CloudAcademy

Broadcasting A Direction in Cloud:

How Comprehensive Skill Development
Powers Turner's Innovation Journey

Turner

Turner's Cloud Story

Turner is a global entertainment, sports and news company that owns and operates some of the most valuable brands in the world including CNN, TBS, TNT, Cartoon Network and Turner Sports. The company creates premium content and delivers exceptional experiences to fans fueled by data-driven insights and industry-leading technology. With the convergence of tech and media propelling a shift in customer engagement, content distribution, and go-to market strategies, technical innovation has become a key driver of future business value.

Turner leadership knew that success in cloud computing would be critical for the company's innovation journey. Turner's technical teams had dabbled in cloud infrastructure, but lacked the centralized structure, policies, procedures, and know-how to truly manage change with confidence. Luckily, the organization knew how to hire world-class technical and organizational leadership who would drive implementation of a comprehensive training program that would benefit the entire organization.

Stacey Young Rivers
Director of Technology
Skills Analysis and Development at Turner

Don Browning
Vice President of
Cloud Architecture at Turner

Top-Down Vision, Bottom-Up Focus

Turner leadership believed cloud computing would unlock a variety of capabilities to improve the company's ability to retain its competitive edge. They also understood that they needed to start with the teams who would be architecting this transformation.

By 2016, Turner had worked to define the critical job skills that mapped to their technical roadmap. Many staff were highly skilled in managing Turner's existing (and largely) physical infrastructure, and management sought a proactive approach to cloud hosting. They would start with Amazon Web Services (AWS), and later Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud Platform. However, before adopting those solutions, the organization needed to know where to focus hiring and staff development.

A one-size-fits-all training initiative would not deliver the purposeful and employee-focused change that would align resources to the vision.

A Role to Develop Capabilities to Roadmap

Turner built an initial cloud team from within, but those initiatives required a much broader set of capabilities. Senior management asked for a comprehensive skill assessment program to understand where the organization stood and what was needed.

Enter Stacey Young Rivers, Director of Technology Skills Analysis and Development at Turner. At the time, Rivers was a 16-year veteran at Turner, having worked on multiple technical teams and later moving into organizational management within Turner Global Technology & Operations (GTO). When Jeremy Legg stepped in as Turner CTO in 2014, Rivers went to work for him to support his vision of aligning the organization's capabilities with the technical roadmap needed to drive innovation.

Instead of a program that focused only on cloud training, Legg encouraged Rivers to include a focus on not only acquiring new technical skills, but also continuous improvement.

Rivers set out to create a comprehensive approach that would serve as many of the GTO staff members as possible. Her research and reflection led her to consider a university model consisting of nine subgroups or colleges focused on technical areas including operations, support, maintenance, and cloud. These colleges would support the greater technology roadmap.

Deep Diving into the Cloud

Turner leadership worked closely to make training contextually meaningful and relevant from the very start. Don Browning, Turner's Vice President of Cloud Architecture, partnered with Rivers to create the foundational process that would leverage internal subject matter experts to develop requirements for continuous training programs. While many organizations would have jumped right into adopting new cloud solutions, Browning believed in a healthier mix of technology and end-user buy-in.

"We took a very practical approach and wanted to do what made sense," Browning said. "Our goal was to focus on not only having cloud infrastructure running, but to also change the mindset of the organization."

Rivers would later apply the strategic template she developed with Browning across other tech colleges in GTO University to craft cogent learning and development programs.

"I depended on our subject matter experts to provide insights on what employees needed to know," Rivers said. "It was very important to understand which vendors in the space were doing well and who we needed to collaborate with."

Given the importance of cloud computing to the Turner roadmap, selecting the right platform for cloud training was a key part of the research journey. Rivers quickly discovered Cloud Academy as one of the solutions to help employees learn the cloud.

"We examined the skills gaps in our organization closely and found cloud computing near the top," continues Rivers. **"It was clear that Cloud Academy had the competitive advantage to serve the learning needs of our employees."**

Ushering in Innovation

The success of GTO University can largely be attributed to Turner leadership's development of a comprehensive program to engage employees. The program employed creative tactics to drive employee engagement like competitions and in-person events. Its aim was to convey the importance of cloud and related technologies and raise awareness of available training resources. Leadership knew that with greater visibility and awareness, more employees would take advantage of the benefits of GTO University and Cloud Academy.

"Everything we did in the first 12-18 months was about engaging employees in this new realm," Browning said. "We quickly learned that the technical challenge was only half the journey. The other half of the journey was cultural. Committing to skill up our staff was absolutely critical."

Ownership of the training methodology was also key to success, requiring a focus on not only the right curriculum, but also towards the right business outcomes.

"If you're going to train, then you have to own training," Rivers said. "Just selecting a vendor and making the material available to people is not a training strategy. We got it right by selecting Cloud Academy for an area where we needed to gain competitive advantage and the platform supported our business strategy.

We developed a complete program and support structure around the platform itself for employees to engage and showcase their learning."

"We got it right by selecting Cloud Academy for an area where we needed to gain competitive advantage and the platform supported our business strategy. "

One engagement tactic was guidance. Turner worked hard to recommend where staff could focus their training efforts so they could contribute meaningfully to the organization. "Employees see the Cloud Academy courses when they go to the college of cloud computing," said Rivers. "While they are able to choose their own courses, we also provide guidance and indicate the courses that will directly support the needs of Turner."

In the first year, Turner employees spent over 18,000 hours of training across GTO University. "Cloud Academy was a big hit," said Rivers. "We ran out of the 300 licenses we purchased within six months and eventually had to create a waiting list."

For Turner, an important aspect of embracing continuous improvement is ongoing measurement. This data-driven approach underpins the university model and enables leadership to regularly revisit its skills portfolio across the organization.

"We have achieved a significantly lower, more favorable total cost of ownership across workloads," said Browning. **"We're also moving beyond the basics of our innovation capabilities and doing things that were unavailable before when we were on-premises including leveraging containers and large-scale data processing."**

"The establishment of GTO University, the comprehensive employee engagement programs that we developed, and our approach to developing the cloud college with Cloud Academy have been key to supporting the transition," said Browning.

Moving Forward

If year one was about employee awareness and engagement, then year two centered around putting that awareness into use. Today, Turner has deployed key workloads to Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, and Google Cloud Platform. This multi-cloud approach offers internal business units like CNN, Cartoon Network, and Bleacher Report to operate semi-autonomously in accordance with their preferences and technical needs. As a result, Browning has witnessed tangible, transformative outcomes in how the company operates.

Leadership is not stopping there. Rivers and Browning are looking ahead and further extending their relationship with Cloud Academy. Turner is developing internal certification tracks aligned to job roles with defined target skill sets.

"We are fully committed to the training of our employees and we're developing scalable, best-in-class programs to ensure that our organization is ready for the future," says Rivers. "We are achieving this by establishing the right mix in our digital skills portfolio and continuously measuring learning progress across teams. This isn't a one-time effort. We are redefining training into enablement that is ongoing, specific, and actionable across the business."

CloudAcademy

Cloud Academy is the leading enterprise training platform that accelerates teams and digital transformation.

Companies trust Cloud Academy to deliver multimodal training on the leading clouds (AWS, Azure, Google Cloud Platform), on the essential methodologies needed to operate on and between clouds (DevOps, Security), and on the capabilities that are unlocked by the cloud (machine learning, IoT).

From the fundamentals to advanced scenario training, Cloud Academy empowers organizations with the knowledge, critical thinking, and hands-on experience needed to adopt, operate, and optimize the multi-cloud.

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