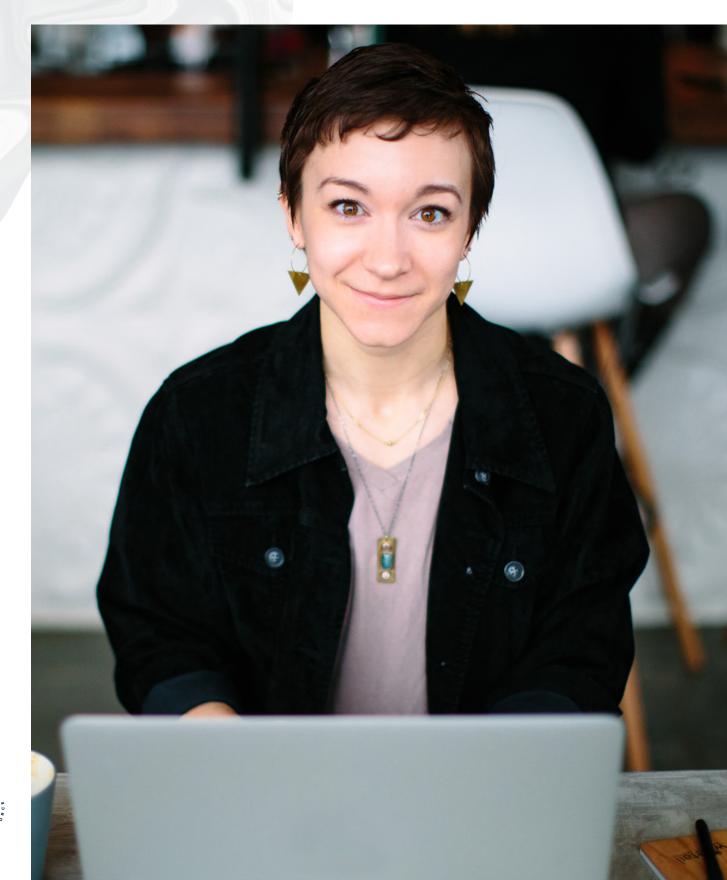
Measuring the ROI of L&D







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Introduction

The challenge of calculating the return on investment of learning and development rears its unwieldy head each year around budget time, if not more often. Leadership teams want you to connect the dots between L&D projects and revenue. That's a trickier ask than it seems, because the relationship between ROI and L&D is nuanced.

It isn't always possible to draw a direct connection between continuing education and the bottom line. But that nuance doesn't necessarily mean the equation is too complicated to figure out. There are ways to use cold, hard numbers to illustrate the impact of a learner-centric L&D strategy.

In retail, educating associates on products makes them more helpful to customers. Open-ended challenges boost engagement and genuine interest in employees. Both of those affect sales. Onboarding and training is almost entirely overhead cost, so cutting down time to productivity offers a simple ROI calculation. Happy employees are effective employees and there are ways to quantify that.

Here we'll go through a series of Key Performance Indicators to track, and show how we've seen businesses put those figures to good use showing the ROI of L&D.



CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Profits

Most businesses want to grow their profits. That's why we consider profits the keystone ROI — the ROI all other ROIs refer back to. Whatever the metric is, whether it's focused on employee retention or course completion rates, the number is tied to profit.





f course, there's always a bit of mystery around what causes profits to rise and fall. The benefits of most initiatives — including learning and development — are cumulative. It's tough to measure the impact of any one initiative on overall profits. But here are three recent studies that show the intimate connection between learning and development and rising profits:

A University of Washington study showed that, especially in knowledge-based industries, intensive internal employee training is a strategic necessity that allows companies to earn and sustain higher profits. The study features the story of a leading Indian IT company that fended off competition from IBM, Accenture, and HP by investing heavily in technical skills and business-domain knowledge.

A large **Gallup study** found that implementing strengths-based training led to a 14-29% increase in profit compared to control groups that received less intensive development or none at all.

A 2012 Bersin by Deloitte report discovered that organizations that build a high-impact learning program outperform their peers and see three times greater profit growth than their competitors, and this research has been confirmed in more recent 2016 and 2017 reports that explore how to build such a high-impact learning organization.

