LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #25 *SyberWorks LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Discusses Leadership, Employment, and Job Search Training for the Chilkoot Indian Association of Alaska*

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Mary Kay Lofurno: Welcome to the next edition of the Syberworks LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Series where we look at real world learning management system, LMS implementations and e-Learning program rollouts. My name is Mary Kay Lofurno and I am the Marketing Director here at SyberWorks and your host today.

SyberWorks specializes in custom e-learning solutions, learning management systems and custom e-learning development for corporations, governments and non-profits.

In this edition, we are talking with Dr. Robert Whitcomb, Director of Human Resources & Organizational Development for Alaska's Chilkoot Indian Association, about their use of the SyberWorks-hosted learning management system to provide leadership training and job skills training to prepare native members for management roles in tribal government and to obtain jobs in the local community.

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Mary Kay: And now let's speak with Dr. Robert Whitcomb, Director of Human Resources for Alaska's Chilkoot Indian Association. Good Afternoon, Bob. Thanks for coming to talk with us today.

Dr. Robert Whitcomb: Happy to be with you, Mary Kay, and actually here it's still morning.

Mary Kay: Yeah, that's true and probably a lot colder, or rather today I think it's about 10 degrees outside.

Robert: Well it's colder for you than it is for us. We're about 40 degrees but we have ice and so we're struggling through an ice storm right now.

Mary Kay: I think it would be great if you could introduce yourself to our audience and tell us a little bit about what you do for the Chilkoot Indian Association.

Robert: OK. Well I've been in Alaska for about four years now and prior to that I was a college professor working in Maine and Wisconsin and then ultimately Alaska. About a year and a half ago, I came up to the Chilkoot Indian Association to work in their Human Resources area.

My full title is Director of Human Resources and Organizational Development. In this dual capacity, I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the human resources, hiring, orientation, benefits, administration and such. But the real nuts and bolts that I spend the bulk of my time on is organizational development, and this piece brings in a wide range of activities ranging from employee training and development to member training to tribal council training and management and leadership development.

So it's a really exciting role that I play in the tribe preparing people to serve the tribe, in essence to serve the nation.

Mary Kay: OK. That sounds great. Can you tell us a little bit more about the Chilkoot Indian Association, its origins, how it got started?

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Robert: I would be happy to. We are a native sovereign nation. The Chilkoot Indian tribe has been in Southeast Alaska since time began. They are the original inhabitants of the area and with the Indian Reorganization Act, the tribe voted to adopt an association model of government. They could either adopt a tribal structure, an association structure or a village structure and this particular group decided to adopt the association structure.

So in 1941, the Chilkoot Indian Association Constitution was ratified, making the Chilkoot Indian Association the government for this sovereign nation. Today the association is a membership organization. We have about 450 native Alaskans and Native Americans who are members. Membership is based on residence and they reside then in the Upper Lynn Canal community of Haines, Alaska, which is Southeast Alaska. We are about 90 miles north of Juneau.

Mary Kay: OK. That sounds good. What were some of the factors that led your organization to investigate and ultimately purchase our hosted learning management system, Bob?

Robert: Well, one of the highest priorities for the tribe is to maintain the native sovereignty where people who live the Chilkoot culture in a community of great diversity. And regrettably throughout much of Alaska, many villages and communities are losing their young people because there is such high unemployment.

Our tribal council believes that education is the economic engine and so they have a real commitment to improving educational opportunities and training and development in college and so forth, and to start addressing that, the tribe said, "We want to create a learning management system." Our tribal administrator is a dynamic young man who has a real stance in knowledge management and said that this was a priority for the tribe.

When we started looking at learning management systems, we were really just looking at courses and saying, "Fine, how can we deliver online courses?" But when we got starting to talk to the SyberWorks folks, we started to learn that there was so much more to the learning management system and we really felt there was a power to the learning management system, primarily in the competencies area where we could start tracking learner management as opposed to just course management.

Mary Kay: OK. That sounds good. So can you describe who is actually using the SyberWorks hosted learning management system in your organization?

Robert: Absolutely. We are still in the very beginning stages. We are less than a year old in our project here and so we are still developing our things and we certainly aren't maximizing the full power of the application.

Right now, I am the sole administrator of the system and I have integrated the tribal staff positions and descriptions and such, so that we have created our role groupings for people. We've identified the job tests that they have and now we are working on creating the specific learning events for employees and tribal members and future employers, so that they can master those.

And our plan is to create learner profiles for all of our members and then identify learning events that will be able to follow them, that will provide them the knowledge, skills and abilities to succeed either in tribal governance or in other work settings.

