



Executive Interview

The Promise of AI in Learning and Development

2026



Bob Szostak

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Solutions
at VPS*



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About VPS



With over 90 years of experience in developing and managing training solutions, **VPS** has been a trusted partner in helping individuals and organizations succeed.

Our tailored content delivery and management services enhance performance, encourage growth and positively impact our clients' success. We pride ourselves on our ability to listen, to take the time needed to understand the unique needs of each organization we work with and provide customized end-to-end managed services capabilities and competencies that bring real value. Our commitment to people first ensures the highest level of customer service satisfaction.

About Bob Szostak



Bob Szostak is Director of Customer Solutions at VPS, a V2X Professional Services business specializing in custom learning content development and workforce training solutions. He has spent nearly 28 years in the learning and development industry, with a career spanning enterprise learning program management, learning system implementation and organizational learning consulting, including extensive experience managing large-scale government and commercial training programs. VPS has been recognized for over a decade running as a top custom content development company by Training Industry.

About Michael Rochelle



This interview was moderated by **Michael Rochelle**. He is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Michael has more than 40 years' experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development and strategic and financial planning working with Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.

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Responsibility Before Adoption

Q Michael

You and your organization have continuously cautioned organizations to be patient when it comes to new innovations like AI. I know it sounds like an obvious question, but why is that?

A Bob

I started my career when web-based training was a new innovation and I have watched that same cycle repeat since. In the 2010s, it was wearable computing and glasses that would put instructions right in front of us. Now it is avatars having conversations that people cannot tell apart from real ones. Every cycle brings real promise and real good, but it takes time to mature. That is not a call for people to avoid being early adopters. It is a call to be conscious of your responsibility as a steward of your organization, your budget and, most importantly, your learning results.

Human Skills Stay Essential

Q Michael

A few years ago, the primary promise was democratizing development, putting everyone on a level playing field and letting them build faster. Did that promise hold up?

A Bob

It came true to a large extent, but the unintended consequence was flooding the market with generic content. What organizations are finding and what we are seeing in our research, is that we are still missing the fundamental pieces that tie the learning people take to actual business objectives and job performance. AI is great at generic content, but when you get to what we call the hyperhuman aspects of performance, critical decision-making, empathy and leadership, it is not the replacement yet. You always have to say yet. A couple of years ago, the whole conversation was about ChatGPT changing the world. That has been surpassed by agentic AI, where information no longer waits for you to look it up. It comes to you, embedded in the workflow, reading the context of what you are doing. It is not about avoiding AI. It is about being careful not to go all in too soon.

Preserve Human Capability

AI can scale generic content, but judgment, empathy and leadership remain essential to meaningful workplace performance.

Q Michael

Do you think people see using AI beyond content development as a good thing or a bad thing?

A Bob

I think it is a good thing. We use it in a lot of different ways, including scheduling and resolving complex conflicts within larger programs we implement. It absolutely is a good thing, but what we cannot take away is the human in the loop or the importance of subject

Keep Humans Involved

matter experts, not just technically but in learning and development as well. That caution has been there from day one of AI and it has proven true over time.

Q Michael

I agree. I think AI in learning and development had one of the quickest uptakes because it was easy. No more blank page. It felt like the perfect blend of AI and human intelligence, each side playing to its strength. But it seems to get fuzzier from there.

A Bob

It does. When you move past content development into analytics, learner experience, AI coaching and other areas, the synergy is less obvious. If your learning data is not good in the first place, would you trust the analytics AI builds on top of it? Every step still requires a people, process, technology and governance approach.

Q Michael

What are you seeing on governance and data concerns specifically?

A Bob

More than half of organizations are still citing concerns about security and about hallucination or accuracy in AI systems. Those concerns are valid. Like any new technology, we are going to push it as far as we can before pulling back to what really can and should be done with it.

Our research backs this up: roughly one in two organizations are still working through governance as a key obstacle or gate, sitting down and asking who has access, what data will be used and how.

Build the Foundation First

AI creates value when quality data, human expertise, sound processes and governance work together.

Hyper-human Skills Differentiate

I do not think people are against AI in learning and development. They just want to think it through before they open the front door and bring it into the building.

Q Michael

There have been plenty of hits and misses as AI has moved beyond content development. What stands out to you?

A Bob

The hits and misses live in the same territory. AI has absolutely democratized learning development and made it more accessible and it has been a real hit in bringing down cost and cycle time for generic content. The miss is that some things are still better done by human beings, taught in live interaction.

We are getting there for things like customer service call role play, but for storytelling, which matters so much for conveying business lessons and for emotional intelligence and leadership, we are still beyond the promise of AI. Those hyperhuman skills are becoming the human capital of learning enterprises, the differentiator that goes beyond the ability to run technical solutions.

