



Brandon Hall Group™

**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Graham Glass**,
CEO and Founder
CYPHER Learning

and **John Kannapell**,
President
CYPHER Learning

Exploring the Impact of AI on Learning and Development:
A Conversation with CYPHER Learning

About CYPHER Learning

CYPHER Learning is leading the necessary disruption of learning platforms to unleash human potential with modern learning. The company exists to ignite lifelong passions through personalized, engaging, and limitless learning experiences for all. CYPHER gives Learning and Development (L&D) professionals and educators more time to teach and train, builds human connection into everything they do — and delivers tailored learning experiences that are meaningful and measurable. The CYPHER platform is easy to use, beautifully designed and infused with AI-powered technology. Every aspect beams thoughtful innovation and engineering that puts people first. Millions of users experience their “just in time, just for me, just the way I want it” approach in 50+ languages with the CYPHER award-winning platform. See the modern learning platform at cypherlearning.com.

Recognition

CYPHER Learning is a Brandon Hall Group™ Gold Smartchoice® Preferred Provider.

The Brandon Hall Group™ Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

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About Graham Glass



Graham Glass, the CEO and founder of CYPHER Learning, is an EdTech visionary pioneering the use of AI-powered modern learning platforms for personalized, elevated training and learning experiences. Graham leads the discussion in the public square about balancing transformative AI powers with human priorities and control. He shares his expertise via major media outlets and in thought leadership forums worldwide. Graham founded multiple ed tech firms and wrote multiple books — all with the mission of advancing modern learning.



About John Kannapell

CYPHER Learning President **John Kannapell** is a seasoned executive with 25 years of experience in vertical SaaS solutions, specializing in scaling businesses from \$10 million to \$700 million. As General Manager at EverCommerce, he managed a global portfolio serving over 100,000 SMBs, led 17 acquisitions adding \$100 million in revenue, and oversaw a successful IPO. At Blackboard, he launched new solutions, growing revenue from \$0 to \$25 million and securing partnerships with top educational institutions. As EVP at 2U, he increased enrollment and revenue for online master's programs, including the top-ranked MBA@UNC. He has also developed and scaled SaaS solutions for companies like Harvard Business School Publishing, AOL, Google, Liberty Global, ExxonMobil and HBO. He holds a BBA from Washington & Lee University and an MBA from Babson College, graduating Magna Cum Laude.

About Michael Rochelle



Michael Rochelle is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Michael leads a wide range of advisory support and strategic engagements for Fortune 1000 and small- to medium-sized organizations as well as leading and emerging solution providers across the HCM industry. Michael has more than 30 years' experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development, and strategic and financial planning in Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.

Q MICHAEL

John, GenAI is relatively new but super exciting. What drew you to the space and to join CYPHER Learning?

A JOHN

Prior to some recent experiences, I spent eight and a half years at AOL running our search business. Google was our first partner back in 2001 when they were first getting started on large language models. I became the general manager of our search and local businesses, and spent a lot of time with Google understanding how large language models are designed, how to respond to open-ended queries, and what refinement and machine learning can do to develop relevant responses.

GenAI has gone in a similar direction, with instruction capabilities to help the model learn and drive toward relevance in responding to user inquiries. When I came across the opportunity at CYPHER Learning, it was a huge fit for me. I love transformational technologies, growth businesses and times of chaos when the industry is trying to figure out how to advance L&D and education globally. CYPHER Learning has a tremendous global reach and customer base, and I was excited about the opportunity to impact that group in a new way with GenAI.

What's fascinating to me is how quickly the GenAI space is evolving. The advancements we're seeing in natural language processing and machine learning are enabling entirely new possibilities in how we develop and deliver educational content. The potential to personalize learning at scale, to make it more engaging and effective, is truly game-changing. That's what really drew me to this space — the chance to be part of a transformation in how people learn and grow.

Q MICHAEL

Graham, what are going to be the top initiatives you'll be pushing now that you have John on board?

A GRAHAM

As far as AI strategy, when ChatGPT first came out, it became obvious that almost all stakeholders of our learning platform could benefit from GenAI — instructors, learners, managers, administrators. Rather than pigeonhole ourselves, we called our strategy "AI 360" to reinforce that AI can help almost everyone.

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Tactically, we're focusing on instructors first because they are overworked and we can save them a lot of time and money by allowing them to build educational content using AI. That's our CYPHER Copilot, which has been out for about nine months. We're working on features for learners to help them learn faster. After that, we'll focus on managers and administrators.

On the business strategy side, it's about finding areas that really benefit immediately from the technology. Some industries are laggards and will shy away, so it's a waste of time to try to sell to them. But in other verticals, they immediately see the value and you can get a quick and larger sale. John joined to help CYPHER Learning efficiently find the areas of most value and drive revenue.

A

JOHN

Graham's right, we're broadly distributed across industries and geographies, which is incredible considering how quickly the team has done that. Moving forward, we want to focus on buyers facing compelling challenges around learning and developing their employees and leadership as a critical part of their growth strategy.

