

TJ

Training Journal

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WANT
FROM
L&D



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OFFERS
SOME
ANSWERS

SHOULD WE
ABOLISH
APPRAISALS?
ASKS HENRY
STEWART

JONATHAN SATCHELL

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TECHNOLOGIES GROUP
ON LIFE, LEARNING
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Beware of fake news!

INTERVIEW

SPOTLIGHT ON

JONATHAN SATCHELL

Jonathan Satchell, head of the fast-growing Learning Technologies Group, tells *TJ* about his views on business

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL TSCHORNOW

As chief executive of Learning Technologies Group, Jonathan Satchell is keenly focused on the corporate aspects of L&D, specifically growing, developing and acquiring companies within the learning technologies and, more recently, the talent management space.

The path to making Learning Technologies Group (known as LTG) the success it is today started back in the late 1980s when Jonathan was selling computer systems. Something of a natural salesman (his first job was selling fridges at Rumbelows, aged 16), he “learned a lot and then fell into the training video business in 1992”.

From there, Jonathan acquired his first company, also a training video company, in 1997. Fast-forward two decades and LTG has achieved incredible success: the group employs around 800 people worldwide, 500 of whom are in the US. The company has annual revenues of £135m and a market capitalisation of circa £700m.

And LTG is growing. It's the parent company of several award-winning, market-leading brands: LEO Learning, Rustici Software, NetDimensions, gomo, PRELOADED, Eukleia and, as of May 2018, PeopleFluent. The latest addition to the company adds a talent management specialism that LTG believes is a key part of the learning and development journey.

Why training and how did you start?

I am, first and foremost, a businessman, not a learning expert. I've been fortunate to work alongside some exceptional learning industry gurus, such as Piers

Lea, Mike Rustici and many others whose strategic thinking and L&D expertise guides my thinking every day.

So I didn't actively pursue a career in this industry; I fell into it. In 1992, an opportunity presented itself with Accountancy Television, delivering video-based training on behalf of the BBC for accounting institutes. I had no background in e-learning or training, but quickly learned how to run a



Virtually every day I'm learning and get to bounce against my limitations. Buying, building and growing companies comes with a steep learning curve

business. I liked the recurring nature of the training requirement, particularly the fact that these professionals needed to constantly stay updated. It was both a sustainable business opportunity and a very exciting medium to work in.

Recognising that video tapes were a dying medium and that digital would, one day, take over, was the next step (although this change occurred more slowly than I expected). I successfully converted this video training company into an e-learning business called the Executive Business Channel (EBC) in 2000 – without any external funding. After selling EBC in 2006, I was asked to be the troubleshooting managing director of Epic in late 2007 →

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

Age

51.

Education

University of life! I have my O-levels and started working at 16.

Family

My wife, Samantha, and I have four children aged between 13 and 21. We've been married for 23 years.

Location

London and Northamptonshire.

Hobbies

Other than a passion for cars, in my free time I enjoy skiing, walking and spending time with family.

Favourite place

I love all things Italian – from the food, clothes and cars to the way families grow up together.

Book

Sir Alex Ferguson's book on leadership called *Leading: Learning from Life and My Years at Manchester United* was inspiring.

Music

I have a ridiculously eclectic taste thanks to my kids and Spotify. We have a family rule: everyone has to deliver one new playlist a month, myself included. So I get them into 'older' music like Genesis and Duran Duran, while they have me listening to some pretty modern stuff. I call it the democratisation of music. It keeps you young!

Movies

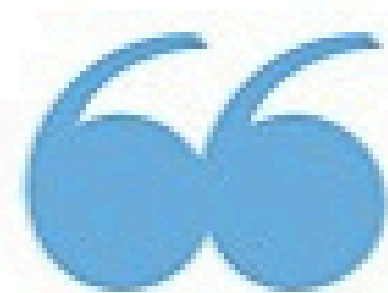
I'm a fan of late 1980s/early 1990s stuff like *Top Gun*, *Pretty Woman* and *Wall Street*. Very low brow but fun!

Technology

Predictably it's my iPhone because it does so many things for me. I literally run my life from my phone.

and acquired the company with our chairman, Andrew Brode, in June 2008.

We fixed Epic and it started growing in 2010, despite the harsh economic climate. In 2012, we began to seriously consider the opportunity to consolidate the digital learning industry and took Epic public in November 2013, which created Learning Technologies Group plc. We've since made six acquisitions by adding LINE, which then merged



I'm a good example of the potency of informal learning – I'm learning on the job from talented people all the time

with Epic to form LEO Learning (consulting and custom content), Rustici Software (e-learning standards specialists), PRELOADED (applied learning games, VR and AR), Eukleia (governance, risk and compliance training specialists), NetDimensions (an LMS specialising in high-consequence industries) and PeopleFluent (talent management experts). We also created and launched gomo, a SaaS based multi-device authoring tool, from the capabilities within the group.