Are profits the most important metric for your organization? Here are a few Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to start tracking now to capture the ROI of your learning and development initiatives in the future:

- Monthly or Quarterly Revenue
- Monthly or Quarterly same-store sales
- Revenue by location
- Average Sales per employee

The average sales per employee is one of the simplest ways to translate training into dollars and show the value of L&D to the powers-that-be. Pick out a few items for further training and track the year-over-year numbers, or whatever the appropriate timespan for comparison. Then you have a credible number to cite when requesting resources for new projects. One of our clients, Murdoch's, did just that.

Murdoch's Case Study

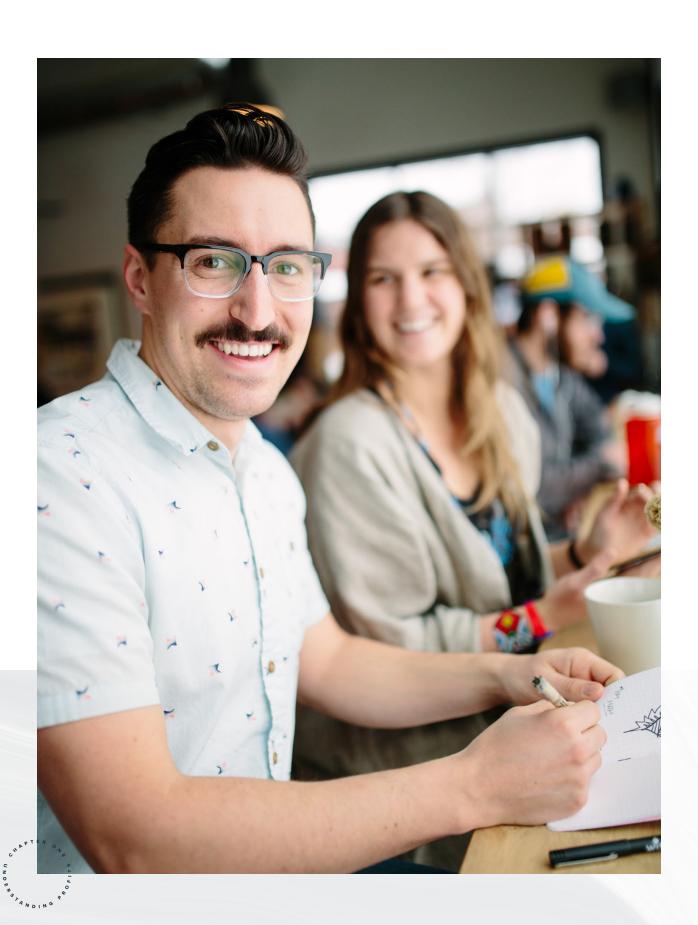
For the most part, people who purchase outdoor equipment and clothing want to understand how and why a particular item of clothing or piece of gear will help them accomplish their goals in the wild or on the ranch. They want to know how it's made, why it's better, and why it's a good value to them.

Customers expect a sophisticated level of product knowledge from sales personnel at outdoor retailers that is head and shoulders above what is expected at fashion retailers. Add a breadth of farm, ranch, and home equipment, and Murdoch's sales associates need to become walking encyclopedias to get the job done.

Murdoch's Training Manager, Steven Potratz has linked specific training efforts to a clear and direct boost in sales. Murdoch's learning and development program was specifically designed to foster company culture. The result: they boast one of the lowest turnover rates in all of retail (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the average turnover rate in retail is 5%).







The Case for Learning & Development

During our interview, Steven Potratz was quick to declare that his ability to enact a fresh and engaging learning and development environment came from the top. He read a quote from founder, John Murdoch, which is on display in Steven's his office:

"We are either going to make you a better employee for our company, or we're going to make you a better employee for another company, or we're going to make you more hireable as a college graduate. Because you are going to be trained as well as you can." - John Murdoch

This isn't just a feel-good proposition. Recent studies suggest 76% of millennials think professional development opportunities are one of the most important elements of company culture.

Talk to anyone in retail in December and they are all slammed. In January, they're typically recovering and revamping for a new year. But something truly remarkable happened at Murdoch's this year. They had their two highest months of engagement ever in December and January.

