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## A Pragmatic Solution to the Skills Gap

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the scope and significance of the problem many individuals and companies are facing today – the global skills gap.

Three factors (Great Recession, Brain Drain, and Limited Engagement) affecting the skills gap are examined and suggestions on how to position your company to address these factors are provided.

Finally, a new online tool is introduced that is a pragmatic solution to the skills gap and provides a clear value proposition to the performance of individuals, companies, and communities worldwide.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Adam Arroyos is the founder and CEO of Grandslam Performance Associates, LLC, an organizational development firm specializing in helping individuals, companies, and communities grow and sustain their performance. He is also the author of the book, "PerformanceGPA®: Achieving High Performance Through Service," a recently published book focused on performance management. Dr. Arroyos is a visionary leader with a proven track record of success in helping people and organizations maximize their potential and elevate their performance. He has a broad base of experience that includes various senior-level leadership positions in private, public, and non-profit organizations.

By Adam Arroyos, PhD  
Founder and CEO

Grandslam Performance Associates, LLC

*"serve2perform.com® is a professional development solution that provides companies with agility, scalability, and efficiency. It is a practical tool that facilitates connections with the purpose of facilitating co-learning opportunities on a global scale. We are excited to bring this innovative technology to our company."*

Ken Kimbro  
Chief Human Resource Officer  
Tyson Foods, Inc.

Two of the biggest challenges for companies of all sizes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the skills gap within their workforce and the limited number of individuals in the pipeline equipped with the skills in demand. To be competitive in today's global marketplace, companies must have the ability to acquire the capabilities needed to achieve their business goals. However, due to a number of factors, retooling a workforce and acquiring new skills and capabilities through talent acquisition has become increasingly challenging. Three specific and significant factors contributing to this challenge are the Great Recession, Brain Drain, and Limited Engagement of the US workforce.

## Great Recession:

The Great Recession has profoundly affected the landscape of today's job market and the skills required to compete in it. Many of the jobs that weathered the storm have expanded in their scope of responsibility and require individuals to engage their creativity and imagination to find ways to create organizational-wide impact with their talents and resources. Many of the new jobs that have emerged are tied to skills that continue to grow in significance such as technology, critical thinking, leadership, interpersonal skills, judgment and decision-making, among others. The late Dr. Peter Drucker, a management expert, refers to this capacity as a knowledge worker, which is a person who thinks for a living. <sup>1</sup>Examples of knowledge worker jobs include software engineers, architects, engineers, scientists, lawyers, among others. The concept, knowledge worker, was coined by Dr. Drucker who was one of the first to predict that the success of companies and the economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would shift from their ability to produce goods to their ability to generate and leverage new knowledge. Drucker suggested that in a knowledge economy, the productivity of knowledge workers would depend on the following six factors:<sup>2</sup>

1. The Task

*Knowledge worker productivity demands that we ask the question: What is the task?*

2. Autonomy

*It demands that we impose the responsibility for their productivity on the individual knowledge workers themselves. Knowledge workers have to manage themselves. They have to have autonomy.*

3. Innovation

*Continuing innovation has to be part of the work, the task, and the responsibility of knowledge workers.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.knowledgeworkerperformance.com/Peter-Drucker-Knowledge-Worker-Productivity.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.knowledgeworkerperformance.com/Peter-Drucker-Knowledge-Worker-Productivity.aspx>

4. Continuous Learning and Teaching

*Knowledge work requires continuous learning on the part of the knowledge worker, but equally continuous teaching on the part of the knowledge worker.*

5. Quantity and Quality

*Productivity of the knowledge worker is not - at least not primarily - a matter of the quantity of output. Quality is at least as important.*

6. Preference

*It requires that knowledge workers want to work for the organization in preference to all other opportunities.<sup>3</sup>*

These factors were supported in the findings of the 2009 Skills Gap poll from ASTD (American Society for Training and Development), where they found that organizations are experiencing gaps in the following skills:

- Leadership and executive skills
- Basic workplace competencies such as literacy and numeracy that are the building blocks of successful performance in any job
- Professional or industry-specific skills
- Managerial and supervisory skills
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Technical, IT, and systems skills
- Sales skills
- Process and project management skills<sup>4</sup>

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics (BLS), the majority of new jobs created in recent years have what economists refer to as “tacit interactions,” as their main component. Tacit interactions are transactions that rely heavily on judgment and context.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.knowledgeworkerperformance.com/Peter-Drucker-Knowledge-Worker-Productivity.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> American Society for Training & Development (ASTD). 2009. Bridging the Skills Gap.