Who or what inspires you?

I had been inspired by the success WPP has achieved in the marketing and communications sector and wanted to create a similar (but smaller!) business in the learning sector. I saw an opportunity to bring a strong commerciality and entrepreneurial spirit to the training industry. There are some great businesses that are run by excellent people, who are seeking support to take them to that next stage. What LTG does is recognise those businesses and help them burst through that ceiling. Seeing that happen is an exciting and rewarding experience.

What has been your lowest moment, and your finest hour?

When we buy businesses, we usually either want their management to stay on or, less often, need to fix things with

THE 360 DEGREE

"Jonathan's skill as a leader is in his great ability to listen well, grasp everything and make quick decisions. He is a true modern leader who has understood that he can't know everything and so has become a consummate and constant learner himself, an ideal quality for someone leading a fast-growing learning business that is trying to help large organisations mesh learning with work." **Piers Lea, chief strategy officer, LTG and LEO Learning**

"I've worked with Jonathan closely, particularly on the recent acquisition of PeopleFluent, and what sets him apart as a company CEO is his strategic vision, team-oriented attitude and outstanding knowledge of the learning space. The recent spectacular growth LTG has witnessed has been significantly down to Jonathan's strategy of ensuring LTG remains at the forefront of innovation and best practice in the learning technology sector. Without doubt, Jonathan is one of

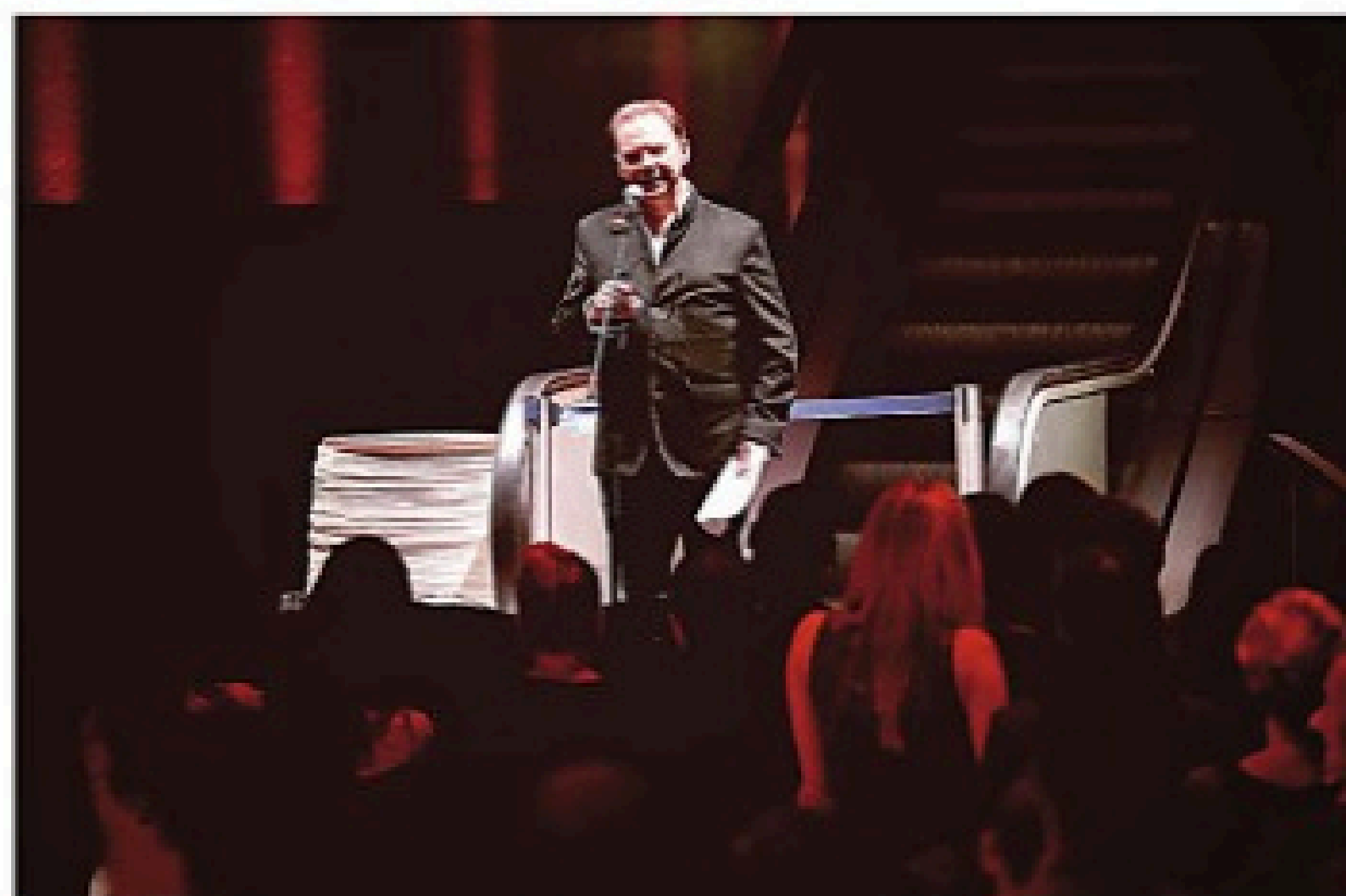
the most impressive executives I have the pleasure to work alongside."

