

Making Learning Worth Their Time

A practical playbook for creating
learning experiences employees
will actually use

Introduction

Employees are busy. But that's only part of the story.

PROBLEM: People skip training or rush through because the learning doesn't feel relevant, supported, or worth the mental effort in that moment.

Gallup projects that organizations could see an 18% increase in profit and a 14% increase in productivity by doubling the share of employees who feel they have opportunities to learn and grow at work. [Also, employees, managers, and CHROs](#) all point to time away from job responsibilities as a key barrier to learning and development.

The question is not simply: ***"How do we get employees to complete more training?"***

The stronger question is: ***"How do we make learning worth their time?"***

✧ "I don't have time" often means **"I don't see the value yet."**

The mindset shift: From "assigning learning" to "earning attention"

Completions matter, but it doesn't mean the learning worked.

If employees finish training but don't remember it, apply it, or understand why it matters, then something is missing from the learning experience.

The strongest experiences give them a clear return.

START HERE: Before blaming low engagement on motivation, look at the experience you are asking employees to engage with.

Diagnose before you prescribe

Before changing the content, diagnose what's really getting in the way.

- ☐ Do learners understand why this learning matters?
- ☐ Is it tied to real business, role, risk, or performance need?
- ☐ Can employees find and access it easily?
- ☐ Is there a clear reason this matters at this moment?
- ☐ Does their manager make space for it?
- ☐ Is the format realistic for their workday?
- ☐ Does it feel useful enough to justify the effort?

When learners say this...

The real issue might be...

"I don't have time."

Timing, workload, or manager support.

"I'll do it later."

Low urgency or unclear value.

"This doesn't apply to me."

Relevance or role alignment.

"I didn't know this existed."

Awareness or communication.

"I can't find it."

Too many systems, clicks, or choices.

"I already know this."

Wrong level or lack of personalization.

"My team won't prioritize it."

Manager reinforcement or culture.

"I'm too busy to focus."

Cognitive load or mental bandwidth.



If the value is hard to see and the experience is hard to use, attention will be hard to earn.

Make learning relevant before making it required

Some training is non-negotiable like safety, compliance, cybersecurity, and more.

But a requirement may drive completion. Relevance helps earn attention.

START HERE: Before launching a learning initiative, make sure learners can answer three simple questions:

- 1. **Why this?** What problem, risk, skill, or business need does this learning address?
- 2. **Why me?** How does it connect to my role, responsibilities, or the situations I encounter at work?
- 3. **Why now?** Why does this matter today, rather than someday?

If those answers aren't clear, employees are more likely to treat the learning as another task to complete rather than something worth paying attention to.

The relevance test

Before launch, confirm:

- ☐ The audience is clearly defined.
- ☐ The learning is tied to a real employee or business need.
- ☐ The message explains why it matters.
- ☐ The content matches the learner's role, responsibilities, or level.
- ☐ The timing makes sense.
- ☐ Learners know what to do after they complete it.



Required gets learning on the list. Relevance gives employees a reason to pay attention.

Instead of saying...

Try saying...

"Complete this training by Friday."

"This will help you handle [specific situation] with more confidence."

"This is required."

"This matters because it connects directly to [role, risk, skill, or goal]."

"We assigned a new course."

"Here's what this will help you do differently."

"Everyone needs to take this."

"We selected this because it supports the work your team is doing right now."

"This is part of our learning program."

"This is designed to make your day-to-day work easier, safer, or more effective."

See the difference: Course description rewrite example

Before

"This course covers communication best practices for managers."

"This cybersecurity course is required for all employees."

After

"Use this course to prepare for clearer one-on-one conversations, stronger team feedback, and better follow-through with direct reports."

"This course shows how everyday decisions can protect company data, customer trust, and the systems your team depends on."

Bring learning closer to the work

Learning feels harder to complete when it feels separate from the workday.

Learning should be easier to find, easier to start, and easier to connect to the work people are already doing.

START HERE: Learning engagement improves when L&D reduces the gap between when someone needs support and when learning is available.

