



Boosting Learner Engagement

Keeping L&D Programs On Track



Learning and development programs look different at every organization, yet every successful, and perhaps more importantly, every sustainable learning initiative has two things in common:

1.) They align with the overall goals of the business. And, 2.) They pay attention to engaging the learner. An engaged learner (and employee) commonly signals an employee that will outperform, advance, and innovate. Organizations thrive on these people.

Learning programs are rarely maintenance-free. Even the most bullet-proof plans are subject to frequent disruption. Changes in technology, laws, working conditions, or even organizational goals all influence the effectiveness of a learning initiative. With more of the workforce operating remotely, learning leaders are again tasked with making L&D programs accessible and engaging. Here are 5 ways to stamp out learner apathy and keep learning & development goals on track.

Organizations with highly engaged employees achieve:

58% Fewer Quality Incidents

21% Higher Profitability

20% Higher Sales

17% Higher Productivity

24% Less Turnover

41% Lower Absenteeism

70% Fewer Safety Incidents

Source: [Gallup, 2019](#)



1.

Focus on the “WIIFM”

what's In It For Me

Proving the value of learning is often necessary to some employees. The “what’s in it for me” of learning and development is crucial to the success of engaging the learner. Learning leaders often experience pushback to assigning required training with staff prioritizing regular duties over training. These tasks should be communicated as having equal importance to their success within the organization.

The act of learning is not an inherent, automatic process. People must be motivated to engage, and rarely is it simply because their HR department required them to do so. Some may require a clear vision of learning benefitting them personally and professionally.

A perpetual task of learning leaders is explaining the “why” of each learning objective. Beyond the benefit to the organization, the learner should be able to find the “WIIFM” for every course taken or assessment offered. Organizational development begins with the individual; therefore, broader, organizational goals must be interwoven with personal goals.

Leadership on any level can help to communicate the importance of the process by encouraging and reinforcing the time and resources spent to reach the development goals. From there, it should be abundantly clear how the organization’s L&D goals serve to satisfy larger business objectives.



2.

All Learning Is Personal



Drilling down on motivation for a second...

People are motivated to change, learn, and grow only when it becomes personal for them.

Learning engagement is far greater when the subject is relevant to the learner's life and work and the learner can easily see the benefits of their effort.



For many, learning is often accomplished at the point-of-need, meaning a person at an impasse performs a quick web search to find ideas for a solution. This is often referred to as the “**learning in the flow of work**” model and it is highly personal. The learner is highly engaged in finding a solution and seeks the specific content to support that problem. That moment of analysis, comprehension, and adaptation is the core of learning and development.

Engaging learning programs should:

- Offer curated content to the learner based on their needs
- Suggest other relevant content
- Be easily searchable to quickly find answers
- Allow users to suggest and share helpful content

Engagement falls off swiftly when the learner must sift through a library of irrelevant content in their search. Modern technology users have high expectations for finding results quickly. Learning leaders can contribute by curating relevant content to learning objectives and reducing time spent in search.

Self-directed learning can lead to higher engagement and can often produce champions of the content that share the knowledge with their peers. Recommended content often increases the likelihood the recipient will engage.

All Learning Is Personal... continued



Beyond content, the delivery method and schedule of learning factor into the process. With multiple generations in the workforce with vastly differing opinions on the role of technology, some learners may prefer a face-to-face learning environment. Others might not enjoy being locked into a traditional classroom format with a rigid timeframe. That's why, when and where it is possible, offering the same learning content in multiple delivery methods such as eLearning and instructor-led training options can broaden the appeal of the course.

Along the line of self-rewarding behaviors, "gamification" is an increasingly common way to foster engagement. It can work to recognize and even reward learners who go above and beyond the requirements. It can be as simple as awarding points and badges or establishing a leaderboard to build esteem and offer up a sense of competition. Also, when and where possible, adding any existing or creating a reward program to L&D can help emphasize the priority of learning and reward self-starters.



