weather the economic downturn, be aware that this is a permanent climate change, not a passing storm. Most of the time, the global economy is cyclical. It has its ups and downs but the underlying pattern remains the same. A swing in one direction is balanced by a swing in the other. But what we are experiencing today is fundamental. Things are not going to return to where they were, for we are witnessing the birth of a new world order. We're moving towards continuous change.

[MORE](#)

The Learning Mixer

by Jay Cross

The front page of the New York Times last week displayed a heart-wrenching photograph of two polar bears stranded on tiny chunks of glacial ice floating in the Bering Sea. The accompanying headline reported "Science Panel Calls Global Warming 'Unequivocal'."

Unless humanity keeps burning coal and oil for power, the ice pack will melt. Most of the world's cities will find themselves underwater within the lifetime of our grandchildren. We'll learn how the polar bears must feel. You don't have to read the newspaper to know global warming is real. How was your winter this year? Ask the manager of any snowless ski resort. You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.

[MORE](#)

Don't Call Them Trainees

By Jay Cross

An astute VP at a major Silicon Valley chip producer was concerned with the meager results of the company's classroom training. He wanted the firm to focus more on building competencies and less on training events. Workers at the company had been happy to pick and choose traditional training from a buffet of offerings. Taking away their choices would require extreme measures.

So the VP shut down the training department. Cold turkey. Focus shifted from training to talent management. A talent management steering committee representing the Vice Presidents from each major function was formed and backed the plan. [MORE](#)

Intangibles Rule

By Jay Cross

What do learning, love, patents, trust, intelligence, software, loyalty, brand reputation, and fear of snakes have in common? Answer: you cannot see or touch them. They are intangible.

It's ironic, but things you can't see have become more valuable than things you can. Eighty percent of the value of the Fortune 500 is intangible.

Take Google. On paper, Google's net worth is about \$5 billion. That's what they paid for computers, buildings, and stuff you can see, minus debts and the expense of wear and tear. Stock market investors value Google at \$135 billion. Where's the extra \$130 billion come from? Intangibles. [MORE](#)

Why wiki?

By Jay Cross

"A wiki is a group-editable website. Wikis are composed of web pages you can write on, enabling fast and easy collaboration." So says Social Text, a company that supplies enterprise wiki software to 2,000+ organizations, among them Nokia, Kodak, Ziff Davis Media, and investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort.

Why should a CLO care about wikis? Because learning is social. People learn through working with one another. Wikis encourage collaboration, and collaboration is the secret sauce of innovation and effectiveness.

Wikis are a new tool in the learning executive's toolkit. They facilitate self-service learning. Training departments of yore focused most of their energy on events and processes to *push* information, much of it pre-packaged. Wikis *pull* people to learn when

they feel the need. The information they find is largely created by the users themselves. [MORE](#)

We've Got to Start Meeting Like This

By Jay Cross

“An **unconference** is a conference where the content of the sessions is driven and created by the participants, generally day-by-day during the course of the event, rather than by organizers.” Wikipedia

Admission and travel to conferences claim a significant amount of many a corporation's investment in learning. That's why CLOs need to be aware of a fresh alternative that costs less and works better.

Professionals attend conferences to learn things. Yet conference participants often say they learn more in the hallway than in formal sessions. *Unconferences* bring the hallway conversations back into the main tent by handing control to participants instead of experts on stage. [MORE](#)

Courses are Dead

by Jay Cross

When I tell training vendors “Courses are dead,” they look at me as if I'd brought a skunk to their picnic.

Roger Shank sums up the failure of training in four little words: “It's just like school.” The better part of two decades of schooling has brainwashed convinced us that courses are the default means of learning. People think of courses as the basic, fundamental model against which other modes must compare themselves. Propose that workers learn something through conversation, a game, or trial-and-error, and the knee-jerk response is “How do you know it will be as effective as a course?” [MORE](#)

Semantics

By Jay Cross

Several years ago, a manager told eLearning Forum that his company's efforts to consolidate dozens of training efforts bogged down for three months while they

struggled for a consensus definition of *eLearning*. Let's not make the same mistake with Web 2.0, Learning 2.0, and informal learning. We need to clarify what these terms mean or abandon them.

It takes guts for a publication named *Business 2.0* to announce that the term *Web 2.0* is headed for the dustbin, sort of like *Wired* trying to champion wireless. *Business 2.0* doesn't deny that the web is morphing into something much larger. It suggests we call today's web by the name Next Net. [MORE](#)

The Low-Hanging Fruit is Tasty

by Jay Cross

The higher you go, the farther you see. Recent research finds that CLOs are working on near-term efficiency while other CxOs are looking beyond, to long-term prosperity. The CEOs, CFOs, CIOs, and other longer-tenured C-level officers look to learning to build the capacity to transform the business. Their goals are long-term, qualitative, and aspirational.

CLOs are more focused on near-term improvements in how learning takes place. They work with business units to make training more efficient. They introduce technology and innovation to streamline the delivery of learning. [MORE](#)

It is the best of tools; it is the worst of tools.

by Jay Cross

Slide after slide of three-bullet sentence fragments is an awful thing to watch. If the presenter reads them to you, it makes a bad spectacle worse. Yet PowerPoint has become the language of business.

PowerPoint is also learning's most popular authoring tool. Many software packages enable you to narrate a PowerPoint and upload it to the web, compressing the files for download or online viewing. The problem is that if live lectures are ineffective, pre-recorded lectures on the web are very ineffective.

The Learner Lifecycle

by Jay Cross

To everything there is a season. We are born, we play, we work, we teach, we die. As time goes by, we change how we learn.

A baby's every waking moment goes into figuring things out. Child's play for pre-schoolers is learning in disguise; they devote their time to experimenting and understanding their world.

