Training Trends for 2017: A Dynamic Year Ahead!

In this summary we invite LERN members to look at what is behind the trends, with insights on how these factors impact one’s work with clients, students and organizations. We consider important demographic changes, shifting sands in the U.S. economy and our nation’s political environment. In addition, because disruptive change is a fact of life for many industries including education, we also look at major new developments and resulting skills gaps. All of these factors impact our work as training leaders. In the final sections of this overview, we will highlight the importance of industry-specific trends, entice you to examine some exciting new learning technologies, then conclude with a path forward providing a “To Do” list for 2017. Let’s get started!

Demographics, the Economy, Politics and Disruption

Our forecast for 2016 had the multigenerational workforce as a headline. This is still a dominant factor for 2017, although now Millennials (GenY) are the largest generation at work, having overtaken the baby boomers in number. Boomers continue to retire in increasing numbers, but still exert an important presence at work because of their expertise and skills. With some older Traditionalists yet to retire and Generation Z starting to enter the workforce, there are as many as five generations in the U.S. workforce in 2017, including Generation X (older but smaller in number than the Millennials).

It is important that training leaders take the multigenerational workforce into account when planning training because motivational factors and preferred
learning technologies differ between generations. LERN advises training leaders to use blended learning models with all generations and plan dynamic interactive programs. Boomers are most flexible, and are adapting to high-tech accelerated training, but Millennials won’t necessarily adapt well to low-tech training. Demand in leadership training has grown in response to Millennials moving into leadership positions formerly held by retiring boomers. Knowledge management and succession implementation are crucial in this work environment.

The U.S. economy continues to show signs of healthy recovery and growing stability, but not everyone has benefitted. Although unemployment is down to a low 4.9%, wealth is now more heavily concentrated at the top, and middle class workers are feeling the pinch of inflation with minimal salary increases over an extended period of time. In the big picture for 2016, it is good news that we have added about 230,000 jobs monthly, that consumer confidence is up and investment in training is up.

Of concern is that there is an increase in the percentage of part-time jobs and a slow but marked decline in labor force participation, not altogether accounted for by retiring Boomers. Also of note is the impact of technology in the workplace. Robotics is increasingly taking over jobs that can be automated, and changing technology and practice will continue to impact almost all jobs. Technology training in specific areas, including but not limited to degree completion, is thus in high and growing demand.

The 2016 political election has overwhelmed the nation’s news since 2015. With the results of the election finalized in November 2016, attention will now turn to how new leadership will impact the nation’s economy, the government’s investment in workforce training programs and higher education, and other policy matters pertaining to these areas. LERN advises learning leaders to stay tuned to funding and policy implications in the coming months.

Disruption of markets will be ever-more present in 2017. Disruptors create jobs, transform work, industries and markets. These create new opportunities for training as most are tied to new and evolving technologies. For example: customers are interacting more with the industries that serve them; innovation centers are taking over traditional R&D sources (with higher education institutions pressed to get on the bandwagon); drones are joining the workforce; virtual reality is progressing and mobile-first behavior
is dominating consumer interaction. Training leaders are advised to stay abreast of the fascinating and dynamic disruptors at play in our economy and consider where these are impacting business, industry and service sectors. The Training Trends 2017 session at the LERN annual conference provides further insights into some of the major trends.

**Industry-specific Trends**

Industry-specific updates are important to highlight. Here are some key insights:

The health care industry continues to grow in jobs, with health care technology as the king of profitability in U.S. industry. Although manufacturing has experienced some area-specific declines in exports, there are industry sectors that remain strong in growth. Training leaders should take a look at what is happening state-by-state in manufacturing, and see where the job needs and skills gaps are most pressing. Manufacturing as a whole demands more STEM skilled workers than are currently in the pipeline. The Training Trends session at the LERN 2017 conference highlights more detailed information and provides links to reports from the manufacturing industry.

**Learning Technologies**

With a respect for the changing nature of our own delivery systems, LERN emphasizes the need to stay abreast of trends and best practices in learning technologies. We turn to two 2016 survey reports, and some of the latest findings. The first is the *New Media Consortium Horizon Report for 2016, Higher Education Edition*, which reports on a global survey of learning technologies in higher education. Participants report on breakthrough applications used for such purposes as measuring and accelerating learning, creating new learning and innovation centers, augmented and virtual reality, deeper learning strategies and more. Near-term and long-range trends are discussed in detail.

The second report is from [Jane Hart’s blog on Learning and Development](https://www.janehart.co.uk), with annual international results on top learning technologies. In recent years the top technologies and tools listed in this report numbered only a relative few. It is significant to note that the 2016 report lists 200 top learning technologies. This year’s report featured over 40 categories of tools, from course authoring tools to virtual reality tools. LERN invites you to have a look at the exciting new technologies available for your use in developing a more dynamic and effective training environment.
Your To-Do List for 2017

Finally, we have some suggestions for the work ahead in 2017.

1. Talk to your best customers and learn about their changing needs
2. Keep up with best practices in new learning technologies
3. Hire, train and reward the best trainers and learning specialists
4. Measure learning outcomes
5. Partner, partner, partner
6. Develop your best markets with internal partners
7. Hone your brand
8. Position for continual learning on workforce demographics and economic trends

The LERN team wishes you a dynamic and successful year ahead. It is bound to be interesting and full of exciting new resources for growth and learning!

Save the Dates!

LERN Contract Training Institute

Chicago, March 21-23, 2017