<sup>5</sup> American Society for Training & Development (ASTD). 2009. Bridging the Skills Gap.

These most in-demand jobs, according to Career Builder's Annual Job Forecast report released in 2013, include the following for the 10 largest global economies:<sup>6</sup>

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| U.S.:    | Sales, Information Technology, Customer Service                           |
| China:   | Sales, Research & Development, Production                                 |
| Japan:   | Information Technology, Engineering, Customer Service                     |
| Germany: | Information Technology, Sales, Production                                 |
| France:  | Production, Sales, Information Technology (IT tied with Customer Service) |
| U.K.:    | Sales, Administrative, Customer Service                                   |
| Brazil:  | Customer Service, Information Technology, Administrative                  |
| Italy:   | Production, Sales, Administrative   |
| Russia:  | Production, Customer Service, Engineering                                 |
| India:   | Information Technology, Marketing, Customer Service <sup>7</sup>          |

The study found that information technology, sales, customer service, and production were common in-demand jobs in the world's 10 largest global economies.<sup>8</sup>

The shortage of individuals with these skills in the workforce coupled with the skills gap experienced by many companies worldwide, has negatively affected companies revenues, their productivity, and their ability to grow their business.

### Brain Drain:

Given the large number of employees, approximately 76 million, that came from the baby boomer generation and the fact that subsequent generations were not as large in number, we would need almost every working-age individual to enter the workforce to attempt to fill the big void left by the retirement of the baby boomers. However, this would not address the consequent loss of knowledge in the workforce caused by the brain drain. This could be a significant threat to the competitiveness of the US workforce given the fact that success in today's knowledge economy requires both expertise and experience. The productivity of the knowledge workers from Generations X and Y will depend on their ability to acquire critical experience from a variety of sources including their baby

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=1%2f16%2f2013&id=pr734&ed=1%2f16%2f2099>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=1%2f16%2f2013&id=pr734&ed=1%2f16%2f2099>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=1%2f16%2f2013&id=pr734&ed=1%2f16%2f2099>

boomer colleagues. According to a 2012 article from Catalyst, there were 154,316,000 people in the US workforce in 2012 and the total approximate representation by generation was the following:<sup>9</sup>

- Mature/WWII Generation: 7,676,000
- Baby Boomers: 59,893,000
- Generation X: 49,433,000
- Generation Y/Millennials: 31,927,000

As indicated in the aforementioned breakdown, Generations X and Y made up nearly 53% of the US workforce in 2012 and this percentage will continue to grow as baby boomers continue to retire and more Xers and Yers enter the workforce. The Pew Research Center reports that on January 1, 2011, the oldest members of the Baby Boom generation celebrated their 65th birthday and every day after that day for the next 19 years, 10,000 baby boomers will reach age 65.<sup>10</sup>

### Limited Engagement:

Many employees are not engaged in their workplace, and consequently, are not proactively owning their skills development. In fact, a recent study by *The Economist* reports that 87% of the C-suite believes that disengaged employees are one of the three biggest threats facing their business.<sup>11</sup> In a 2012 study, Gallup found that 70% of Americans are not engaged in their jobs, which indicates that American businesses are operating at one-third of their capacity.<sup>12</sup> Gallup estimates this large disengaged group of employees to cost the American economy between \$450 and \$550 billion per year in lost productivity.