Learning in the flow of work can look like:

- A short course before a new process rollout
- A searchable resource employees can find when they need it
- A manager-led discussion after training
- A job aid that supports a new skill
- A learning path tied to a role or career step
- A refresher after an incident, policy update, or team change

Match the format to the moment

Then reduce the lift. Every unnecessary step adds friction.

Need	Better format
Build foundational knowledge	Course or learning path
Support a task in the moment	Checklist or job aid
Reinforce a behavior	Manager prompt or team discussion
Explain a quick process	Short video or guide
Support practice	Scenario, simulation, or role play
Refresh prior learning	Short follow-up or searchable resource
Support a busy frontline team	Mobile-friendly, modular learning
Support managers	Discussion guide or team prompt

Friction points and better approaches

Friction point	Better approach
Long course lists	Curated recommendations
Generic assignments	Role-based pathways
Too many clicks	Direct links and clear next steps
Long training blocks	Shorter modules or staged learning
One format	Multiple modalities
Desktop-only access	Mobile-friendly options
No follow-up	Manager discussion prompts or job aids
No clear purpose	A simple “why this matters” message

Ask yourself this one simple question: What are we making the employee do that we could make easier?



Learning should feel less like leaving the workflow and more like getting support inside it.

Give managers a role

Managers shape whether learning feels important.

Even the best learning initiative can struggle if managers don't reinforce it, protect time for it, or connect it to team priorities.

But managers are stretched too.

Gartner identified leader and manager development as the No. 1 HR priority for 2025 for the third consecutive year, in part because managers are overwhelmed by expanding responsibilities.

That matters because managers are often the people who either protect time for learning or let it get pushed aside.

Managers don't need to become trainers.

They need simple ways to make learning feel relevant and supported.

BEFORE LEARNING

Explain why it matters and how it connects to team goals

DURING LEARNING

Protect time and remove barriers

AFTER LEARNING

Ask what changed, what was useful, and how the team will apply it

Simple manager prompts

Before learning:

- "This matters because it connects to [team goal, customer need, safety priority, skill, or process]."
- "Here's what I want you to look for as you go through it."
- "We'll talk about how this applies to our work afterward."

After learning:

- "What was most useful?"
- "What should we apply right away?"
- "Where do we still need support?"
- "What would make this easier to use on the job?"

Manager conversation starter email

Subject: Helping your team make learning worth their time

Hi **[Manager Name]**,

Your team has been assigned **[learning topic]** because it supports the work they're doing every day and the goals you're working toward together.

Employees are more likely to engage with learning when they understand why it matters, can see how it connects to their role, and know they'll have an opportunity to use it.

You don't need to become the trainer. You simply need to connect the learning to the work.

Here are three ways to do that:

- Explain why this learning matters to your team right now.
- Make space for employees to engage without feeling like they're falling behind.
- Follow up with a conversation about how they'll apply what they learned.

Try asking:

"What's one idea from this learning that could make your work easier, safer, or more effective?"

That one conversation can reinforce the value of learning far more than another reminder email ever could.

Thank you for making learning part of how your team grows, adapts, and succeeds.

Manager checklist

- ☐ I personally understand why this learning matters.
- ☐ I can explain how it connects to team goals.
- ☐ I know when employees are expected to complete it.
- ☐ I've made space for the team to engage.
- ☐ I have one follow-up question ready.
- ☐ I know what behavior or outcome we're trying to support.



Learning feels more important when managers make it part of the work.

Worksheet: Build a learning experience people will actually use

Use this worksheet to plan a learning experience around the employee, not just the assignment.

1. Define the audience

Who is this learning for?

Audience: _____

Role or team: _____

What does this group need to do differently, better, faster, or more confidently? _____

2. Identify the real barrier

What may get in the way of engagement?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| ☐ Not enough time | ☐ Too many steps | ☐ Competing priorities |
| ☐ Unclear relevance | ☐ Wrong format | ☐ Mental overload |
| ☐ Poor timing | ☐ Lack of manager support | ☐ Other: _____ |
| ☐ Limited access | ☐ Low awareness | |

3. Clarify the value

Why should this learning matter to the employee?