Once we've addressed our tribal member needs, we are talking about possibly putting our whole system online to open up for the whole region because there are other tribes and associations throughout the Southeast Alaska region. There are about 267 tribes in Alaska.

So many of them are doing other wonderful things but there are always the commonalities. Fine, if you are going to tribal governance, you have to understand how to do grant writing, how to do council meetings, how to do

parliamentary procedures. And so what we're looking at long term is taking the learning that we've developed here and putting it on the market for other tribes.

Now we haven't made the decision whether that's going to be a for-profit operation for us or if it's going to be a service to our other sister tribes, but this may be the way that we maintain our sustainability for the program by setting it up and in essence selling training online and learner management online to other tribes throughout our communities.

Mary Kay: OK. That sounds great. I understand you are the only person working on it currently. Do you have any plans to get Native Americans in your tribe working on that? When do you think that is going to happen?

Robert: Absolutely. Our whole plan, when we look at our strategic plan for our tribe, is to move to completely native management, native operations. Currently we have a number of non-natives working in specialty areas that are developing the systems and procedures so that we can hand this off to our native brothers and sisters.

Right now we do have — one of our tech guys is a native and it's kind of a funny story because he's a strong tech guy and when we hired him I was really excited and said, "Great, someone can do the SyberWorks work for me because I'm really not a technology person."

Well, he read through the manual and he talked with some folks at SyberWorks and he came back and said "Bob, this is a level that you can handle," which is quite a statement to SyberWorks' simplicity of use because I am really not a tech guy. But our tech guy felt confident that, yes, this was something that a non-technical person can do.

And as I've learned and been trained by the SyberWorks folks by our guy, I'm finding, gee, I can handle this. I still haven't learned anything about the technology, which is fine because it really doesn't require you to be a technologist to use it. It requires you to be able to think, and so far I have been able to do that.

Mary Kay: That sounds good. I know you talked a little bit previously about competencies and how you are setting those up. Can you tell our audience about the business case that really precipitated that need a little bit more? I know you shared some of it but if you could give us a little more information about that.

Robert: Oh, sure. Alaska is like no place you've ever worked. You know, it's a remote community. It's a remote area. There are only 600,000 some-odd people here in the whole state. Our community is about 1,500 people so we're very, very tiny. And for our purposes, competency management is a huge function for us. Our tribal administrator knows that the critical factor in hiring is competency. What can people do for the organization?

And so our starting point has been identifying the competencies required to run tribal government, construction companies, small retail businesses, so that we can know what skills people need to be hired for. Unfortunately, you don't always have the people with the skill set available to you right in your area. And this is especially true in Alaska.

Prior to coming here, I ran something called The Village Management Institute through Sheldon Jackson College, which is in Sitka, Alaska, a little bit south of here. And in The Village Management Institute we looked at villages and saw that villages were struggling with the administration of their business, in essence, because they couldn't attract professional managers to their communities.

A community of 28 people isn't going to bring in someone with a Masters in Public Administration to run their community. However, they still have all the same reporting information and all the same training and all that that any other community has.

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So The Village Management Institute took a stance: "We need to train the people that live in the local villages, who are already established there, in the skill sets that are required." We're taking that exact same stance with our tribal government where we're saying, "We need to prepare our current young people to take on that next generation of leadership."

It's a little scary for us right now. We look at our tribal council and the youngest person on our tribal council is about 47 years old. Well, that's great. But then there's this huge gap down to 18 and we're missing people ages 18 to 35 in our activities. And so we see this as a huge problem for us. And so the business case for us is we need to prepare that next generation of leaders.

It's a succession planning model for us that we say, "If we don't have that next generation of leaders in 25 years, we don't exist any longer." And that's a real strong case for us to look and say, "OK, we need to put something in place right now." And we're working with our young people right away on that.

Mary Kay: OK. Sounds great. Do you have any other learning goals or objectives you'd like to share with us, Bob?

Robert: Well, one of the neat things that we're doing, and we're very excited about this, is beyond the training of management skills or business skills and such, we're looking at how we can preserve our culture. Many of our elders are obviously getting older. They are becoming frail. We've recently, within the past two months, lost one of our greatest resources, one of our elders that was very involved in setting up the community, setting up the tribe.

And so we're trying to say, "How can we preserve that?" And obviously, one way to preserve it is through video tape or through recordings. And that's information that we can then put onto the learning management system for other people to share later on. So part of this is preserving our heritage.

It's exciting because we can get out there with a camera and watch someone carving a totem pole or watch people out collecting berries and salmon harvest and the subsistence living. We can set up videos of people that are gutting salmon or gutting moose or look at any of those hunts. So there's a real opportunity for us to preserve some of the subsistence and some of the cultural activities that we have here so that our young people can have that forever.