**Khamran Ali,
Investment Banking Division,
Goldman Sachs International**

"The highest compliment I can give Jonathan is this: he's genuine. His enthusiasm is consistent and real, whether we're talking product strategy or home theatre setup. His command of the financials is obvious, but he also shows a consistently deep knowledge of the intricacies of the e-learning product ecosystem. It's always best to come to any discussion with him prepared, because he'll catch you out with his knowledge if you don't." **Tim Martin, former MD of Rustici Software and now LTG's chief innovation and product officer**

"I have enjoyed a business relationship with Jonathan since he was 19. A born salesman, always on top of any problem, he crafts creative solutions. Jonathan is an outstanding negotiator and brilliant with people." **Andrew Brode, chairman, RWS**

a new senior team. For most of LTG's acquisitions where we are excited to work with the vendor management teams, I'm delighted to say they've stayed on and become totally integrated into the leadership of LTG,



but there has been one instance where they opted to leave a few years after we acquired them. The business hadn't achieved its growth targets but even so, that was a disappointing outcome that we didn't foresee in our diligence.

As for the finest hour, quite a few moments come to mind. Epic winning Company of the Year in 2012

after a particularly hard few years of turnaround stands out, as does LEO Learning winning it in 2017. And then there's the e-learning industry charity, Learn Appeal, which I founded in 2012 with the aim of trying to bring our industry together for a good cause. It sounds lofty and it took two to three years to take off as people were initially sceptical, but we now have something which genuinely has the support of the training industry. Learn Appeal has done some groundbreaking work, especially with the Learning Capsule, an incredible box which has helped hundreds of poor communities in Kenya, Malawi and South Africa, among other places, to enjoy access to free mobile learning via wifi on third-hand mobile devices.

What and when was your career turning point?

The company going public on the stock exchange in November 2013 was a major 'turning point' moment. I initially resisted the idea for many

A man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a light pink button-down shirt, stands in the foreground. Behind him is a blurred view of a city street with a railing, and in the background, the tall, glass-clad Shard skyscraper rises into a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

PLAYING TO WIN

A few maxims for success, in both a personal and professional capacity:

- ▶ Under-promise, over-deliver.
- ▶ Never assume anything.
- ▶ Surround yourself with brighter people than you are.
- ▶ Most importantly, maintain integrity at all times.

reasons: the glare of public scrutiny, concern we'd let down shareholders, etc. But our chairman persuaded me it would be a wonderful opportunity for personal and professional progression. He was, of course, absolutely right and it was the best thing we ever did.

Describe your best learning and development experience

Virtually every day I'm learning and get to bounce against my limitations. Buying, building and growing companies comes with a steep learning curve.

We're now at a level where we are working on high-value, complex acquisitions financed by

global fund managers, restructuring ailing businesses and working through due diligence to assess the underlying qualities of the business.

I am constantly being impressed by (and am immensely grateful to) the talented and bright people working alongside me. I'm a good example of the potency of informal learning – I'm learning on the job from talented people all the time.

What's next in your career?

As a listed company, there are a lot of plans we can't talk about right now but our ambition is to make Learning Technologies Group a true global leader in the delivery of digital learning and

development solutions for corporations and governments worldwide. There are lots of exciting plans for the group companies – we have incredible brands within LTG and the next step in our evolution, something we've already started, is integrating our best-of-breed solutions. So we've already integrated gomo's authoring capabilities with NetDimensions' LMS, for example, and we're now focused on integrating PeopleFluent's talent management solutions with NetDimensions' LMS.

Another strong focus is on measuring the business impact of learning. We're excited by genuinely being able to measure the effects learning has on the performance of a business. **TJ**