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GADGETS, GAMES, AND GIZMOS FOR LEARNING

Tools and Techniques for Transferring Know-How from Boomers to Gamers

Karl M. Kapp Foreword by John Beck



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

About This Book

Why is this topic important?

It is almost impossible to underestimate the knowledge gap that will be caused by the retirement of the baby boomer generation. Scientists, CEOs, senior faculty members, nuclear technicians, doctors, lawyers, sales managers, seasoned trainers, and other highly skilled individuals are not walking out the door; they are running out. Simultaneously, a new generation of employees, dubbed gamers, are entering the workforce with a different focus, mentality, and learning style from any previous generation—a mentality forged by playing video games, communicating with handheld gadgets, and Internet surfing.

The knowledge of the departing boomers must be successfully transferred to the incoming gamers. The consequences of inaction or failure are high. But what methods work, and how? Why is knowledge transfer needed? What technology is already in place for this transfer? What organizational commitment is required? Are there examples to follow? *Gadgets, Games, and Gizmos for Learning* answers those questions and more. It serves as a resource providing learning and development professionals, executives, academics, and organizational leaders with the information they need to address this growing issue in a practical and sustainable way.

What can you achieve with this book?

This book provides you with practical and innovative solutions to the impending boomer-togamer knowledge transfer problem. It describes how gamer values—such as the use of cheat codes, the love of gadgets, the need to play games, and the desire to be constantly connected can be leveraged as methods for moving knowledge from the heads of the boomers to the minds of the gamers or, in some cases, to their gadgets and gizmos. As a result, you will not just be helping your organization survive this transitional time period; you will help it profit and thrive.

How is this book organized?

The first chapter of the book introduces several concepts critical to the remainder of the work: the impending boomer retirement wave, boomer traits, and their current control over the workplace. It also defines gamers and describes their traits and the influence that technology and video games have had on them. Finally, it describes the need for innovative methods of transferring knowledge from boomers to gamers.

Each subsequent chapter in the book describes a trait, value, belief, or habit of gamers and how it can be used effectively to transfer knowledge from the boomers to the gamers. The final three chapters discuss how to integrate the knowledge transfer process into an organization, how to sell the concept of gadgets and games to business skeptics, and personal action items a reader, boomer, or gamer can take to understand the other side.

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Published by Pfeiffer An Imprint of Wiley 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103–1741 www.pfeiffer.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kapp, Karl M., 1967-Gadgets, games, and gizmos for learning: tools and techniques for transferring know-how from boomers to gamers/Karl M. Kapp; foreword by John Beck. p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index. ISBN-13: 978-0-7879-8654-4 (cloth)
ISBN-10: 0-7879-8654-2 (cloth)
I. Employees—Training of—Technological innovations. 2. Video gamers as businesspeople. 3. Knowledge management. I. Title. HF5549.5.T7K274 2007
658.3'124—dc22

2006101889

Acquiring Editor: Lisa Shannon	Editor: Beverly Miller
Director of Development: Kathleen Dolan Davies	Manufacturing Supervisor: Becky Carreño
Developmental Editor: Susan Rachmeler	Editorial Assistants: Caitlin Clarke and Marisa Kelley
Production Editor: Rachel Anderson	Illustrations: Kristin Longenecker and Lotus Art

Printed in the United States of America

Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Foreword

WHEN MITCHELL WADE and I sat down to conduct research for *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation Is Reshaping Business Forever*, we never imagined the results we would uncover. We, like many other boomers, had overlooked the force that video games had become. We still viewed them as a niche item that teenagers played to pass the time. Although we expected the research to reveal some differences between gamers and nongamers, what we found was amazing. Quite frankly, we were blown away.

In a survey of twenty-five hundred professionals, we found that those who reported playing more video games when they were young reacted to business situations differently from those who did not—in fact, very differently. Weaned on video games, we call this phenomenon the *gamer generation*.

The gamer generation has grown up in the video game world of immersion, unlimited do-overs, and instant feedback. The result is that they have verifiably different mind-sets, attitudes, and behaviors regarding business, education, and culture from those who did not grow up playing video games. As a boomer myself, I didn't grow up playing that many video games. I remember desperately wanting *Pong* as a Christmas present when I was a boy. My parents told me that it was too expensive. (I have lived with those emotional scars ever since!) So my coauthor (who has similar emotional scars) and I definitely cannot claim we were part of the gamer generation. Then when the results from our survey came in and were surprisingly positive, they changed my attitude of how I would deal with my kids and their electronic game habits. It also changed how I saw the role of gamers in the workplace.