"You just don't see that kind of engagement in retail over the high volume holiday sales season," says Potratz.

Between their launch date of Sept. 2, 2014 and Feb. 21, 2016, Guest Ranch had 2100 users in the system who completed a whopping 70,617 courses. That means, an average employee at Murdoch's has completed around 30 courses on their own by far exceeding the handful of required coursework.

As Potratz explains, "These numbers exceed what we originally thought possible. It shows us that people strongly desire to develop as professionals and become as knowledgeable as possible in their positions. They're also going on there and recognizing each other for a job well done."

You just don't see that kind of engagement in retail over the high volume holiday sales season.

STEVEN POTRATZ

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A Direct Link From Training to Increased Sales

In addition to professional development, employee engagement and driving culture, Murdoch's has documented evidence of how training can be directly attributed to increased sales. Triple digit increases in sales.

In 2015, they ran a training promotion with a clothing vendor. Murdoch's asked employees to complete a training course in their LMS and they would receive a free clothing item upon completion. In the month of training, Murdoch's saw a triple digit sales increase for that item of clothing in all of their stores. They did no other promotion to increase sales - it was a positive sales increase specifically linked to training. The kicker is, the experiment resulted in a sustained double digit increase for the entire year following the month

of training. Did that specific ROI surprise them? "Yes, absolutely. I have literally worked in retail all of my life, beginning as a kid in my parents' store. I've never seen that kind of training ROI in my life. It was pretty amazing and has inspired us to do even more," Potratz explained. "It also confirmed with both management and our teams on the ground what a positive difference training can make. Beyond our doors, we are proud to share this story with other members of our buying group because it just solidifies the direct and positive results of great learning opportunities."

Correlation can be convincing. Even if your organization isn't in the retail business there are ways to track output and production. How can you tie those numbers to an L&D initiative?



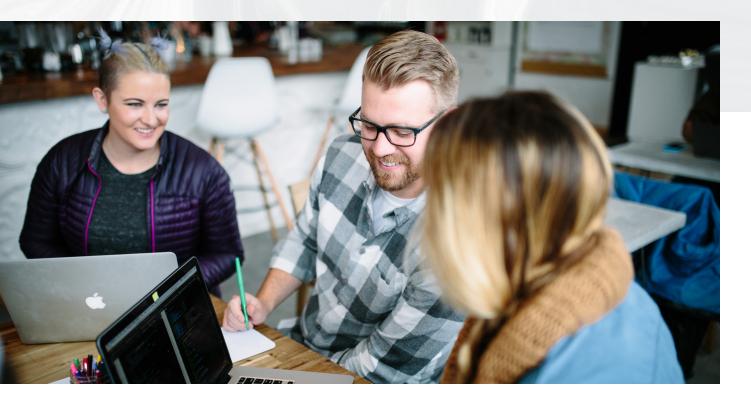


CHAPTER TWO

Productivity & Engagement

For years, Gallup has conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between employee engagement and performance outcomes like profitability, productivity, customer ratings, and quality, among other metrics. Eight studies in a row have confirmed that more engaged employees are more productive and lead organizations to higher levels of profitability.





his is a key finding because we also know that investing in learning and development is directly connected to increased levels of employee engagement. A Bersin study found that companies that transform their learning and development are able to **dramatically improve employee engagement** and enable companies like BP, IBM, Toyota, and Microsoft to stay ahead of their competitors.

So what does that mean? It means you can drive employee engagement by providing L&D opportunities. The level of participation is also a great indication of who is and isn't engaged, which allows you to spot employees who could benefit from more engagement support to increase productivity.

If productivity and engagement are important

metrics for your organization, follow these KPIs to calculate the ROI of your learning and development initiatives:

- eNPS
- Overall labor effectiveness
- Activity on the LMS
- Revenue per employee
- Effectiveness ratio (Gross profit per dollar spent on cost of workforce)

You don't need an elaborate plan to boost engagement. Sometimes it's as easy as launching a company-wide challenge that has defined boundaries but still leaves enough room for creativity among your learners. For example, L&M Supply has seen big jumps in engagement and productivity from a simple monthly sales challenge.



