Executive Interview

with **Jeff Walter,**
Founder and CEO
LatitudeLearning

and **David Proegler,**
Senior Managing Principal, Product Manager
LatitudeLearning

Are Your Employees Actually Learning Anything? Lessons from the Experts

About LatitudeLearning

Latitude CG, home of LatitudeLearning, is the partner learning platform designed for the unique needs of partner training programs to train the people who Sell, Service and Use your products. Geographically dispersed partner networks have a level of organizational complexity that cannot be supported by an HR LMS. LatitudeLearning was designed to support the complexity of partner training and give the visibility partner organizations need to training compliance and potential vulnerabilities when gaps exist. Latitude has been providing solutions for companies globally for more than 30 years. More than 3 million people have successfully used LatitudeLearning.

Recognition

A Brandon Hall Group™ Smartchoice Preferred Provider, LatitudeLearning earned a Bronze Brandon Hall Group™ Excellence in Technology Award in 2023.
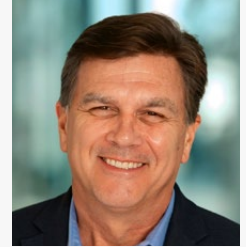
EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

Learning and Development	1	Bronze Award

The Brandon Hall Group™ Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

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About Jeff Walter

Jeff Walter is a visionary entrepreneur driven by an insatiable curiosity about people, systems, and organizations. As the Founder and CEO of LatitudeLearning, he has dedicated his career to pioneering innovative solutions that empower individuals and organizations to unleash their full potential.

Jeff's academic journey reflects his multifaceted interests and relentless pursuit of knowledge. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Binghamton University. His passion for high-performing organizations led him to pursue a Master's in Business Administration at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Professionally, Jeff's inquisitive nature propelled him to establish information technology consulting practices across diverse industries such as healthcare, financial services and manufacturing. Through his consultancy endeavors, Jeff made significant strides in enhancing business performance by leveraging cutting-edge technologies and optimizing operational efficiencies.

For the past two decades, Jeff has been at the forefront of learning technology innovation, channeling his inquisitiveness into developing platforms that unlock the human potential within business ecosystems. Under his leadership, LatitudeLearning has emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of learning technologies, empowering organizations to cultivate a culture of continuous learning and growth.

Jeff firmly believes in the power of collaboration and lifelong learning. He champions the idea that every individual has valuable insights to offer, and he is always eager to engage in meaningful conversations over a cup of coffee, exploring new ideas and perspectives.

As a thought leader and industry pioneer, Jeff Walter continues to shape the future of learning technologies, inspiring individuals and organizations worldwide to embrace curiosity, innovation, and the limitless possibilities of human potential.

About David Proegler

David Proegler, Senior Managing Principal and LatitudeLearning Product Manager, has spent his career designing and implementing business-focused solutions that synthesize business needs with technology. He brings these talents to the LatitudeLearning LMS and is leading efforts to engage the market and address the future demands of the Extended Enterprise training space. David's technical acumen and focus on client business outcomes provide an important bridge between LatitudeLearning, their clients and the market.

About Michael Rochelle
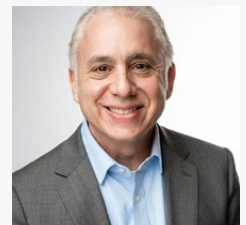
Michael Rochelle is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Michael leads a wide range of advisory support and strategic engagements for Fortune 1000 and small- to medium-sized organizations as well as leading and emerging solution providers across the HCM industry. Michael has more than 30 years' experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development, and strategic and financial planning in Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.

Q MICHAEL

I know business stakeholders are wondering if anyone's actually learning anything because they're trying to measure it through business performance. I think anyone listening to this from a learning professional standpoint knows there's a lot of pressure to show the ROI on learning — what are we getting from it? So in essence, the question is, is anybody actually learning anything?

A JEFF

Well, definitely someone is learning something. To say that no one is learning anything would be an overstatement. But I've been thinking about this topic, and we all got into this industry because we believe in human potential, in the power of knowledge and skills. But the reality is, there's so much more we can do, and there are a lot of frustrated professionals out there who aren't learning. And it's not because the courses aren't good or the technology isn't the latest and greatest — I think it goes much deeper than that.