For one thing, our research revealed that gamers learn differently from boomers. During the boomer generation's matriculation, kindergarten teachers expected children to show up knowing their colors, numbers, and some basic words. Now, gamers not only know the basics but also show up at kindergarten as budding strategists, having already learned problem-solving strategies from electronic children's games like Scholastic's *I'm Ready for Kindergarten: Hugley's Sleepover*, THQ's *Scooby-Doo: Knight of 100 Frights*, and Sound Source Interactive's *The Land Before Time: Math Adventure*, not to mention hundreds of similar games. The expectation of instructors who expect the old industrial age style of teaching to endure in this new environment is as quaint as expecting society to go back to black and white television. It's just not going to happen.

Playing electronic games has created a learning style for the gamers that:

- Aggressively ignores formal instruction.
- Leans heavily toward trial and error (the Reset button is only a click away).
- Encourages exploration and interactive adventures.
- Includes learning from peers but little learning from boomers.
- Is consumed in very small bits, exactly when the learner wants and usually right before it is needed.

Gamers have learned to manipulate electronic information in games, on the Internet, and through electronic gadgets. These gamers are definitely gadget oriented. They think about them, they care about them, and they learn from a very young age to know when a new controller is out or when the next version of a game platform is released. Gadgets and video games are part of their ethos in ways that boomers can maybe appreciate but never fully comprehend. This new relationship with technology will remain with our society forever.

Businesses need to act quickly and decisively to help these gamers, with their new and aggressive self-learning style, to assimilate into the boomercontrolled workplace. Boomers need tools and methods to effectively transfer their knowledge to this new generation—a generation they barely understand.

In lectures and speeches that we have delivered since the publication of *Got Game*, we have made it clear to organizations—business, nonprofit, and governmental—that work and learning systems need to be adapted to this gamer generation. We are regularly surprised by how many boomer executives recognize that there is a disconnect between them and their younger employees, but how few have realized that one of the sources of that generation gap is really the hours upon hours upon hours of video game play that these youngsters logged before entering the workforce. Those who don't recognize games as the source of a gap say that it is the Internet that differentiates them.

And while gamers are facile with the Internet, boomers have almost universally adopted the Internet (at least for e-mail and search functions). But boomers don't know the first thing about games: they don't know the titles, they don't know the metaphors, and in most cases they can't even manipulate a controller. And very important, they didn't grow up with games.

We argue in our book that the way gamer generation minds work is different from those who haven't grown up playing video games. Basic neural pathways in the brain form in our brains until the early teenage years. (The hardening of these neural pathways is exactly why we can naturally learn a new language before that age and have to connect it to a language we already know after we hit about age fifteen.) We believe that those who grow up on games have different models about how the world works, how to succeed, how to learn, how to teach, and how to work together.

What we try to impress on all of the executives with whom we work is that it is simply not enough to become aware that this generation exists. It is important that organizations begin to change the way they interact with employees. As Kapp explains in this book, tapping into the technologies and mind-sets that are second-hand to the gamer generation is ultimately the only way to transfer the knowledge of the boomers to the minds of the gamers.

Any professional concerned about the future workforce will be interested in the ideas and concepts contained in this book—concepts that explain how the boomer generation can transfer its vast knowledge to the gamer generation.

If you are an executive, *Gadgets, Games, and Gizmos for Learning* will open your eyes to the need to establish an infrastructure for transferring knowledge from your existing workforce to these gamers. If you are a manager, this book provides practical examples of how to oversee this emerging workforce. If you are a frontline supervisor, you will learn how you can take simple but effective steps to move some of the knowledge from your older workers to these up-and-comers. If you are working side-by-side with gamers, you'll understand a little bit more about what makes them tick and how you can work together to accomplish goals. If you are a gamer just entering the workforce, you'll learn strategies for understanding how boomers think and relate to you.

As video games become an even bigger influence on our culture and our economy, we all will need to pay attention to the ins and outs of what gamers are thinking both today and tomorrow. There is no doubt that it is a combination of gadgets, games, and gizmos that will lead the way to bridging this new generation gap.

February 2007

John Beck

Preface

" UN."

"Awesome."

"It was so great, I couldn't put it down."

"We have to share this with our friends."

