



Brandon Hall Group™
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**



Executive Interview

with **Mark Atkinson**,
Chief Executive Officer
Mursion



SKILLS, UPSKILLING, AND IMMERSIVE
LEARNING: A CONVERSATION WITH MURSION





About Mursion



Mursion is the award-winning upskilling platform that blends AI and human insight to deliver immersive simulations for workplace skill-building. Trusted by top companies, Mursion prepares organizations for the future of work with real-world practice and personalized feedback. Mursion’s upskilling platform:

- ✦ Empowers employees to learn, practice, and master the skills that make interactions smoother and more effective, driving individual performance and team productivity.
- ✦ Builds critical thinking, adaptive problem-solving, and sense-making skills, enabling employees to assess situations, collaborate effectively, and make smarter decisions in real time.
- ✦ Delivers measurable gains in retention, productivity, and NPS—showing clear ROI and creating healthier workplaces.

About Mark Atkinson



Mark Atkinson is Mursion’s strategic leader, and brings 20+ years of experience in education and corporate learning. As the founder of TeachForward, a Yale graduate, and Emmy-winning producer, he leverages unmatched expertise to drive Mursion’s mission to transform workforce development.

Host: Rachel Cooke



Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group’s Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences, and the company’s project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research and Performance Improvement industries.



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



RACHEL

Can you share more about your background and how you ended up founding Mursion?

MARK

I was a television journalist for many years. I worked for Peter Jennings at ABC News when network television was doing large documentaries about international and social issues. It was at a time when online learning was becoming new. One of the earliest online universities sought me out because pre-video on the internet, it was largely scrolling text.

I was interested in this intellectually and in the notion that learning experiences can have narrative structures, just like documentary film, because documentary film is educative. If you marry the narrative structures of learning to the pedagogical structures, particularly as video became possible on the internet, that created interesting creative applications.

I pioneered a company that built video case studies around great teaching, which ultimately became online learning for teaching. Mursion is the evolution of what I learned through the kind of learning you can do through video. In video, whether in education or leadership, if you have good recordings of yourself, you have the opportunity to reflect on how you come across — whether you're empathetic, your tone of voice, whether you allow people to listen to you and take turns in conversation.

Then one of my investors showed me simulation technology. In simulation, you don't look in the rearview mirror, you look at the road ahead because you are expected to do leadership or activities related to nursing

or a doctor giving feedback to the family of a patient under stressful circumstances. These are make-it-or-break-it skills for individuals and organizations.

While a video of me making mistakes is powerful, having to demonstrate capability in the situation, I'll be expected to do it on the job is perhaps the most powerful learning experience. That's why in high-stakes careers, the notion of simulation is mature — pilots, obviously. We don't want somebody learning to pilot a plane for the first time with passengers. We don't want a doctor giving feedback to the family of somebody with a difficult medical diagnosis for the first time. We want people to practice and perfect these skills before deploying them.

These are the skills the future is seeking in professionals. Large organizations are saying we need people that can navigate change, lead inclusively, manage under difficult circumstances, and bring both analytical strengths and empathy to their work.

RACHEL

How would you help leaders today shift from the old paradigm to this new, more inclusive, more adaptable, more collaborative type of leadership?

MARK

The first thing is to be sure people are inspired to be that leader. That starts with the highest leadership. Our clients want org-level behavior change, sometimes simply to get closer to their customer. As organizations ossify under structures that don't have good communication, they lose touch with the

people who use their products and services and lack the ability to innovate.

Leadership will often say we need to change the culture so we are a listening culture, an empathetic culture, a culture that cares about feedback. You start at the top leadership. We get leaders to model the behaviors they want to see, and simulation is a great way to do that.

If I need to lead a team expected to change how it develops or markets products, it's incumbent upon me to explain the rationale, hear concerns, and persuade through listening, judgment, strategic thinking, and empathy. Leadership is not simply the authority to command people. If you want change to stick, it's about influence. Garnering influence doesn't just come with title; it comes with the ability to connect with individuals.

We get leaders to model behaviors, capture recordings, then invite their teams to do the same. We put those teams through a virtual coaching experience where they see vulnerabilities and mistakes through simulation and get powerful data and feedback to improve. They're encouraged to practice more.

If you go back to the earliest days of performance management, it had a Darwinian view — get feedback and lop off the bottom 10%. That punishment culture doesn't get you far. What does is creating a psychologically safe place for learners to experiment and safely fail because we all have limitations and situations that frustrate us.

When we get frustrated, we revert to our natural selves, sometimes looking out for oneself instead of the team. It takes practice to keep the interests of the group top of mind. We're about repeat practice with good analysis and feedback. When implemented

consistently across the organization, behavior change is real, measurable, and tied to business outcomes.



RACHEL

Our research also shows how important it is for leaders to self-actualize and self-assess. Simulations allow leaders to do that in a safe environment and understand their triggers. How you showed up 15-20 years ago is probably quite different than today.