The Skills Gap of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is clearly a significant problem for employers and employees worldwide. To contribute to the amelioration of the skills gap problem,

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<sup>9</sup> Catalyst. Catalyst Quick Take: Generations in the Workplace in the United States & Canada. New York: Catalyst, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/baby-boomers-retire/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.managementthinking.eiu.com/sites/default/files/LON%20-%20PL%20-%20Hay%20report\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.managementthinking.eiu.com/sites/default/files/LON%20-%20PL%20-%20Hay%20report_WEB.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://thegallupblog.gallup.com/2013/06/gallup-releases-new-findings-on-state.html>

we must leverage technology and new innovative strategies that will expand the scalability, adaptability, and agility of our existing talent development platforms.

These three factors, which are contributors to the skills gap problem, have many implications to individuals, companies, and economies worldwide. In regards to companies, here are a few implications that talent development professionals should consider to help their business and employees grow their productivity and performance in today's knowledge economy:

- Foster a culture of entrepreneurialism in the workplace where employees are given the autonomy and accountability to be problem-solvers and innovators.
- Create experiential learning opportunities for employees to learn more parts of the business and acquire and sharpen a diversity of skills.
- Facilitate the transfer of knowledge between the four generations in the workforce (World War II Generation, Baby Boomer Generation, and Generations X and Y). I.e. The World War II Generation and Baby Boomers have wisdom and years of experience to transfer to Generations X and Y and Xers and Yers have expertise and experience in information technology to transfer to the Mature Generation and Baby Boomers.
- Leverage technology to expand access to a variety of learning and development sources.
- Expand efforts to grow the engagement of all employees with strategies that account for the four generations and the workplace conditions that effectively motivate their engagement.
- Expand organizational focus on intrapersonal diversity to ensure employees fully realize the scope and value of their diverse skills and help them understand how to leverage their diverse skills and experience to solve problems and generate innovation.

- Expand training and experiential learning offerings focused on relationship building, relationship management, collaboration, persuasion, negotiation skills, influence, and resource management.
- Encourage personal ownership of learning and professional development by leveraging annual performance evaluations to recognize and reward this behavior.

### About [serve2perform.com](http://serve2perform.com)®

This innovative online platform was designed to leverage the popularity of social media and the scalability of technology to help individuals connect to skills, learn skills, and practice skills. At [serve2perform.com](http://serve2perform.com)®, job performance is powered by connections and the members of its global community help each other grow their professional skills through peer-to-peer learning.

Generations X and Y are active users of online platforms and it's important to leverage technology as an additional delivery platform for talent development. Two researchers, Don Tapscott and Robert Bernard, found that old models of employee development (train, supervise, and retain) are outdated and not aligned with how the younger generations prefer to learn and develop. Tapscott and Bernard recommend reciprocal and relationship-oriented approaches, because they found them to be more effective in engaging Net Generation employees in their learning and their work. Consequently, they recommend leveraging delivery platforms such as social media, virtual games, and other Web.2.0 tools to help the younger generations learn and develop.<sup>13</sup>

The focus of [serve2perform.com](http://serve2perform.com)® is to encourage more individuals to take greater ownership of their development and performance by providing them with access to a resource that affords them the ability to continuously acquire and grow skills that will elevate their performance. According to Pew Internet, more individuals are relying more

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<sup>13</sup> American Society for Training & Development (ASTD). 2009. Bridging the Skills Gap.

on the internet as the go-to resource for information and advice on a number of topics. A 2009, study by Pew Internet, found that 69% of Americans have used the internet to cope with the recession as they search for bargains, jobs, ways to upgrade their skills, better investment strategies, housing options, and government benefits.<sup>14</sup>

Peer-to-peer learning has existed for many years, but we've never seriously considered or leveraged it as a talent development solution. However, many individuals who actively engage in peer-to-peer learning, including me, can attest to the invaluable learning and development that is gained. It is an effective, economical, and scalable model for the development and engagement of talent. Peer-to-peer learning grows the engagement of individuals by affording them with the opportunities to invest in the development of others and to learn from others on an ongoing basis. For example, if one's strong skills set is marketing and sales and they are interested in practicing their public speaking skill, they may pursue teaching opportunities where they teach this skills set with others as a coach, mentor, program facilitator, etc. The individual would receive invaluable practice in public speaking and other skills associated with coordinating and teaching the skill. Their peer(s) would gain marketing and sales insights directly from a subject matter expert and would also grow their social capital by establishing a key connection.