Q Michael

Do you think providers have been overly enthusiastic about the promise of their AI platforms?

A Bob

To a degree, yes. We operate in a fragmented landscape of providers chasing opportunity and AI has enabled a proliferation of very use-case-specific learning providers with platforms built for one job. They are good for what they do, but they are not a panacea.

Match AI to Work

AI speeds generic content, while storytelling, emotional intelligence and leadership still depend on human interaction.

Keep Humans Actively Involved

There is no panacea for organizational learning problems unless you make one type of widget over and over. I think it was oversold and overhyped on the vendor side, the sign-up-here-and-it-solves-everything pitch.

At the end of the day, we are dealing with complex human beings inside complex organizations with real stakeholders in dynamic environments. Human intelligence has to be part of it.

Q Michael

Our research describes three categories: humans out of the loop, humans in the loop and now humans on the loop. It feels like the industry has spent far more time talking about humans out of the loop, as if AI is a walkaway, set-it-and-forget-it technology. Has that been overstated?

A Bob

A little, yes. That caution around keeping a human in the loop has been there since day one, but you are right that it can start to feel like a given, like someone is managing it so it is fine. That human has to be actively involved in content creation and validation, in how the output will actually be consumed by real people. I do not think that has gotten enough attention and to be fair, industry messaging has fed that set-it-and-forget-it mentality to some degree.

Resist Silver- Bullet Thinking

Specialized AI platforms cannot solve every learning problem; human intelligence must remain part of the solution.

Q Michael

Another miss people raise is treating AI as a panacea that can fix things on its own, even when the underlying data or learning strategy is flawed. Do you think people have lost sight of the fact that AI begins and ends with people in learning and development?

Protect Learning Fundamentals

A Bob

To some degree, I agree. I would add another name to the hyper-human skills list: diversity. What worries me most in that scenario is the newer generation entering the industry inside an AI-enabled world. I say this in nearly every conversation and I know it can sound like the old guy in the room, but awareness of where the industry has come from and what the foundational elements of learning and development are, which is performance, still matters. Just because something is easier does not mean it is better.

Q Michael

Have you seen a real impact on learning teams themselves? VPS provides learning services, so you are close to this. Are people asking you more about how AI can make their teams more productive, scalable or efficient?

A Bob

Shift Toward Strategic Work

As generic content becomes easier to produce, learning partners must solve organization-specific performance challenges.

Absolutely. We see it in the types of requests hitting the industry. Basic, generic content development is something organizations can now handle well on their own, so that has changed the nature of what comes to us. The requests we get now are more tied to an organization's specific goals or differentiators; the things AI cannot satisfy to the same extent. That has absolutely shifted the types of conversations and requests we are seeing.

Q Michael

Have you seen anyone truly transform their training needs analysis with AI?

AI Augments Needs Analysis

A Bob

I have seen people claim that. I have seen AI help facilitate analysis and data parsing, but you still need the right data collected to do that well. I have not seen a flip-the-switch solution that takes care of all of it. People built the learning strategy the training needs analysis is based on. Unless you are feeding in the business conditions that matter, AI is not going to run down the hallway and pull your learning committee together to talk about upgrading your training needs analysis. It does a great job augmenting. It does not replace.

Q Michael

Looking at the horizon, if you were talking to an L&D organization about evaluating AI, what are the two or three most important criteria they should focus on?

A Bob

Let's move past the simple things, like developing basic courseware. That is a given now. The number one thing organizations need to focus on is incorporating AI into their outcomes and their organizational data, so you get AI-driven ROI. It should be planned to measure and improve the performance outcomes you actually care about, not just to generate more learning faster.

Is it making a difference and how do you know? That is the smart use of it, building ROI around your learning and business objectives. The second thing is to go back and focus on hyperhuman skills. That becomes the human capital of your organization that AI cannot replace: the capability to teach critical decision-making, empathy, leadership, and even the judgment of how and when to use AI in your learning organization. Those are not going away and for the first wave at least, that is where I would encourage people to invest.

Measure AI by Outcomes

Evaluate AI by performance and business results, not by how quickly it generates more learning.

**You Set the
Conditions****Q Michael**

A lot of L&D professionals feel like AI got away from them, like they are playing catch-up. What you are describing puts the power of choice back in their hands.

A Bob

That is exactly right. It does not matter how far AI has gone. You are still in control of where it gets used, who uses it and under what conditions. Whether you keep working with your current providers or not, AI or otherwise, it is still a choice. Nobody is being forced into something they do not want.



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