

**Tony Bingham**

**Opening Presentation, Monday, May 22**

**ATD 2017 International Conference & Exposition**

Today, I'd like to share with you some thoughts on something that has the potential to be huge for the profession and for those we serve, yet it's considered very small. Some even call it "micro." It's microlearning.

Twenty-six years after the launch of the worldwide web, and the start of the Information Age, some people are already declaring that age dead. We've moved beyond using the Internet mainly to collect and share piles of information. Now, thanks to mobile and social technology, we can share experiences, direct people's attention, influence social change, and even learn on demand.

This new world is the perfect incubator for changes in the practice of talent development, especially the rise of microlearning. Mobile and social technology provide a way to do what has eluded practitioners for decades: close the gap between learning and doing. Furthermore, these technologies enable the delivery of learning in small digestible doses that the human brain loves.

A new ATD research report on microlearning<sup>1</sup> found that 38% of the talent development professionals are already using microlearning to reinforce or supplement formal training. And, 41% expect their organizations to start using microlearning in the near future. We're convinced that microlearning is poised to take off and that you should be on board.

What is microlearning?

At ATD, we describe microlearning as small, focused bites of knowledge, typically with just one learning objective. And almost always, it's delivered with the help of technology. Microlearning doesn't need to be tethered to a classroom or a desk.

So, how did learning on the job get to this place? We've all been pre-conditioned by search engines to expect to find information instantaneously.

In 1998, the year Google launched, people did about 500,000 searches per day. Now, 19 years later, there are more than 2.3 million Google searches, per minute. All of us, all over the world, whether we're young or old, nerdy or super cool, are addicted to instant fact-finding. We expect it. We depend on it. And increasingly, today's learners demand it.

Search technology was a big influence in laying the groundwork for microlearning. But several other factors are also pushing it forward. Learning theory, social software, brain science, generational changes, and mobile technology all play a part. But mobile is the big enabler. Without mobile, microlearning wouldn't have the scale it has today.

Today, there are more mobile devices in the world than there are people.

Earlier I shared that 38% of the talent development professionals we surveyed are already using microlearning.

---

<sup>1</sup> ATD 2017 research report, *Microlearning: Delivering Bite-Sized Knowledge*.

We asked talent development leaders in three different industries to tell us why and how they use microlearning. We spoke with Guillermo Miranda from IBM, Kara Laverde from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Nancy Harvin from Newport News Shipbuilding. Each one has a unique approach.

[VIDEO]

Each of our virtual guests mentioned the need for more speed in delivering learning.

We know that microlearning is effective at delivering short, focused learning experiences to help a learner achieve a single outcome. One reason is that microlearning is built on solid learning principles.

Because every time you learn something, you change your brain, and these small moments add up to new capabilities over time.<sup>2</sup>

Another reason microlearning is effective is that it's short. Studies show that short pieces of content, followed by assessments when appropriate, produce better performance.<sup>3</sup> ATD research found that microlearning segments lasting two to five minutes were considered the most effective by 59% of the respondents.

We asked our three virtual guests how they know the microlearning they use is effective.

[VIDEO]

The fact that these and other organizations are seeing positive results from microlearning—ranging from more engagement with learners to cost savings—supports research that says the use of microlearning will increase.

The growth of video is another factor driving the evolution of microlearning. Mobile video traffic now accounts for more than half of all mobile data traffic, according to Cisco. They predict that by 2019, over three-fourths of the world's mobile data traffic will be from video.

All three of our virtual guests mentioned video as a component of their microlearning. Our research found that video is a top way to deliver microlearning for more than three-quarters of the companies we surveyed. Video just makes sense in an age of information overload. A blog post in *Psychology Today* stated that the brain processes video images 60,000 times faster than it processes text.

Another force pushing microlearning ahead is the influence of young people who will soon be the majority in the workforce. PwC estimates that by 2020, people under 40 will comprise half of the global workforce.

For many years, Millennials have been credited with bringing their mobile and social habits into the workplace. But that's already old news. Now we're feeling the influence of Generation Z.

These young people, who are in their late teens and early 20s, have been using mobile device almost since birth. On average, Gen Zs use their smartphones 15.4 hours per week — more than any other type of device. They're connected to the Internet and to each other an average of 10 hours a day.

---

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lara Boyd, Neurobiology Researcher, University of British Columbia, Canada, in a TED Talk

<sup>3</sup> Felix Kapp & Antje Proske, University of Dresden, in the *Journal of Educational Computing Research*

Microlearning is a great match with 21<sup>st</sup> century workers who are young, mobile, and totally social. Gen Zs comprise nearly 2 billion people globally, and they don't just represent the future; they're creating it. They prefer to communicate with pictures, not words. And, they expect to learn that way.

At this point, I hope you're excited about microlearning, and are ready to get on board, or if you're already using it, to take it to the next level. Let's hear how IBM and The Gates Foundations got started with microlearning and what tips they have for making it successful.

[VIDEO]

You just heard Kara talk about moving away from perfectionism, and Guillermo encouraging you to "be agile." These are signs that microlearning is breaking old paradigms about designing and delivering learning.

Here are some steps you can take to move in that direction too.

- Think forward to a workplace that will be powered more and more by mobile devices and by the expectations of people who have never known anything but a mobile, digital, connected world.
- Think outside the classroom. Work on closing the gap between when people need short bites of learning and when they get them.
- Be agile in your learning design. At IBM this means designing learning in short units, testing them, revising them, and repeating the process quickly until the results are right.
- Keep content short and focused on the need to know rather than the nice to know. It doesn't have to be perfect to be effective.
- Don't forget to line up the technology you'll need, plus the tech talent to support it.
- And be sure to get leaders on board because they can help others be accountable for using microlearning.

Our research found that some leaders are reluctant to support microlearning because they're concerned about the security of data systems. So, make IT security your new best friends.

And starting right now, use this conference to accelerate your journey into microlearning. The sessions, the EXPO, and even the hallways are full of opportunities to learn more and to connect with people who can help you.

By next year's conference, I expect to be able to report to you that a solid majority of organizations are on board and benefitting from microlearning. I hope your organizations will be among them. That outcome is in your very capable hands. Are you ready?

Thank you.