



# Get badged!

Ryan Tracey

Anyone who was in the Scouts or Girl Guides will be familiar with badges. When you achieved a particular milestone or completed a specific task, you were awarded a colourful patch that you (or your mum) sewed on your jacket or sash with pride. It was a visual representation of your achievement.

The same concept applies to the world of workplace education. When you participate in a particular training program or demonstrate a specific skill, the training provider or assessor might award you with a digital badge. It's a visual representation of your capability.

At my workplace, we are starting to award digital badges to the employees who successfully participate in our leadership and innovation programs.

## What is an 'open' badge?

Mozilla is spearheading the Open Badges Infrastructure (OBI) standard, which is a common protocol for the issuing, earning and displaying of digital badges.

The standard enables you to earn badges from different issuers, and collect them in your online "backpack". You can then show them off to the world, and display them on your website or blog. And because they're yours, you can continue to "wear" them wherever you go.

## How do I get started?

Visit Mozilla's Open Badges website (<http://openbadges.org>) and go to the "Earn" section. This will step you through the process of earning your first badge and setting up your backpack.

Then I suggest setting up a free Credly account (<https://credly.com>). Credly is the platform that we use to issue badges to our employees. Pro and Premium accounts are available, but the free version can do a lot, so it's probably the best way to start. You can always upgrade later.

I like Credly because it's drop-dead easy to create a professional-looking badge using

its inbuilt tools, populate all the necessary meta-data, then issue the badge to its worthy recipients. It even allows batch uploading of the recipients' details – which is handy when there are lots of them!

Importantly, the recipients can send their Credly badges to their Mozilla backpacks (because Credly complies with the OBI standard).

## Why bother?

There is no shortage of critics who dismiss open badges as yet another fad. Many pigeonhole them as childish or superficial "bling". However, I challenge you to dig a little deeper by considering the following five dimensions of open badges.

**1) Open badges can motivate people to learn** – While badges may appear childish at first glance, there is no denying the game mechanics that underpin them. Some learners are incredibly motivated by badges. Once they have earned one, they want to earn another.

You will note that I am using weasel words such as "can" and "some". This is because badges don't motivate everyone. But my view is if they motivate a significant proportion of your target audience, then that makes them worthwhile.

Remember: as learning in the corporate sector becomes more informal, the employee's motivation to drive their own development will become increasingly pivotal to their performance.

**2) Open badges can credential in-house training** – Corporates can print off certificates of completion for employees who undertake their in-house training offerings, only for them to be pinned to a workstation or hidden in

a drawer. And corporates typically track and record completion statuses in their LMS, but that lacks visibility for pretty much everyone but the employee him- or herself.

In contrast, open badges are the epitome of visibility. They're shiny and colourful, the employee can display them in their online backpack, and they can be shown off via a plugin on a website or blog – or intranet profile.

Badges therefore give corporates the opportunity to recognise the employees who have completed their in-house training, within an enterprise-wide framework.

**3) Open badges are portable** – If you undertake training at one organisation and then leave to join another, you typically leave your completion records behind. However, if badges were earned through the training, their openness and centralisation in the cloud means that you can keep them when you move to your next employer.

I think this portability of open badges would be enhanced if third parties were able to endorse the training. An APRA-endorsed badge earned at Bank A, for example, would be meaningful to my next employer, Bank B, because this bank is also regulated by APRA.

Still, the concept holds without third-party endorsement; that is to say, much of the training provided by Bank A would probably still be meaningful to Bank B – because Bank A and Bank B do very similar things!

**4) Open badges are task oriented** – Despite my reference to "training" thus far, open badges are in fact task oriented. That means they recognise the execution of specific actions, and hence the mastery of skills.

I love this aspect of open badges because it means they don't merely promise that you can do a particular task, but rather demonstrate that you have already done it. That gives employers confidence in your capability to perform on the job.

5) **Open badges can formally recognise informal learning** – It's no secret that employees learn in all kinds of ways – from reading a newsfeed or watching a video clip, to playing with new software or chatting with colleagues over lunch. The question is how to manage all of that learning. The answer is we don't.

If a particular competency is important to the business, we assess it. Assessment represents the sum of all the learning that the employee has undertaken in relation to

that competency, regardless of where, when or how it was done.

I see open badges as micro-assessments of specific tasks. If you execute a task according to the pre-defined criteria (whatever that may be), then you earn its badge. In this way, the badge represents the sum of all the learning that you have undertaken to perform the task successfully, regardless of where, when or how that learning was done.

### Where can I find out more?

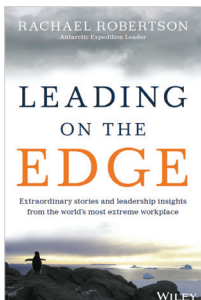
Visit Mozilla's Open Badges website (<http://openbadges.org>) and go to its "About" section. This provides you with a nice overview of the concept. Then visit Credly's website (<https://credly.com>) and go to their "About" section. This provides a complementary point of view.

If you still don't get it or remain sceptical, please read the following articles. Forgive me, two of them are mine!

- So what are Open Badges? by JISC
- The penny drops with open badges by Mark Smithers
- Badges of honour by Ryan Tracey
- The past tense of open badges by Ryan Tracey ■

Ryan Tracey is an E-Learning Manager in the Australian financial services industry. He blogs as the E Learning Provocateur and can be found on Twitter at @ryantracey.

# Open Book



**Leading on the Edge:**  
Extraordinary stories  
and leadership insights  
from the world's most  
extreme workplace

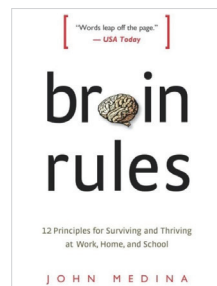
By Rachel Robertson  
Wiley 2013

This insightful book is an engaging true narrative about a crazy adventure in

Antarctica, peppered with proven practical tools to lead through tough times and adversity. The book delivers on its promise on how to be a better leader and will have broad appeal to anyone looking to expand their leadership skill set, or simply those wanting to get another perspective of life on an Antarctica station. It is a very amusing and insightful read, as the author takes us on a journey from her early career in Public Relations, to Australian expedition leader of Davis Station in 2005 at only age 36.

Rachel is uniquely qualified to provide management advice, as she has spent the better part of twenty years in various leadership and senior management roles testing and perfecting her skills. In Antarctica her leadership acumen was put through the proverbial 'acid test'. Sharing her stories from the field, in part through daily journals kept whilst in Antarctica and post expedition reflections, you will enjoy the journey and appreciate the wisdom and critical learning's captured at the end of each chapter.

*Reviewed by Josie Bruzzese.*



**Brain Rules: 12 Principles  
for Surviving and Thriving  
at Work, Home, and School**

By John Medina  
Scribe Publications 2008

In this book developmental molecular biologist, John Medina, synthesises the latest research in neuroscience into 12 principles on how the human brain works,

hence the title Brain Rules. John has managed to take a potentially dry topic and turned into an informative, engaging and practical book.

For learning and development practitioners this book helps debunk some common misconceptions about how people learn and provides evidence to support what many practitioners observe anecdotally about what makes learning effective. For example, why people learn differently, why people don't learn effectively when they are stressed and why the use of visual tools are so important for learning.

If you are looking for hard evidence to back a case you are making to management about improving learning and development practices in your organisation, this book is a great resource.

*Reviewed by Jacqui Szrypalo.*