L&M Supply Case Study

The assignment was straightforward: launch a monthly sales challenge across L&M Supply's nine locations. Michelle Graber, Training Manager at L&M Supply, figured the expectation was to put the challenge out over the company LMS at the beginning of the month and issue an update at month's end.

Michelle knew two things: the challenge would drive employees to the LMS, called The Lodge, and people would need a scorecard if they're going to reach a goal. So she launched the sales challenge and updated each location's sales figures every week.

Not only did the sales challenge work — monthly sales increased, for one item, by 5,700% compared to the year prior — but Michelle's weekly updates helped boost LMS engagement. The Lodge has one of the highest engagement of any Wisetail client, with overall engagement consistently above 90% and voluntary engagement always above 80%.

Monthly sales increased, for one item, by **5,700%** compared to the year prior.

L&M SUPPLY SALES CHALLENGE



How Does L&M Do It?

The sales challenge itself is designed to empower employees. It's as simple as choosing the items — and because of its success there are currently four items of the month — and Michelle posting them on The Lodge. How the individual locations choose to merchandise the items is up to them.

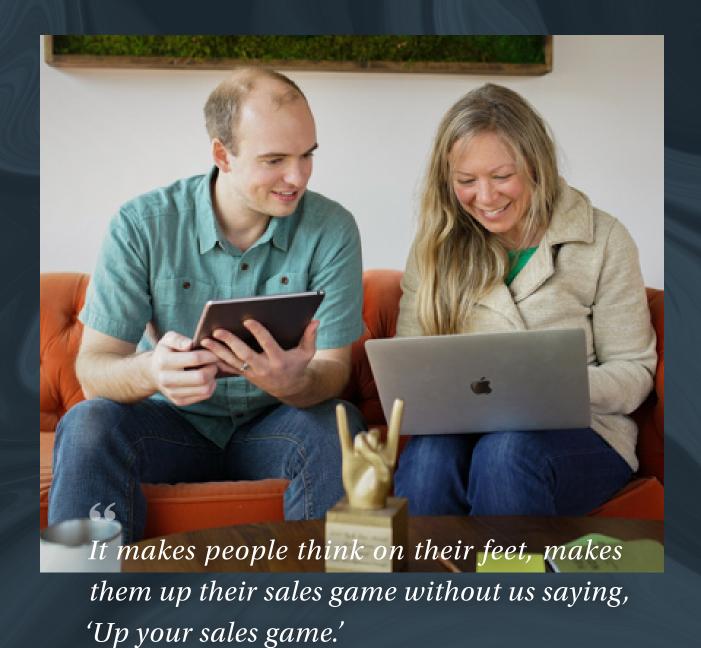
"We want them to take ownership of it. There's an expectation that the products are put on what we call our 50-yard line, which is the first set of shelving right when you walk in the store," Michelle says. "It makes people think on their feet, makes them up their sales game without us saying, 'Up your sales game."

The sale items are chosen off what's in stock. Sometimes it's what L&M can get on a hot buy offer. Sometimes it's a slow mover. Other times it's something fun and seasonal. The price point ranges from an 89-cent candy bar to \$80 game cameras, Michelle says.

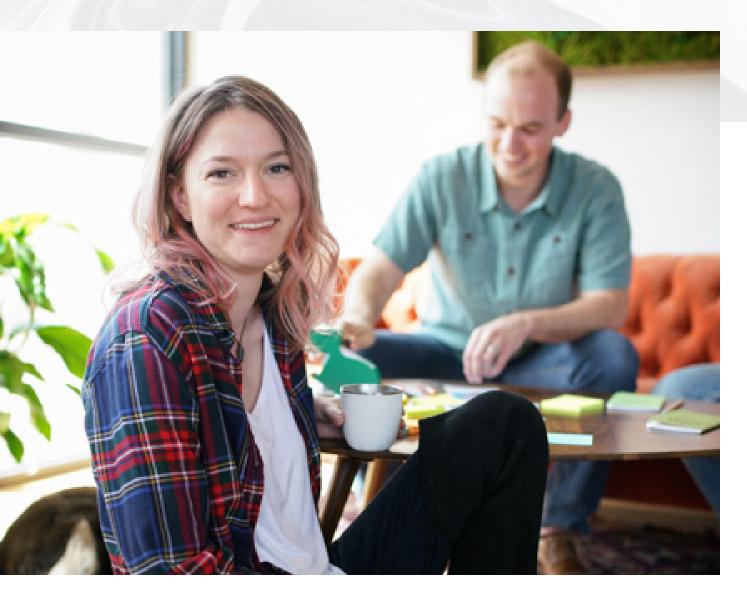
Michelle always tries to pair items with product training on The Lodge. It's easy to find quality product training to go along with a game camera, but with other items it can be a bit challenging. In those cases, Michelle likes to find fun informational tidbits like a tour of the candy bar factory on YouTube that includes a history of that company. Her thinking is that a quick video at least gives people something to chat about with coworkers when downtime inevitably strikes.