Q DAVID

I concur with that. I think a lot of training these days is just done for the sake of checking boxes, without a real purpose. And what ends up happening is people are just going through the motions. But we know that in today's world, it has to be more purposeful than that — it has to engage the individual and keep them invested. I think that's where the industry has gotten off track, by focusing too much on checking boxes rather than actual learning and development.

A JEFF

I think there's a lot of teaching going on, and not so much learning.

Q MICHAEL

Well, you know that a particular category or topic you're talking about is in deep water when people start to use the term "scrap learning." That's becoming a more common term now. You just picture some truck pulling up and you're taking your old refrigerator and stove, anything that's metal and throwing it in the back of this big blue truck to recycle it. But we've got this term "scrap learning" going on now. Like organizations are just stockpiling learners. It didn't go anywhere. So in the middle of this conversation, is anyone learning anything? It's not a good sign that the latest and coolest cliche or colloquial is "scrap learning." It's not a positive connotation.

A **JEFF**

Well, since our industry, our livelihoods are tied to it, I don't like that idea. But I think it goes to the heart of what we're talking about, which is, look, in order to learn, the student has to do it. Learning is something you do, it's not something that's projected at you. Teaching is something that somebody projects at you. If so much of our training is just "attend this course, check this box," it doesn't really make a difference. But I'm a big believer in human potential and education in general. I think there's a lot of waste and potential going on that we could apply more purposefully.

A **DAVID**

I think when you look at the individuals going through the training, the "why's" and "where for" is what they want to know, especially younger learners. Learners want to know where they're going and the reason for taking the training. A lot of old training programs don't put that out there. You simply must take this. You need to align the training with a clear purpose that drives the learner forward. Younger people entering the workforce want to know how the training will impact them. If they don't know that, they will have a bad attitude and not absorb or apply what they've learned.

A **JEFF**

A lot of the "check the box" training is just to protect the organization from liability, which is a complete waste of time. As an industry, we both over-promise and under-deliver. What knowledge and skills do people need to be successful in their current and future roles? Those are the things that can really change a person's career trajectory and that they can absorb and learn. Trying to fundamentally change someone's personality or outlook through a short training course is just not going to happen — it's a waste of time.

Q **MICHAEL**

You both brought up three interesting points. I'll rewind to the first one — that David mentioned, about not selling people on the learning and just telling them "this is what you need to know." It's a very parental approach of "do as I say." People aren't terribly interested in that.

The second point you brought up, David, was about the difference between learning and training. People are more willing to do training, as it's predetermined. But if you describe it as "learning" — like learning how to use a fire extinguisher — it becomes a non-starter. People are more accepting of training, as there is a hierarchy of rules and behaviors, like at home with their kids.

Your third point was really interesting — about behavior change having a purpose, like changing how you act for 8 hours a day to keep your job. But the second part of that point gets to the heart of whether anyone is actually learning anything.

We have content issues — is the content relevant, timely, in the right format? And we have technology issues — the technological interface is crucial for enabling learning.

A DAVID

The technology and format of how people consume training has changed a lot. Younger learners want short, on-demand content, not hour-long courses. Being able to access training at the point of need is crucial.

There are also challenges replicating the apprenticeship model with technology, as you can't have a single master technician traveling everywhere. But technology like AR can help scale that model.

A JEFF

If you look at how people learn in their personal lives, like watching YouTube videos to learn a new skill, it's very different from corporate training. People have a thirst for knowledge and skill development, especially younger generations who are used to on-demand, engaging content. We need to make corporate training more learner-oriented and bottom-up, rather than

top-down. But we also need to identify the minimum knowledge and skills required, rather than overwhelming people.

Overall, balancing the content, format and technology is key to enabling effective learning in the corporate environment.

Q MICHAEL

Let's take it a layer deeper since you brought it up. I think if you ask most people about the way they learn outside of work, they look at technology as a gateway to getting to who they'd like to talk to or what they'd like to find. And a lot of learning technology out there in the corporate world doesn't have that embodiment. It feels like you're on the end of a conveyor belt. It's a delivery item.

When you go out on social media, you're used to using apps as a gateway to access the world you want to be in. It could be talking to people or finding information. But in the corporate learning space, employees feel like they're just standing at the end of a conveyor belt, waiting for something to drop in their lap that they need to learn. It's not a gateway, it's not opening them up to new possibilities.

