

ATD 2023

Awareness report

Top ATD takeaways and one big blind spot

ATD 23 marked a true return to the vibrancy and engagement we remember from this conference from the pre-2020 years. While the San Diego weather may have been grey, the connections and conversations flowing inside the convention center were vibrant.

From AI to a big industry blind spot, here's the tea from ATD 23...

1

AI and the Intelligence Age

AI is everywhere, so it's only natural that people were talking about it on-stage and off.

CoRise's presentation, *What Will Generative AI Do for You This Year?* reinforced that underlying message of futureproofing our businesses, but also how to think about these new technologies (leaning into them rather than burying our heads in the sand).

CoRise's CTO Sourabh Bajaj and CEO Julia Stiglitz joined industry experts to talk about what it means to be entering the **Intelligence Age**. They covered how generative AI can be leveraged to personalize learning and how this will affect jobs within organizations (the former very positive, the latter relatively optimistic).

Are people truly embracing AI? Yes!

- One million users signed up for ChatGPT in the first five days of its release (consider it took Netflix months to reach that number)
- Currently, 5000 academic papers on the topic of AI are published every month

With its ability to process 45 terabytes of information with a moment's notice (yes, there were a lot of numbers included in this session) AI is something we must learn to embrace and leverage.

It's one thing to listen to these presentations that are meant to challenge and inspire, but equally interesting are the real-world conversations happening on the conference floor around AI.

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HR is one of the industries where AI is poised to have the biggest impact

What the vendors had to say

HR is one of the industries where AI is poised to have the biggest impact, and vendors talked about how this is exciting but also scary.

AI can bring scalability and consistency to people-centered processes in organizations, but there is still quite a bit of seen and unseen biases in much of what AI offers.

Most vendors were talking about AI in one way or another, but it is not consistent or clear yet what that really means in each case, or to what extent AI is truly integrated with or integral to their offerings.

According to the majority of ATD vendors we chatted with, AI is still more of a buzzword at the moment.

Our take? Consumers need to educate themselves about AI to ask intelligent questions and be on the same page about what all these buzzwords really mean when we listen to these conversations.

This means awareness of future opportunities as well as awareness about our own ways of thinking, so that we can match the velocity of our thinking to the velocity of these changes we're seeing in the workplace.

2

Change how you think, futureproof your business (and, perhaps more importantly, your career)

Author Adam Grant's keynote, *Think Again: the power of knowing what you don't know*, was, next to the general topic of AI, the most talked about thing at ATD.

If you're having trouble placing the name, Adam Grant is everywhere these days. He's written eight books, has a successful podcast (Re: Thinking), a newsletter, and he's the current king of TedTalks.

We love him because he's a kindred spirit regarding the topic of awareness. Awareness of self, awareness of others, and awareness of context and future opportunities.

Adam challenged us to rethink how we approach challenges and to be wary of entrenched thinking. He mentioned companies like Barnes & Noble and Sears that had been great thinkers to start but were unable to rethink when their circumstances and environments evolved.

He pointed at the *"Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions"* attitude, so common in business, as problematic.

Awareness is key to expedited, accelerated and evolved thinking

If we are not open to hearing about problems in real time, or we force our employees to wait until they have a solution before bringing them to us, we risk learning about what's really happening in the company much too late.

If you're one to those *"don't bring me problems,"* managers, move on or risk being left behind.

The antidote to this kind of attitude is to build psychological safety within organizations, so that people at every level feel safe to talk about problems, criticize and correct. Encouraging this kind of dialogue – and protecting it – is critical to future success, insomuch as the ability to 'rethink' is critical to future success.

Adam outlined different ways people approach thinking (do you recognize yourself in any of these?)

The preacher who thinks, 'I'm always right'

The prosecutor who thinks, 'You're always wrong'

The politician who thinks, 'we're always right, you're always wrong'

The cult leader who thinks, 'I'm always right'

But the best way, according to Adam, to approach thinking is like a scientist: "I may be wrong, let's test it"

From Insights perspective, evolved thinking (re-thinking) requires awareness. If we are not already aware of what we do think, we cannot question it. Bringing awareness to our assumptions and imbedded thinking allows us to question and evolve them when needed (it's never an 'if', only a 'when'). Change happens fast, so quick thinking is also important. Again, awareness is key to expedited, accelerated and evolved thinking.

3

An industry-wide blind spot we need to talk about

Despite its obvious role in the two themes that dominated the conference this year, the concept of awareness still sits just below the surface.

It was there in just about every session, every topic, every vendor booth; yet it was rarely called out.

How ironic that, as an industry, we lack awareness about awareness!

It is something most people agree is important when asked, yet they either gloss over it or make assumptions about it ("I'm self-aware, of course I'm self-aware.")

It's time to get serious about awareness and understand its potential to be a catalyst for success and effectiveness.

In the future world of work, AI will be ubiquitous

In the future world of work, where AI will be ubiquitous, it is awareness that will ensure we use AI (and other technologies) appropriately while also ensuring we have the necessary non-digital skills for success.

When we think about adopting a growth mindset and “rethinking” our assumptions as per Adam Grant, awareness is the obvious pivot, yet there’s much work to do in this area.

When we spoke with vendors about awareness and how it related to what they offered, some of them understood right away what we meant, while others were initially taken aback.

Every single person we spoke with, however, eventually made the connection about the impact awareness has on their offering.

It seems that, without even knowing it, most industry experts are quietly singing from the same song-book when it comes to the transformative power of awareness, and how necessary it is to embrace in today’s day and age. We simply need to sing it aloud.

To that end, we’ve been searching everywhere for a copy of the music created (in real time) by ATD 2023’s house band, Song Division, to see exactly what they included in their final lyrics. So far, no luck, but someone’s bound to post it soon!

At Insights, we help build **high-performing teams** through **the power of awareness.**

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