"They maybe don't need to know that info to sell it, but it increases excitement around the product," Michelle says.

The sales challenge isn't entirely a one-way show, where management simply dictates what to do. Employees comment on the challenge modules, offer suggestions for what items might work well in the future, and upload pictures of their displays.



- MICHELLE GRABER



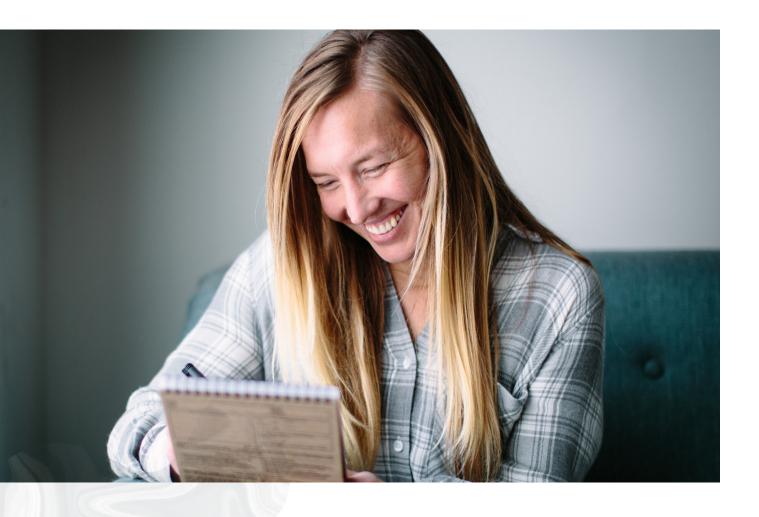
Ripple Effects

Since the sales challenge launched, learners in The Lodge have completed a consistent —and consistently high — amount of training. And they're active in the system too. User contributions jumped 26% when the sales challenge began and have remained at that new level since.

"When our category managers go to buying shows they're actually looking for something to bring in that would be a good Item of the Month," Michelle says. "It's great to see the participation at all levels with this challenge, all using our LMS as a platform for success."

Does your organization have any monthly or quarterly benchmarks? Think of ways you can engage different departments or locations with creative mission-focused challenges.





CHAPTER THREE

Time to Productivity

Time to full productivity. Often described as either how long it takes a new employee to be able to complete every aspect of their job. Or as long as it takes them to reach the equivalent performance of their closest colleague. Or until they're able to work independently. Or for an existing team member to learn a new skill.





ny way you look at it the learning process reflects almost pure overhead. So maybe the best way to define time to productivity is when an employee is no longer costing your organization money, but earning money. However you look it, having a long time to productivity is costly.

Learning and development opportunities are one of most effective ways to lower time to productivity. And will prove to be one of the strongest indicators of ROI for your L&D initiatives for years to come. One study suggests that effective onboarding can increase employee performance by 11.5%.

Organizations don't always track and measure time to full productivity. But the metric is an easily communicable figure and a convincing one.

A method of tracking this is as follows:

- 1. Track training hours for new hires
- 2. Implement a change in your training program
- 3. Track the amount of time it takes to train the next group of hires

Find percentage difference:

(New value - old value)

Old value

4. To find the dollar amount you are saving take the difference in time to productivity and multiply it by the amount of employees that are being onboarded each year.