Industries like franchising, where there is high turnover and a need to rapidly train employees in a just-in-time way and build

bench strength, are a great fit. Customers like Anytime Fitness, McDonald's, Hyundai and U-Haul really rely on talent development. We're looking for customers who see learning as an advantage, not only for brand and customer experience but also for compliance with increasing regulations.

Our platform can do rapid development and versioning of courses down to a personalized level, which is hard for companies to do on their own. One banking customer has 800 people just doing course development — we believe we can reduce their costs by 75% and save hundreds of hours, turning it into a competitive advantage versus a cost center.

The key is to demonstrate measurable business impact. It's not just about having the latest AI technology — it's about leveraging that technology to drive real outcomes. Whether it's speeding up employee onboarding, improving sales performance or ensuring regulatory compliance, we're focused on helping customers achieve their most critical goals.

Q

MICHAEL

Where do you see the big growth areas coming as people start to catch on to GenAI? Is it based on use cases, vertical, company size, maturity of learning strategy?

GRAHAM

A Companies with a franchise or partner model, where they have a large, distributed network, seem to be a sweet spot. We have features to partition the system into portals with custom URLs, color themes and courses that work well for them. Training companies that teach people for a living are another area, as they have a lot of learners and building engaging courses quickly is a core need. Overall, it's organizations where learning is a really important part of the business.

JOHN

A We believe the growth areas are around the two ends of the training spectrum. On one end is the general compliance training that everyone dreads — it's boring, irrelevant and a resource drain. We can make it more engaging, personalized and aligned to specific workforce needs.

On the other end, as leaders recognize the high cost of employee turnover, they need to invest in raising the value and skills alignment of their existing workforce. Most are realizing they've got to find ways to upskill the people they already have and we think our platform can fill that need.

Another big growth area we see is around sales enablement. In many industries, the sales cycle is becoming more complex,

products are getting more technical and customers are more informed. Sellers need a lot more knowledge and skills to be effective. We think there's a huge opportunity to use GenAI to rapidly create and deliver targeted learning content that helps sellers ramp up faster and close more deals. It's an area where the ROI is very clear.

MICHAEL

Q What would you want our audience to know about CYPHER Learning as a company — its people, culture, what you stand for?

GRAHAM

A We've always focused on being pleasant to work with and having a positive, can-do attitude. In many deals, the customer picks us because they like working with our team — they find us fun, responsive and quick to react. I've always tried to hire people I genuinely enjoy talking to.

We've also architected our platform to integrate easily with customer systems, so unusual requests aren't a big deal for us. And our support team is excellent — well-trained and engaging, despite support for sophisticated platforms being challenging.

JOHN

A In any partnership, we look for alignment around mission, vision and values, with a focus on long-term impact. We recently revisited our North Star as a leadership team, centered on giving learners the power to succeed in a rapidly changing world by enabling millions of learning moments every day. Alignment on purpose, along with values like curiosity and empowerment that create great learning cultures, is what will lead to the most impactful partnerships.

One of the things that really attracted me to CYPHER Learning was the authentic commitment to the customer. This isn't a company that's just trying to make a quick buck off the latest trend. There's a genuine passion for understanding each customer's unique needs and figuring out how to meet those needs in the most effective way possible. Whether it's our product team iterating based on customer feedback, our support team going above and beyond, or our leadership team investing time to truly understand a customer's business — that customer obsession permeates everything we do.

MICHAEL

Q People are worried that AI will replace instructional designers and subject matter experts. How are you ensuring the people you work with know you're putting the power in their hands, but it doesn't eliminate the need for them?

GRAHAM

A Virtually all our outbound communications emphasize the message of empowering people to focus on what they do best. I use AI constantly in my own life and find it saves me time and accelerates my work, whether in software development or brainstorming. Once you experience it, it's clear AI isn't going to replace humans anytime soon. But it's also apparent that those who don't partner with AI will be at a disadvantage. When I speak publicly, I share my experience with AI as a message of hope — if you embrace this, it will give you an added advantage.

JOHN

A At a recent ASU GSV EdTech conference, a key theme was the issue of academic freedom and institutions wanting to ensure they maintain control over course quality. The way CYPHER Learning's product is designed addresses this by allowing the user to determine where and how much to rely on AI input.

Notably, 45% of high school students are already using AI regularly to pursue learning outside of school, while only 7% of teachers are using it. There's a groundswell of learners that institutions are trying to serve and we see AI as a tremendous tool to help save time on the drudgery of course development and focus more on student success, outcomes and engagement.

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I think it's important to emphasize that GenAI is not about replacing human expertise — it's about augmenting it. Instructional designers and subject matter experts bring deep knowledge and experience that AI can't match. What AI can do is take on some of the more routine, time-consuming tasks and free up these experts to focus on higher-value activities.

For example, an instructional designer might use AI to generate a first draft of a course outline or a set of assessment questions based on a set of learning objectives. But the designer's expertise is still critical in refining that content, ensuring it aligns with pedagogical best practices, and creating a cohesive learning experience.

Similarly, a subject matter expert might use AI to curate relevant content and resources on a given topic. But the SME's deep understanding of the nuances and implications of that content is what makes it truly valuable for learners. It's about creating a partnership where AI and human intelligence complement each other.

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:



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About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and more than 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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