School children attend formal classes and do assignments to lay a foundation for learning the 3 Rs, cultural memes, and social norms. The quality of the experience is open to debate, but few would argue that children should have to invent, say, multiplication rather than have it taught to them in school. [MORE](#)

Extreme Learning: Decision Games

By Jay Cross

Sometimes failure is not an option. When a malevolent megalomaniac threatens to vaporize your empire, you send in your James Bond, not a raw recruit.

In business, when it's vital to break into a complex new market, you send in a veteran who knows the territory to close the deal. You rely on an expert who has been there because experts know how to spot the signs, read the context, and grok what's going on as if by second nature.

Until recently, extensive experience was the only way to become an expert. It took decades to develop and hone one's expertise. You couldn't teach it in a classroom. That's about to change. [MORE](#)

Meta-lessons from the Net

by Jay Cross

Ten years ago, most business execs saw no value in the internet beyond maybe cheaper communications. CIO magazine's December 1994 issue sheepishly proposed "not to laud the future of electronic commerce nor to cheerlead the creation of a great national network that, like Godot, may never materialize."

A representative skeptic said, "So far, I haven't seen anybody use the internet for anything that was all that worthwhile." Another CIO chimed in, saying "There's so much non-business stuff on the internet that you have to wonder if people are getting their jobs done."

Ten years, not that long ago, 38 million people had internet access; next year, internet users will top a billion. The pro's missed a sea change. [MORE](#)

The Business Singularity

Jay Cross

The structure of business, the role of workers, and the architecture of software are changing beneath our very eyes. Business is morphing into flexible, self-organizing components that operate in real time. Software is becoming interoperable, open, ubiquitous, and transparent. Workers are learning in small chunks delivered to individualized screens presented at the time of need. Learning is being transformed into a core business process measured by Key Performance Indicators. Taken together, these changes create a new kind of business environment, a Business Singularity.

It's all about networking

Business organizations are evolving into networks. What happens inside the corporate walls is nowhere near as important as the overall flow of value from raw material to customer. Internal boundaries are obstacles to be overcome. Networks shared among suppliers, partners, and customers integrate the business into a commercial ecosystem that is, no surprise, a larger network. [MORE](#)

Improv

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

As You Like It
William Shakespeare

The first wave of eLearning brochures invariably touted the benefits of being focused on the learner. Schools and classes had always been organized for the convenience of the faculty; one size fit all. In the e-era, learners would receive personalized instruction, just what they needed, just when they needed it. It was "Learner-centric."

There's a problem with this. Walk into the sales department, the warehouse, the call center, or the executive suite, talk with the people there, and you know what you'll discover? Nobody else calls them learners. The members of the organization are known as workers. They are blue-collar workers, knowledge workers, hourly workers, commission-only workers, and contractors doing work-for-hire. [MORE](#)

Personal Intellectual Capital Management

by Jay Cross

you are the most important person in the universe.
so is everyone else.

e. e. cummings

Ultimately you're responsible for the life you lead. It's up to you to learn what you need to succeed. That makes you personally responsible for your own knowledge management, learning architecture, instructional design and evaluation.

Professionally, we design learning experiences to meet concrete objectives. We plan ahead to prepare for the future. We try to avoid re-inventing the wheel. We build systems to leverage the knowledge we already possess. We gather feedback so we can do better next time.

Personally we should do no less. [MORE](#)

Informal Learning, a Sound Investment

by Jay Cross

Workers who know more get more accomplished. People who are well connected make greater contributions. The workers who create the most value are those who know the right people, the right stuff, and the right things to do.

It's all a matter of learning, but it's not the sort of learning that is the province of training departments, workshops, and classrooms. [MORE](#)

Whatever Happened to Performance Support?

by Jay Cross

Business performance is the sole objective of corporate learning. Often, there's a better, faster, cheaper alternative to learning for achieving business results. It's called Performance Support, and it generally involves embedding smarts in the work rather than the worker's head.

Performance Support (PS) was founded on the premise that providing information to a worker when it's needed is generally preferable to having the worker memorize it in advance. A respected professor of instructional design has written that "Information is

not instruction.” A performance support enthusiast might reply that if information gets the job done, it doesn't matter whether it's instruction. [MORE](#)

And a few from other sources...

Foreword to The Handbook of Blended Learning

Jay Cross

When Curt Bonk asked me to contribute a chapter to this book, I flat out refused. As you might guess from the quantity of top-notch authors who appear here, Curt is persistent. He asked me again, and again I turned him down, this time with an explanation.

I told him I considered *blended learning* a useless concept. To my way of thinking, *blending* is only new to people who were foolish enough to think that delegating the entire training role to the computer was going to work. I could not imagine *unblended* learning. My first-grade teacher used a blend of story-telling, song, recitation, reading aloud, flash cards, puppetry, and corporal punishment. [MORE](#)

Learning in the 21st Century Workplace

by Jay Cross, EFMD Joural

Organizations that don't embrace new ways of operating and radically different approaches to corporate learning will not survive for three reasons: We're witnessing a dizzying rate of change. Business people are being overwhelmed by the pace of progress and the explosion of knowledge.

There are denser and denser interconnections afoot. Everything is getting hooked up to everything else. This increases complexity and makes business unpredictable. Intangibles are the prime source of value. Social capital and know-how have replaced plant and equipment as the creators of economic value.

Companies that fail to adopt new practices that take these things into account are headed for the scrapheap. Don't believe me? Ask somebody in the newspaper business -- The New York Times and USA Today are doing better than their peers -- they lost only 80% of their value in the past decade. Or look at the music business -- remember record stores? [MORE](#)

<http://jaycross.com>