Leaders need a greater appreciation of diversity — not just ethnicity but diversity of thought. You're dealing with multi-generations in the workplace. What examples or transformations have you seen with immersive experiences or simulations helping change culture?



MARK

I've been very impressed with Liberty Mutual, a global insurance enterprise singularly focused on leadership skills. They've built an integrated curriculum of learning resources around workplace changes and how they impact performance, retention, and recruiting talent. They focus on leaders showing up with both strategic thinking and empathy for getting cross-functional teams to collaborate.

I've always believed that in any meeting, you want the best idea to get heard and carry the day. If you don't develop skills at drawing out individuals to feel safe presenting ideas, the organization makes the wrong decision because the best idea never gets aired. This happens millions of times daily across

organizations. It's critical that leaders show up capable of eliciting the best idea and acting on it.

Liberty Mutual rolls out programs not just in North America but globally in a way that unifies the organization, empowers leaders, and excites teams. They weave practice throughout the learner's journey so people can track progress and get data on how they're changing.

Another example is Starbucks. They've always believed in the community they create in stores. They're working hard to reestablish deep roots into communities and remind people this is a place where everyone feels welcome. In a divided country, these are challenges for people navigating customers every day. I've never seen an organization approach these problems with the intelligence and commitment that Starbucks does.

Lastly, I've watched Salesforce navigate changes around performance management. They've built a culture where people get strong feedback while feeling respected by leadership teams. Given the difficulty of recruiting talent, many organizations tread lightly on performance management because they're afraid of scaring away talent.

Salesforce has embedded warmup practice routines into performance management to give people opportunities to practice giving constructive feedback that focuses on both improvement opportunities and talents. Organizations going down that path care about their people. You do your folks a better service by showing them how they can grow. This is particularly true for the newest workers and people previously shut out of traditional roles.

RACHEL

Those companies are spearheading approaches to transform and scale while helping teams thrive in competitive, changing environments. This aligns to resilience and helping teams persevere through turbulent times. What other advice would you give organizations as they forge ahead?

MARK

There's been a post-COVID movement to use L&D investments to bring people back together. I applaud that because people need community. But I suggest this shouldn't come at the expense of ongoing learning efforts to develop skills for the next five years as we face enormous transformation.

This is not a time to sit back and watch developments like artificial intelligence transform work. This is a time to embrace the skills and capabilities needed to maximize opportunities for upskilling and be ready for these changes.

The World Economic Forum report shows we're transforming how work gets done through technology while unwinding some supply chain arrangements from the last decade. Add migration to that, and leaders have a turbulent future to navigate. Yes, we need to bring people together, but we also need to build muscles that allow leaders to develop skills to manage teams, recruit and retain talent, and handle transformations.

This is an enterprise-level initiative, not just for top leaders. If you want a culture close

to customers, that attracts talent, that gives feedback up the organization when changes are needed, you need to build trust, safety in giving feedback, and encouragement to express ideas. Technology now makes this possible from the C-Suite to the front line, and simulations can be a huge part of that.

RACHEL

Q CEOs and leaders aren't looking ahead three to five years anymore. It's more assessing the need now and within the next three to six months. Leaders need to be more tech-savvy and understand how to leverage technologies. In highly regulated environments like airlines, telecommunications, banking, they're embracing technologies and figuring out ways through security. In the past, regulated industries sometimes waited to see how technology evolved, but now you can't sit back.

MARK

A We work closely with most of those you mentioned. They're thoughtfully building capabilities for the future. The unique leadership strands they've developed are models for any enterprise.

What their CEOs and CFOs are asking is how to correlate upskilling efforts to business outcomes they report to shareholders. This is an area we're all learning about - correlating data, getting vendors to describe employees uniformly, connecting skill development across systems, merging data around aligned competency frameworks to show growth in both technical knowledge and human skills.

It's one thing to match skills on a resume to

a job description. It's another to know which leaders are living those skills every day and bringing their organization along. Leaders care about these skills because they drive business outcomes. Technology is making it possible to get a holistic picture of not just hiring the right person, but whether they can do that job day-to-day in ways that protect the brand, drive the mission, increase efficiency, and improve customer success.

RACHEL

Q What are your thoughts on how you're using GenAI to help with your solutions?

MARK

A Mursion was a business that existed in the hope that someday people would invent GenAI. We pioneered AI-supported simulations using highly trained humans with strong improv backgrounds to provide spoken dialogue. Those live simulations ensure psychological safety, learning opportunities, and rich coaching experiences.

We've managed to leverage humans in our tech stack. Now generative AI makes it possible to deliver similar experiences without the human on an on-demand basis. Immersion will always provide both live and on-demand simulations.

On-demand simulations can reach the approximately 60% of the frontline workforce that gets none of the training around these skills. Through generative AI, they'll be able to get the same kind of skills that the C-Suite and senior management have been getting through human-delivered services. This makes enterprise-wide transformation easier and more affordable to enact.

About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and more than 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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