So, for example, let's say it takes your company 40 hours to train an employee to full productivity. Then you design and create a brand new revitalized training program cutting your employee's time to productivity to 30 hours.

Percent change:
$$\frac{(30 - 40)}{40} \times 100$$
 -25% or a 25% decrease in time to productivity

Now let's say your company is onboarding 1,000 new employees a year and the average hourly pay is \$15. Take 10 hours (decreased training time) and multiply it by 1,000 (employees) and then multiply by 15 (hourly wage).

Now, let's take a look at how two of our clients, smoothie franchisor Jamba Juice and fast casual restaurant Farmer Boys, utilized this metric to expand their L&D programs.

Training and ROI Case Study: Jamba Juice & Farmer Boys

The learning and development teams at franchise organizations have a unique challenge. They have to convince not only the corporate decision-makers of the effectiveness and viability of their learning strategy, but also individual franchisees.

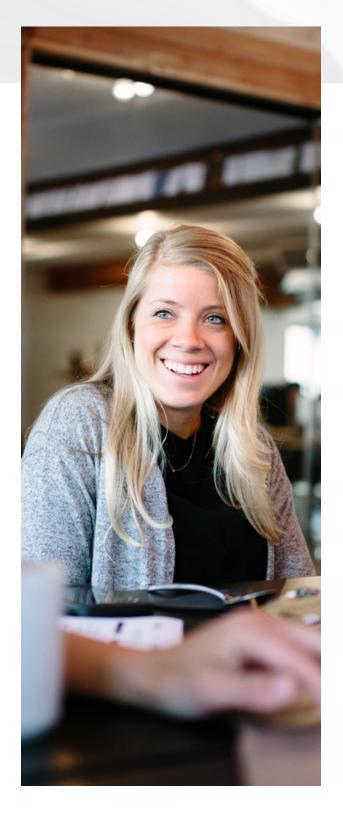
Two of our clients — smoothie franchisor Jamba Juice and Farmer Boys, a farm-to-table fast casual restaurant — tackled this challenge in similar ways: with cold, hard numbers.

It was a time of slight upheaval at Jamba Juice. The California-born, Texas-based purveyor of nutritional smoothies had shifted its franchise mix from 60% corporate locations and 40% franchise locations to 10% corporate and 90% franchise.

During this big reorganization, Zoe Maduros, Jamba's Director of Organizational Effectiveness and Learning, was tasked with finding a new Learning Management System and convincing franchisees to buy in and adopt the system.

Zoe knew that, in their heart of hearts, Jamba's franchisees were small business owners. Because of that, she knew the best way to encourage them to embrace a new system was to appeal to their pocketbooks, to show how improved training could help grow their business. She zeroed in on time to productivity.

Camille Chavez, the Director of Training for Farmer Boys, was faced with a similar assignment: to prove that an increased investment in learning and development would actually translate into better business.



How They Did It

Like many businesses, Jamba Juice's workforce fluctuates in the summer. Improving time to productivity for new hires—whether hourly staff or managers—can greatly affect the bottom line. Zoe found that simplified, standardized onboarding can get new hires up to speed up to two weeks faster.

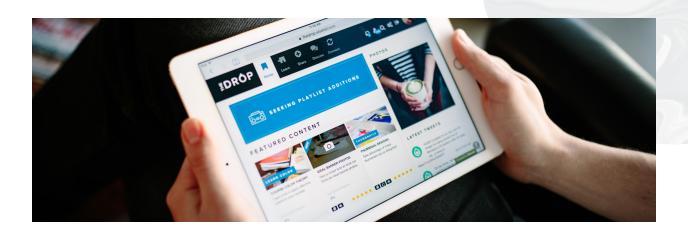
Zoe also worked to develop a sense of community among franchisees. She did this by running a video upload contest across the organization. Locations recorded and uploaded their best practices. In one fell swoop, Zoe was able to show franchisees the initial cost savings and then help them gain even more through more efficient, better training.

"The most effective way to encourage them to embrace a new system is to show them how it will help them grow their business," Zoe says. "Franchisees can upload their own best practices from users across the system and that's a cost savings for everyone."



