



## Perspectives from John Zappa, CEO, EdLink LLC

As many of you already know, on September 2<sup>nd</sup> [EdLink LLC](#) was launched jointly by [CAEL](#) and [ACT](#) to provide the tuition assistance management services previously administered by CAEL. As the nation's largest provider of tuition assistance management services, EdLink builds on the combined strength of CAEL and ACT. John Zappa, formerly CAEL's senior vice president for learner services, became EdLink's CEO.

John recently shared with us his perspectives on the opportunities and challenges facing the new company, as well as current trends and changes in the marketplace.

### **Q: What are the major trends EdLink is seeing in the world of corporate tuition programs?**

**John:** There are several, of course, but let me underscore two overarching trends that we believe are of prime importance to anyone responsible for managing human capital:

#### **1) *Linking the Tuition Program to Business Outcomes and Demonstrating Value:***

Despite the downturn in the economy, companies in general are keeping their tuition programs. This was validated by the recent research by [Bersin & Associates](#) and the [Parthenon Group](#). With that said, these benefits are getting greater scrutiny than ever before. The need to link the tuition investment to tangible business outcomes is more pronounced than it has ever been. In many organizations, this takes the form of linking the investment to an overall talent management and leadership development strategy for the company. UPS represents a leading example of this kind of work. In other companies, the challenge becomes identifying and measuring the return on investment of the tuition program to truly understand its value. Verizon Wireless is on the forefront of this type of work. As has been proven across multiple industries and in companies of various sizes, the value of an effective tuition policy that ties to the corporate growth strategies can be validated through recruitment, retention, engagement and productivity measures.

#### **2) *Managing the Overall Cost of the Program:***

For many organizations, the focus on the tuition program has become a question of managing expenses. It's understandable that in today's economic environment, there is significant pressure to manage budgets very tightly and reduce expenses. Unfortunately, this becomes a missed opportunity if the tuition program is viewed as merely an expense, without a clear understanding of the overall value back to the organization. Unlike other benefits, the tuition program has the potential to be an investment in human capital and talent management.

That said, today's reality is that all companies do need to be examining the costs associated with tuition assistance to ensure that the funds are being used efficiently and effectively. Companies can do this through a variety of strategies, including online administration and partnering in smart ways with higher education. One clear, quantifiable example of these cost-focused strategies is EdLink's Featured Provider Network (FPN), an expanding network of adult-focused higher education institutions that provide tuition savings to all EdLink clients. We manage to bring substantial savings each year to our clients on their overall tuition spend.

Companies also are expanding their view of traditional tuition assistance to include support for industry-relevant coursework, including certificate programs, certifications and individual courses. These are often programs that are shorter in duration and can have a more immediate impact on the business. It is critical that these educational pursuits be administered with the same efficiency, and tracked and measured with the same level of accuracy, as the overall tuition program spend. EdLink provides this kind of integrated administration and reporting for several of our clients.

**Q: What opportunities and challenges do these trends present for EdLink?**

**John:** I feel that EdLink is well positioned to help our clients address these trends proactively.

EdLink is customer driven. We listen closely to our clients and partners. We have another participant satisfaction survey going on right now, we are hosting a Client Forum later this month, we travel to key areas across the country on our *Innovations in Tuition Tours* to speak with HR leaders and tuition program managers, we participate in and/or initiate much of the current research in the field, and more.

We understand there is a need to demonstrate value, and we are keen to help make that happen. To quote from the consulting firm [Innovation Point](#), *"Customers can be the best source of defining the kinds of new value that are meaningful to them, and there is no better time to re-engage with them than now."* \*

EdLink is unique in its ability to provide consulting to companies to help them get more value from their education benefit. We assist them in reshaping their tuition program policy to ensure that education is aligned with current and future business needs. That includes integrating the tuition investment with talent and leadership development initiatives to build the talent pipeline for the company. While each company is unique, we leverage our understanding of exemplary and common practices to help them achieve greater business value.

Many companies also are looking to create a centralized tuition policy to cover both their domestic and international employees. We now are experienced in working with client employees in Canada, as well as expats in many countries across the world. We are working with several of our clients to develop sound policies that honor cultural and financial differences in other countries, while leveraging the efficiencies of centralized administration.

Through our new relationship with our parent company ACT, we now also have the ability to assist companies interested in exploring the opportunities presented through scholarship

programs for employees and their dependents. And through out parent company CAEL, we can work with companies interested in exploring an expanded range of employee advising and career development options.

All of these various options speak to the importance of *integrating* the full range of the company's human capital investments, and the critical importance of tracking and measuring those investments. EdLink is expanding our ability to create customized reports for client companies that track and report on the outcomes of these integrated investments – ultimately demonstrating the real value back to the company. We believe this is a critical component of professional tuition assistance management services, and rightfully is a growing trend in the industry.

**Q: How would you describe EdLink's unique position in the marketplace?**

**John:** EdLink is the largest provider of tuition assistance services in the marketplace today and is the only organization focused exclusively on delivering full-service, best-in-class tuition management services. In other words, our tuition services are not ancillary to something else like delivering training programs or growing an LMS. This focus has enabled us to drive research and develop an in depth understanding of exemplary practices in tuition administration. This expertise translates into real efficiencies, tangible savings and meaningful value for our clients.

EdLink is also the only tuition services provider focused on research and exemplary practice. Through our partnerships with research-based firms such as Bersin & Associates and the [Human Capital Lab](#), our partnerships with global Business Process Outsourcing firms (BPOs) such as [ACS](#), and through our unparalleled relationships with higher education providers, we can bring bottom-line results to our clients. As mentioned above, one example is the very real tuition savings we bring to our clients each year through our FPN. Another example is the reduced cost and integrated reporting achieved for an aerospace client provided through the partnership between EdLink and ACS.

With the additional resources now available to us through our two parent organizations, we are excited about the many prospects for our future.

*Times* \* *Penny Wise, Pound Foolish? Building Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Tough Economic*  
by Sally Crawford and Derrick Palmer, InnovationPoint LLC