3.

Balance Tech with Talk

The power and efficiency of work-science software to analyze and process data is simply amazing. Automation of human resource duties is making it possible for the software to suggest areas such as groups or even individuals that need special attention. Work-science analyst, [Josh Bersin](#), puts it like this: “In a sense we are moving from a market of feedback to one of “management development,” where the system becomes a real “management system” to help us continuously improve.” Technology is making it easier to track the signs of an engaged learner. Conversely, it can highlight learners not engaging.

Technology alone cannot replace the human part of human resources. Frequent ‘check-ins’ featuring real conversations can be necessary to get accurate and reliable feedback. While the intervals of those conversations may vary, organizations that only evaluate the learning process on an annual basis are missing the boat. Employees who have had conversations with their manager in the last six months about their goals and successes are 2.8 times more likely to be engaged, according to a [Gallup](#) poll.

Having feedback sessions on learning activities serves to reconcile anecdotal data with objective system data. This is an opportunity for leadership to recognize and reinforce positive behaviors around learning and engagement. Learner analytics offer an objective viewpoint on engagement, whether that means demonstrated proficiencies, courses completed, or simply surpassing a desired metric.

Frequent conversations about learning can help to identify experts in certain areas that may wish to volunteer in a mentoring role for their organization. An advanced LMS can support and track mentoring programs, as well as video check-ins with learning leaders to support engagement.



4.

Strategy Matters... (Metrics do, too)



The sustainability of a learning objective is dependent on alignment with larger business goals.

Similarly, L&D strategies rely heavily on metrics, outcomes, and feedback. If this balance is thrown off, the results may be harmful to the learning program. Leaders must communicate the goals and strategy of the learning objective and not simply the metrics by which they are assessed. This could unseat the importance of learning in favor of satisfying the metric.

Learning program metrics should be tied to real and measurable results to judge training effectiveness. For example: judging a learning objective by course-completions doesn't speak to the effectiveness of the content, merely that everyone labored through the course. The same can be said for assessment scores or training event attendance. Each can be swayed to misrepresent the knowledge acquired, or lack thereof. Setting meaningful metrics should be done only after the strategy is determined. It often helps to involve multiple levels of management to gain perspective and accountability in the process.