These were the comments I kept hearing from my basement as my two boys played their new video game. New games always translate into neighborhood kids congregating in our basement and investing hours and hours of time trying to reach, and ultimately defeat, the final level. Collaboration, shared vision, working together to achieve a common goal, fun, excitement, and high levels of energy all accompany a new video game's entry into our house.

Meanwhile, back in the office, clients and fellow faculty members kept complaining about boring e-learning, irrelevant training programs, archaic teaching styles, and the increasing pressure to transfer knowledge to new employees or students quickly and effectively. "What is wrong with these kids? Why can't they learn? These kids don't read, and they're always watching TV, listening to music, and working on the computer—all at the same time."

Many of my clients also expressed concern about the impending massive retirement of baby boomers: "We need to capture the knowledge of these boomers before it is too late. What do we do? How do we capture the knowledge and then train the newbies quickly and completely? Why aren't our current methods working?" Trying to find answers to these questions kept me awake at night.

One of those sleepless nights, I found myself watching a televised poker tournament at 2:00 A.M. Through half-open eyes, I noticed twenty-one year olds playing against fifty-five year olds, the grand masters of poker, and winning. How could that be? Why were these young guys, kids really, winning? How could they hold their own against such experienced and knowledgeable players?

Then the announcer, as if reading my mind, provided the answer: "One of the reasons relatively unknown poker players can defeat thirty-year poker veterans is because of online poker." What? Did I hear him correctly: online poker? What do you mean? How is that like "real" poker? Before he could fully explain, he was interrupted by a commercial.

I was fully awake when he returned. The announcer explained that online poker allows a gambler to play as many as eight hands at once against unseen but real opponents. The experience of playing so many hands over and over again while receiving almost instant feedback on good or bad bluffs allows twenty-one year olds to gain as much experience in two years as someone who has been playing poker all his life.

Wow! It hit me. Maybe this generation of kids, my kids, my gamer kids, has a different expectation for learning, an expectation built on a framework of video games providing instant feedback and constant interaction. A framework augmented by constant access to gadgets and a comfort level with technology that boomers and Generation Xers can only imagine.

My boys are obviously able to learn enough to progress through video games at a fairly rapid pace. They have fought with *Donkey Kong*, built roller coasters, commanded armies, outwitted bad guys as *James Bond*, and helped *Link* rescue the princess. Kids are learning skills from these games and applying those skills over and over again in other games to achieve success.

In addition, they are techno-savvy. My boys know more about the functions of my personal digital assistant than I do. They multitask effortlessly and talk about strategy, economic trade-offs, and online bartering as if they were seasoned M.B.A.s. They pace back and forth with a cell phone like a stockbroker and exchange knowledge and information with each other in huge online communities. Maybe the problem isn't with the kids at all. Maybe it's with us. Maybe it is with our clumsy attempts at knowledge transfer.

That sleepless night resulted in many more, but for entirely different reasons. I realized that baby boomers are trying to use an old paradigm to transfer knowledge to a new generation, and our traditional methods, hundreds of years old, have begun to crumble. I was fascinated (my wife would say obsessed) with the search for new and innovative methods for knowledge transfer, and I found them. They exist in creative efforts in large and small companies, academic institutions playing with the latest in Web technology, and the gadgets, games, and gizmos of this upcoming generation—the gamers.

The result of my late-night insight and subsequent research is this book. It contains techniques and recommendations, gleaned from colleagues, professional acquaintances, and people in all kinds of fields, transferring all types of knowledge. *Gadgets, Games, and Gizmos for Learning* attempts nothing less than a recasting of existing knowledge transfer and computer systems into tools that can be used to transfer knowledge from the experienced boomers to the incoming gamers. It seeks to create an understanding between two groups who have a critical need to communicate with each other for the survival and success of many organizations.

I hope that future corporate and academic knowledge transfer efforts will elicit the same terms I hear from my basement when a new game is brought home: "Fun." "Awesome." "It was so great, I couldn't put it down." "We have to share this with our colleagues."

February 2007	Karl M. Kapp
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To DOROTHY S. KAPP, the best grandmother two gamers could ever have, and to Nathan and Nicholas, the greatest gamers I know

Acknowledgments

WRITING A BOOK is a process with many people to thank for helping bring it to life. First thanks go to Nathan and Nicholas, the gamers who inspired this work and who challenge me on a daily basis to transfer knowledge to them in meaningful ways.