I believe this is a bigger problem than the actual content. If you don't get the gateway or interaction right, people won't even engage with the content. It has to be ubiquitous, easy, and intuitive — people should be able to just get on and go, without having to read or learn anything, to the people and information they want. That's a major reason why people aren't learning anything — the technology is a barrier, not an enabler.

A **JEFF**

You're absolutely right. The technology has to be easy to use. And the key is that this is all about goal-directed learning. People are going to take the path of least resistance to get the knowledge or skills they need to achieve their goals, whether that's calling someone, asking the guy next to them, or using the learning system.

It has to be easy and goal-directed from the learner's perspective. What am I trying to achieve and how do I easily get access to the content I need? That's why we've put all our help-desk information on our website — because people will just Google how to do something with the tool, rather than navigating through the application.

Q **MICHAEL**

Isn't it crazy that you're supposed to be using a tool to learn how to do something, but then you have to go Google how to learn how to use that very tool? It's almost like an anti-gravity situation — nobody has to read the owner's manual on LinkedIn or Facebook. You just enter your username and password, and you can figure it all out. Technology for learning is supposed to be an enabler, not an inhibitor.

A **JEFF**

That's a good point. Take LinkedIn as an example. You're trying to do something in LinkedIn that you don't know how to do. So what do you do? You don't navigate through LinkedIn to find out how to do it. You open up another tab and you Google, "how do I do this in LinkedIn?" Then an article pops up, showing you where to find the right settings or buttons, and you can get it done. It's a bit of a workaround, but it works.

Q **MICHAEL**

Based on everything you're working on from a product side at LatitudeLearning, what do you want people to know about how you're addressing the things we brought up today? How do we get more people to learn? What are you doing about it?

A JEFF

The key is making the learning easy, accessible, and intuitive. If someone doesn't know the answer, there needs to be an easy way for them to figure it out. Some of the things we're working on include:

- Getting all the help text out of the system and into the website so people can Google it.

- Adding an AI chat app to the website so people can ask how to use the tools

- Making the tools more intuitive to help users find the learning they're looking for.

It's easy to say, but hard to execute. But the goal is to make it as easy and intuitive as possible for everyone. This includes things like improving navigation, internal search, and predictive learning recommendations. And instead of just doing knowledge-based assessments, we want to figure out what people already know and serve up the things they need to learn.

A DAVID

I think those were all good points. One earlier comment — I do think that learning management technology is more driven by the conveyor belt analogy we discussed previously, and that is an accurate reflection of how most learning management systems have evolved. That's why you saw LXPs (learning experience platforms), employee experience platforms and customer experience platforms emerge — as attempts to create more ubiquitous environments. But I think they've all fallen short, as it's just an evolutionary process.

From our perspective, as Jeff pointed out, our platform does a lot of different things. We do a lot of prescriptive-based learning, but we also have customers who are doing this really well — not just focusing on core knowledge, but giving learners access to all the other things they can do and creating relationships between them. So you can give an individual who needs to learn how to fix something the ability to do that through multiple modalities of training, but also provide them with all the ancillary supporting content.

I think that's the intermediate step for us, but ultimately, we'll need to see things move forward by integrating AI and broader capabilities. So when you do a search in your LMS, it's not just the learning content that's there, but your organization's knowledge base feeding into it, or even pulling in relevant information from the broader internet. Taking the analogy of repairing a washing machine, imagine a learning environment that brings in all those external resources as well. It's not just about the specific task, but the broader context and resources.

A JEFF

I would just add another twist, which is something we already do that's a little different than some other platforms. And that's accreditation. When we're talking about all this just-in-time stuff or goal-directed learning, usually when you're looking at a certification or accreditation, it's a one-time thing — you sign up and then achieve it. But one of the things we do differently is that we have a number of certifications or accreditations available based on your role, and we're constantly evaluating how far along you are on those accreditations, no matter what you're doing in the system.

(continued)

It's not about assigning you a specific certification and you having to complete a set of tasks. Instead, it's about looking at these accreditations as a minimum sufficient level of knowledge or skills for a certain domain, and then seeing how you're progressing toward that minimum threshold across all the available accreditations. It's a different way of approaching it, where you're just slowly filling in the matrix and the organization can determine the right set of accreditations for you to have that minimal level of knowledge and skill.

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:

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