Franchisees can upload their own best practices from users across the system and that's a cost savings for everyone.

ZOE MADUROS



Camille built out a controlled experiment. Out of the entire Farmer Boys chain of restaurants, she picked 12 stores for strategic training. Camille then gathered data over the course of a year, monitoring training and how long it took new hires to go from costing the company money to making the company money.

She found that strategic, quality training reduced the time to productivity for new cashiers by 20%. Not only did Camille find that improvements to training directly impacted a location's bottom line, but Camille sent mystery shoppers to every store as a way to gauge the impact that training had on employee performance. Her mystery shoppers found noticeably better service at locations with strategic training.

How You Can Do It

There are a few straightforward steps you can take to improve training and onboarding.

Set clear expectations. Starting a new job or learning a new skill is stressful and can be confusing. If your employees understand what's expected of them every step of the way it removes that ambi-

guity and potential for worry.

Have a set process. Standardizing training is a good way to ensure training is completed on schedule. Think of it as a way to set clear expectations for trainers or managers.

Leave room for creativity. Everyone has a preferred learning style. Some might catch on quickly, others might need hands-on work before mastering a skill. You can't tailor onboarding or training to each individual person, so leave a little wiggle room where you can for trainers and learners to figure things out.

Collect feedback. **Design thinking** might be trendy right now, but it's catching on because it works. Improvement is almost always possible. It's worth it to hear the ways in which training worked and how it didn't.

The first step to trying out this metric is determining how long your organization's onboarding actually takes. Do you know the specific number of days it takes an employee to get up to speed? Once you do, consider doing A/B testing to improve and refine your organization's onboarding process.



CHAPTER FOUR

Employee Satisfaction

What if your leadership team doesn't love cold, hard numbers? Then you can explore the relationship between your company's Net Promoter Score (NPS), a measure of customer relationships, and Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS), a measure of employee engagement and loyalty. These metrics make perfect sense to people-oriented leaders.





fter all, investing in learning and development for employees makes them happier and more engaged at work. What happens beyond that is the magic that pushes your business to the top: happier employees give better service, which leads to happier customers and higher profits.

This isn't a coincidence. Wildly successful organizations around the world like **Google**, **Zappos**, **Jack in the Box**, and **Campaign Monitor** put L&D first and find that the investment in their employees corresponds to the employee's investment in their careers, their company, and their customers.

These organizations have seen, in a very real way, that when employees are connected to their work and value the organization they work for, they're more likely to transfer that excitement to customers. If NPS and eNPS scores are important metrics for your organization, follow these KPIs to capture the ROI of your L&D initiatives:

- NPS
- eNPS
- Employee satisfaction
- Employee engagement
- Turnover
- Retention

We use these metrics here at Wisetail, and have found five steps that help improve our connection and engagement with employees. Check out what we've learned and see if it's something you can implement at your organization.

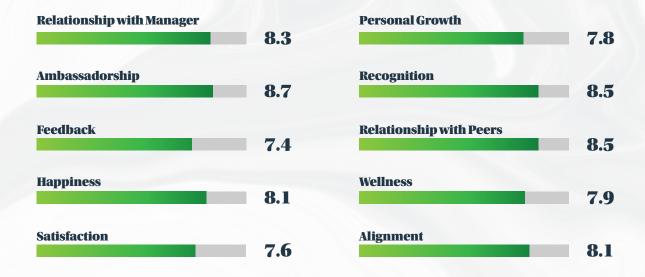
With the help of our friends at <u>Officevibe</u>, we are provided the tools to know exactly how our team really feels and receive advice and strategies to help improve overall employee satisfaction.