Thank you to my many consulting clients, business associates, former students, and colleagues who made time in their busy schedules to contribute to this book or track down permissions for me: Laura Porter from Sprint Nextel, who provided the fastest permission turnaround known to humankind; Patrick Larkin of Johnson & Johnson, an alumnus of Bloomsburg University; Audrey Kuna, another alumna and founder of her own company, Get Thinking; Greg Walsh of Black and Decker, an alumnus and one of the most creative people I know; David Manning, president of Performance Development Group (PDG), not an alumnus but still a great guy; Richard Mesch, the director of simulations and special projects at PDG; and Tomas Ramirez at Bristol-Myers Squibb. Other Bloomsburg alumni I'd like to thank are R. Lynn Hummel, an instructional technology specialist at a vocational school in Lewistown, Pennsylvania; Lucas Blair, game player extraordinaire and master of *World of Warcraft;* and Eric Poole, associate director of online M.B.A. programs at Drexel University's LeBow School of Business.

I also extend thanks to David Dunlap of Coccinella Development, who created a fantastic simulation for learning a language through the creative use of a game engine; Andrew Howe, the client service director at AXIOM; Marty Siederer, senior director of training and customer service for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society; Mark Sylvester, CEO and cofounder of introNetworks; Bjorn Billhardt, CEO of Enspire Learning; and Stephen Robinson of Enspire Learning for tracking down permissions and contributing screen captures.

More thanks go to Amanda Lannert, president and corporate evangelist of Jellyvision; Alison Stone-Briggs, the associate director of the Corporate Institute at Bloomsburg University and my cohort in many corporate-focused activities; Shelia Dove-Jones, professor of special education in the Department of Exceptionality Programs at Bloomsburg University; and Kirk Cantor, professor of plastics and polymer technology at the Pennsylvania College of Technology.

Thanks to Jack Hughes, CEO and founder of TopCoder; Jeff Liable of TopCoder; David Gardiner, licensing manager for Army Game Project; Matthew Adlai-Gail, innovation officer at EduNeering; Chris Carro for his help with understanding the public relations side of the game industry; Gordon Synder Jr., executive director and principal investigator of the National Center for Telecommunications Technologies; and Brian Palagallo at Paramount for his help with permissions.

Special thanks go to John Beck, who got me interested in the academic side of the topic of games and gamers, and Don Deieso, president and CEO of EduNeering, who continually challenges me with new ideas and perspectives on learning, knowledge, and business. Also a wink and a nod to Bonni Scepkowski and Heath Miller of Stellar Meetings and Events.

Thanks to all of my students and former students who contribute to my learning in so many ways and a special thank-you to those whose work appeared in this book: Vince Basile, Yanru Wang, Brian Smith, Justin Moranski, Bill and Ronnie Noone, Regina Bobak, Richard Peck, Frank Brophy, Adrienne Marquette, David Cerreta, Nick Pastore, Ula Konczewska, and Norm Verbeck.

Special thanks to faculty and staff at Bloomsburg University's Institute for Interactive Technologies who contributed in some way to the creation of the book: Kelly Woltornist, Helmut Doll, Celina Byers, Pam Berman, Robyn Defelice, Eric Milks, Mary Nicholson, Karen Swartz, Beth Holmes, Tammy Matthews-Hunter, Michael Phillips, Sara Kliamovich, and Lara Beth Winschuh.

Thank you to Marc Rosenberg for allowing me to take him to lunch and to quiz him on the many aspects of publishing with Pfeiffer. And a thank-you to Kevin Kruse and Clark Aldrich for their help in guiding me to Lisa Shannon. Also, special thanks to the team at Pfeiffer, including Lisa Shannon, who helped the idea to become a manuscript, Caitlin Clarke, Susan Rachmeler, and Bev Miller, who I only know through copyedits. As well as Rachel Anderson, who many times helped me navigate the editing process.

Also, a big thank-you to my three formal reviewers, Mark Oehlert, Michael Qaissaunee, and Bill Herman—two of whom, Mike and Mark, later became contributors. Mark, also thanks for the telephone conversation and insightful ideas. And thanks to Joey L. Monaco, who provided an informal review that was right on the money and kept the book grounded.

A huge thank-you to Kristen Longenecker for the wonderful artwork and cartoons that adorn so many pages of this book. They add value to and a bit of professional whimsy (if there is such a thing) to the topic.

Also, a thank-you to anyone I may have missed. So many people have helped, and any omission is purely an accident.

And finally, a grateful thank-you to my wife, Nancy, who had to put up with a husband who kept claiming that buying and playing video games and cool electronic gadgets was "research."