This learning will help employees: _____

This matters now because: _____

After completing it, employees should be able to: _____

4. Choose the right format

What format best fits the need? _____

Why is this the right format? _____

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Course | ☐ Job aid | ☐ Searchable resource |
| ☐ Learning path | ☐ Manager-led discussion | ☐ Other: _____ |
| ☐ Video | ☐ Refresher | |
| ☐ Checklist | ☐ Practice activity | |

Worksheet: Build a learning experience people will actually use

5. Bring it closer to work

Where should this learning show up? _____

How will employees access it? _____

- ☐ During onboarding
- ☐ Before a new process or tool launch
- ☐ During a team meeting
- ☐ After an incident or change
- ☐ At the point of need
- ☐ As part of a role-based learning path
- ☐ Other: _____

6. Define the manager role

What should managers do? _____

Before: _____

During: _____

After: _____

7. Define success

What will tell us this worked? _____

How will we know employees found it useful? _____

- ☐ Completion
- ☐ Application on the job
- ☐ Manager feedback
- ☐ Reduced errors or rework
- ☐ Faster onboarding
- ☐ Improved confidence
- ☐ Better compliance or safety outcomes
- ☐ Improved productivity
- ☐ Other: _____

Quick confidence check

Before launching a learning initiative, confirm:

- ☐ Employees know why the learning matters.
- ☐ The learning is relevant to their role or work.
- ☐ The format fits the moment.
- ☐ Access is simple.
- ☐ Managers know how to reinforce it.
- ☐ The message is clear and human.
- ☐ There is a practical next step after completion.
- ☐ Success is defined beyond completion.

If any box is unchecked, revisit the relevant section above.

Your 30-second learning engagement plan

Use this template to bring everything together:

“We’re trying to support [audience or team], but engagement may be limited because [barrier]. To make this learning worth their time, we’ll connect it to [specific role, task, goal, or pain point], deliver it through [format or workflow], and ask managers to [manager action]. We’ll know it worked when [success measure].”

Draft your plan below:

Is your learning worth their time?

A learning engagement scorecard

This is more than a companion download; it's a **diagnostic tool**.

And, unlike most scorecards, it doesn't measure the learner. It measures **the learning experience**.

Score each statement:

3 = Yes, consistently

2 = Sometimes

1 = Rarely

Scoring

Relevance

- ☐ Employees understand **why** this learning matters before they begin.
- ☐ The learning connects directly to employees' roles or day-to-day work.
- ☐ Employees can clearly explain what they'll be able to do differently after completing it.

Score: ____ / 9

Accessibility

- ☐ Employees can find the learning without unnecessary searching or clicks.
- ☐ The learning works across devices, locations, and schedules.
- ☐ Employees can return to the learning when they need it again.

Score: ____ / 9

Experience

- ☐ The learning is delivered in the format that best fits the need.
- ☐ Employees aren't overwhelmed by the amount of content assigned at one time.
- ☐ Learning feels manageable within the flow of work.

Score: ____ / 9

Manager Support

- ☐ Managers explain why the learning matters.
- ☐ Managers protect time for learning.
- ☐ Managers reinforce learning after completion.

Score: ____ / 9

Practical Application

- ☐ Employees have an opportunity to apply what they learned.
- ☐ Learning includes examples relevant to real work.
- ☐ Success is measured by behavior or performance, not just completion.

Score: ____ / 9

Scoring

39–45

You're creating learning experiences employees are likely to value.

Your focus:

- Continue refining and measuring business impact.

30–38

Your foundation is strong, but friction still exists.

Focus on:

- Clearer relevance
- Manager involvement
- Easier access

20–29

Employees may be completing learning without fully engaging with it.

Look closely at:

- Relevance
- Timing
- Workflow
- Learning formats

Below 20

Your learning experience may be asking employees for more time and effort than the perceived value justifies.

Before assigning more learning, ask:

- How can we make this feel more useful?

Reflection questions

What's the biggest source of friction today?

What's one thing we could remove?

What's one thing we could make more relevant?

If we only changed one thing before launch, what would have the biggest impact?

Make training work when it matters

Employees don't need more learning competing for their attention.

They need learning that deserves it.

That's when learning becomes worth their time.

See how OpenSesame helps organizations deliver trusted training, reduce friction, and build workforce readiness.

[Book a demo](#)