An additional tool available via this online platform is the PerformanceGPA® Assessment. This assessment is based on my recently published book titled, "PerformanceGPA®," and assesses an individual's scope of leadership, influence, and performance. The acronym GPA stands for Grand slam Performance Aptitude which refers to one's natural tendency to initiate the Grand slam Performance effect. The Grand slam Performance effect is initiated when one engages in a volunteer service opportunity with the intention of affecting their performance and the performance of others. As in baseball, a grand slam requires making it possible for everyone on base to score, which yields a greater contribution to the team. Once an individual completes the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP%20-%20The-Internet-and-the-Recession%20%20with%20topline.pdf>



assessment, the system will provide them with a report that includes their scope of leadership, influence, and performance along with recommended competencies to develop. Users can then leverage the [serve2perform.com](http://serve2perform.com) community to register for skills or submit skills to practice that will help them develop their targeted competencies.

This platform is an excellent resource to add to existing career planning programs for college students and for talent development platforms for the global workforce. It address the challenges of scalability, agility, and cost because anyone worldwide can immediately leverage it. The platform provides learning resources that are readily available worldwide that come with little to no costs. There are many ways in which this platform can add tremendous value to companies and communities of all sizes worldwide, and here are a few examples of how this platform can be utilized to address the skills gap and limited engagement in the workplace and communities worldwide:

**College Students:**

- Help college students gain exposure and experience in various disciplines to help them make more informed decisions related to their fields of study and career choices.
- Connect college students to a pipeline of potential mentors and sponsors.
- Connect college students to service learning opportunities that engage their passion(s) and leadership purpose.
- Help college students build a [serve2perform®](http://serve2perform.com) profile that tracks their professional development experience for potential employers.

**Workforce (Private, Public, and Nonprofit):**

- Help employees overcome skills gaps by connecting them to on-demand training opportunities.
- Help employees worldwide grow their engagement and performance by helping them connect to professional development engagements that will engage their passion and stretch their capacity.
- Connect employees to a pipeline of potential mentors, coaches, and sponsors.

- Motivate a mindset of Grandslam Performance™ where employees and members of their community are invested and engaged in each other's development to advance the performance of their company and community.
- Help transfer knowledge between the generations in the workplace (WWII, Baby Boomers, X, and Y).
- Help Veterans market and communicate the transferrable skills and competencies they received from their military experience.
- Help members of Employee Resource Groups acquire and track all the skill sets and experiences they've acquired through their leadership service.

### Conclusion:

The skills gap is a significant problem for the competitiveness and success of companies and communities worldwide and unless we figure out how we can address the factors contributing to the skills gap, the problem and its implications will continue to grow. As more baby boomers continue to retire, more Generation Xers continue to move into leadership roles, and more Generation Yers continue to enter the workforce, we must have an answer to critical questions such as the following:

1. How can we facilitate the transfer of knowledge while many baby boomers are still in the workforce?
2. How we can create a culture of entrepreneurialism within our workplace?
3. How can we provide more autonomy to our workforce to solve problems, create solutions, and engage their authentic leadership without compromising the integrity of our business model?
4. How can we provide more experiential learning through our existing career planning and talent development platforms?
5. How can we create more flexibility within our workplace to become a workplace of choice for Xers and Yers while not infringing on productivity?

6. How can we address the professional experience gap for first generation college students and other disadvantaged students while not infringing on the success of their academic pursuits.
7. How can we expand access for our college students and workforce to more sources of performance management platforms while containing costs?
8. How can we leverage the demand for technology-based delivery platforms to grow the scalability and accessibility of our talent development programs?
9. How can we enable our workforce to gain experience in more areas of our business while not infringing on their work stream?

Finally, a key resource to consider as you design your workforce development strategies is [serve2perform.com](http://serve2perform.com)®. This online platform is a pragmatic solution to the skills gap and will help elevate the performance of individuals worldwide by broadening their social networks, empowering them to continuously gain skills and experiences, growing their versatility and capacity, and deepening their engagement.