Not only our young people. Alaska, of course, is a huge tourist area and so setting up those activities so that tourists and others can see and start to understand the piece of Alaska that they'd never see otherwise.

So, for us, much of it's preserving our native sovereignty, but also sharing our native heritage with members and non-members, connecting our youth and elders, and really trying to bring that information across so that people can understand us better. We're looking at integrating ourselves more into the community and getting the community to understand where we're coming from as well.

Mary Kay: Well, that sounds great. So Bob, what are some of the instructional design and planning processes used to develop your training and what course development tools are you using to do that?

Robert: Well, for us, everything started with trying to identify what it is people do. So we went back to the position descriptions and said, "Golly, these don't tell us anything." So we revised all of our position descriptions. We did desk audits to understand what people were doing. We talked with directors to try to understand what their tasks were. And we finally identified what the knowledge, skills, and abilities were that they were doing.

Once we had that we could develop the competency statements and indentify what we needed people to do, the competency statements. Then we said, "What are the learning events? What are the things that provide the knowledge to the individual to develop those skills?" And that's where we started picking up on "what's the easiest way for us to do this?"

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As I've confessed already, I'm not a real tech person, but when we started working on this we learned that we can use PowerPoint presentations that we then turn into a FlashSpring that can then load right into SyberWorks. And so our greatest tool, and frankly, one of the biggest selling points when we were looking at buying, was the ability to take a PowerPoint with a narration, pop it right into a Flash movie, and put it right into the SyberWorks system. And that's what we've done.

Now it may not be real impressive for a lot of folks, but for us it's the perfect tool. And as we develop skill and competence in using other tools, we'll start expanding. But for us, the Flash movies was the important thing and the easiest way for us to get going right away. And we had things running immediately for us. So it worked real well for us.

Mary Kay: OK. Well, that sounds great. So Bob, can you tell us about your customer experience with SyberWorks?

Robert: Well, we had been looking at several places. And I'd just sent an inquiry to SyberWorks and Bill Hutchins contacted me and said, "Well, what are looking at?" And I kind of chatted with him a little bit. And so Bill said, "Do you have a PowerPoint presentation?" This kind of relates to our last question about what we do. So I sent Bill a PowerPoint presentation. We set up a meeting, a telephone meeting. And at the meeting he said, "Well, go ahead and log in," and he popped up my presentation and showed me the whole thing. And I thought, "Golly, this is cool."

He said, "Yeah, it took me about five minutes to do." I'm going, "I like this. This is easy to use and going to be a positive thing." So we worked with Bill in the initial sale and then I was assigned to an account exec that provided us training – that's Lorinda Boyd, who's given us fantastic service when we were looking at trying to learn the FlashSpring. Steve Pena spent time with me giving me training there.

And then I had the good fortune of being on the East Coast this past summer where I went into SyberWorks headquarters and I visited with Lorinda for an extended period of time and she walked me through. And it was just a wonderful experience. So customer service has been fantastic.

You know, we of course have a four-hour time difference here so I have to be real cognizant that I need to be looking at that. If I have a problem in the afternoon, I know that I'm going to have an answer first thing in the morning when I get in. And so that's worked out very well for us. And Larinda's been real flexible for us saying that if we need her to be available in the afternoon, which is evening on the East Coast, she's happy to do that. And so it's been just wonderful.

We felt a real positive experience working with SyberWorks just because when we've needed things, they've been there and when we're just kind of plugging away with our own things, they kind of leave us alone. And so there isn't a hounding that, "Oh, you've got to do this now!" It's, "We're here if you need us." And that's exactly the way that we need our training and our support right now.

So we're delighted. SyberWorks has been just fantastic for us. And the fact that it's hosted on SyberWorks system means I don't have to worry about any of the back-office stuff here. So it's the perfect system for us at this time. And we've talked about, "Gee, do we bring it in?" And I don't think we're going to. I think the hosted system works best for us.
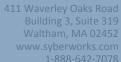
Mary Kay: That sounds great. Listen, I know you're a busy guy so I'm going to let you go.

Robert: [laughs]

Mary Kay: Thank for joining us today.

Robert: You bet yeah. Thanks so much for having us.

Mary Kay: OK, great. This is Mary Kay Lofurno, Marketing Director of SyberWorks. I wish to thank you for listening to our interview with Dr. Robert Whitcomb, Director of Human Resources and Organizational Development for the Chilkoot Indian Association on the SyberWorks LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Series. Talk with you next month.

Have a great day!

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