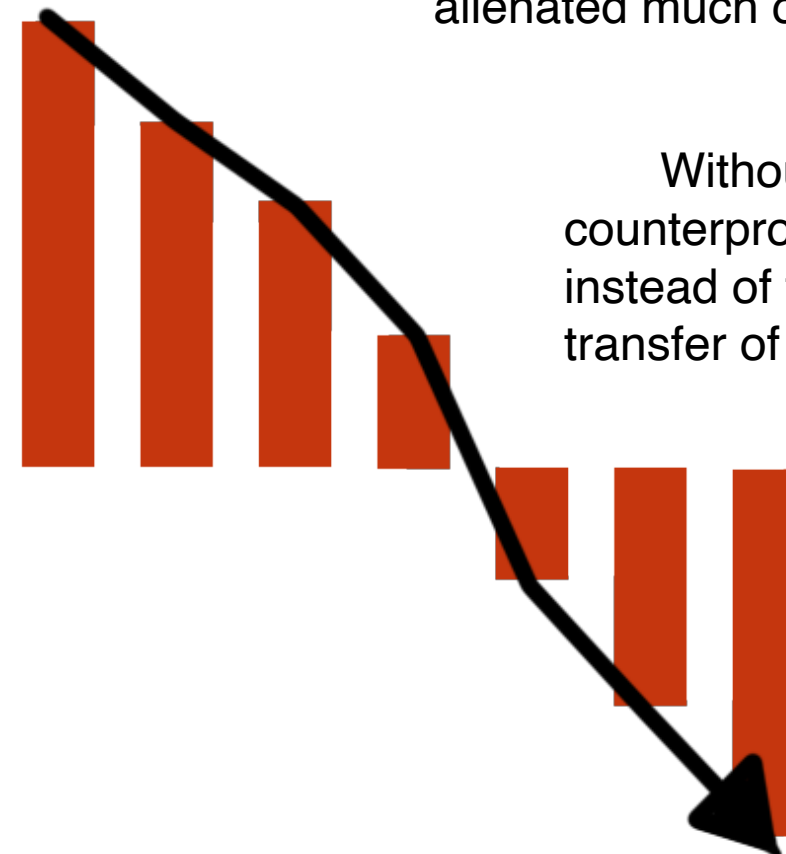


Metrics Gone Wrong ...

Communicating metrics without relating it to strategy can lead to confusion and even disastrous consequences. [The Harvard Business Review](#) spotlights a banking fiasco that ultimately cost the company millions in fines and a loss of trust in the brand. The leadership team communicated sales metrics that outshined the intention of the strategy. The unintentional implication was a mandate on expanding existing sales. Associates accomplished this by opening additional accounts without customer knowledge.



The metrics were achieved en masse; however, their strategy was completely undone by it. The goal of engaging customers with the product(s) and the brand through fraudulent means served to alienated much of their customer base.



Without tying the goal to a strategic purpose, it became counterproductive to the overall strategy. Focusing on metrics instead of the strategy can ultimately derail a learner from the transfer of knowledge.

5.

Use People to Help People

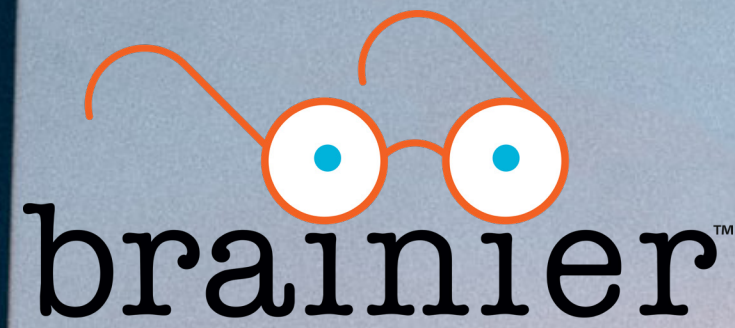
The proliferation of user-generated learning content on the internet is staggering. According to [Pew Research](#), 86% of YouTube users report using the site to learn how to do new things. The appeal of self-paced, independent eLearning continues to grow, and so does the willingness for people to create their own learning content. It has never been easier or more affordable for users to generate their own content specific to the organization, location, or even their role to enrich learning programs.

Social Learning

Learning leaders should identify members of the organization that are knowledgeable and willful contributors to create and curate relevant learning content. Soliciting feedback from members of the group, or crowdsourcing, is a way for highly engaged members to display their expertise in determining best practices for the organization. When leadership works to prioritize learning and influencers in the organization contribute to an ongoing dialog with their peers, the result is a culture of learning taking shape.

The challenge of reaching remote learners is getting easier as technology adapts to this increasingly remote workforce. The rapid expansion of communication tools such as video conferencing software makes it easier than ever to maintain mentorship programs.

Forming subgroups of learners undergoing the same learning track or interest is one way of increasing engagement. These communities could act as forums for discussion and further comprehension of learning content. They could be used to support fellow learners by sourcing and recommending other relevant content for the learning objective or even act as innovation focus groups working to solve organizational challenges.



Continual Learning and Engagement

While there are endless ways to create successful L&D programs, a recurring theme for efforts that fail is a lack of focus on learner engagement. Measuring engagement has been aided by work-science technology but it isn't fool proof. It is incumbent upon learning leaders to have meaningful conversations that serve to validate that data. Empirical evidence on learner engagement has changed expectations on measurement, but the process ultimately relies on people making sure other people keep progressing in the learning process.



About Brainier

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The Brainier LMS helps your business achieve breakthrough results through better enterprise eLearning that will educate, engage, and empower your employees.

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