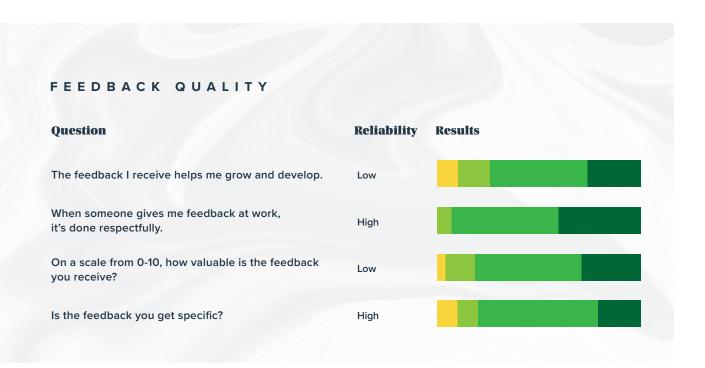
At Wisetail, our employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) allows us to measure our teams loyalty within the organization and is based off the question "On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend your organization as a good place to work?" The eNPS score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors (people who respond 0-6) from the percentage of promoters (people who respond with a 9 or 10). Individuals that answer 7 or 8 or skip the question are considered passives or neutral. Since they are neither for or against promoting the organization, they are not included in the calculation.

Scores can vary anywhere from -100 (yikes) to +100 (nobody's perfect). Anything above a score between 40-50 is not easily achieved and you should give yourself a pat on the back. If you're able to score anywhere from 10-30, this is the sweet spot and you should be proud of the healthy workplace that has been cultivated. Anything between -10 and +20 is considered a normal score. Anything below -10, you can start to worry. Although it's easy to become fixated on the score, we try to pay more attention to the written feedback that is provided revolving around what can be improved.

When our team's eNPS score took a dip a few months ago, we looked closer at our 10 Key Metrics Of Employee Engagement: Relationship with Manager, Ambassadorship, Feedback, Happiness, Satisfaction, Personal Growth, Recognition, Relationship with Peers, Wellness, and Alignment.

10 KEY METRICS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT





Out of the ten metrics, *Feedback* (specifically quality and consistency) was the lowest. To understand why we are lacking in a specific area and improve our overall eNPS score, we have found it helpful to follow up with five simple steps:

1. Follow Up Survey

After having the opportunity to respond to the initial survey question, follow up with a more detailed survey – what they like, don't like, aspects they would like to see improved or different all together. The more feedback collected, the easier it to make relevant improvements.

2. Tap Into The Promoters

Here we find out what is actually working for people and capitalize on it. You don't have to reinvent the wheel – learn more about their process and build upon it.

3. Get Details From Detractors

The Detractors are the ones you want the most feedback from so that A.) They don't become a contributor to turnover and B.) You can fix problems before new employees inherit them. It's also reassuring to the Detractors to know you are addressing the issue they have been struggling with.

4. Follow Up With Promoters

Don't forget the promoters! Assuming that they're happy just because they gave positive feedback initially, doesn't mean you shouldn't follow up. There is a lot to learn from the Promoters. For example, asking them what is currently working for them, what they can't live without, and encouraging them to be critical can help align your efforts, identify gaps and unearth untapped opportunities.

5. Communicate Change

Lastly, as easy as it may sound, keeping everyone in the loop and working toward the same goes is critical. Communicate with as many people as possible throughout the above steps before implementing a change. If employees are involved in the decision-making process, they will feel more responsible and connected to the end goal – leading to higher engagement.

Throughout the process, we were able to identify the need to streamline our feedback process. As a result, we introduced a **Guide to One-on-Ones** to serve as a template for both employees and managers across our organization. Within the guide we identified the importance of things like cadence, expectations, setting, intentions and following up. With a little extra intention, these conversations proved to be great opportunities to discuss longer-term vision such as career development and job satisfaction. All very important things to consider when trying to maintain or boost your eNPS score.

So what about the numbers? Three months after putting our Guide One-on-Ones into place, we revisited our Engagement Report. The Feedback metric itself increased from 8.5 to 9.5 which helped boost the overall eNPS score from 42 to 47. Beyond the numbers, we had direct written feedback from Promoters and Detractors alike that was both meaningful and frequent.

While we use Officevibe as our feedback tool, there are several other methods of collecting feedback. If budget is a concern the best way to get started is to open the lines of communication within the company. Our **Guide to One-on-Ones** is an excellent way to start collecting feedback that you can take action on. While it might not provide the hard numbers that Officevibe does, it's still a great way to get started. There are **lots of other tools** as well that you can use. You could even do something as simple as a google form that employees can fill out anonymously. We have provided some example questions to help you get started.



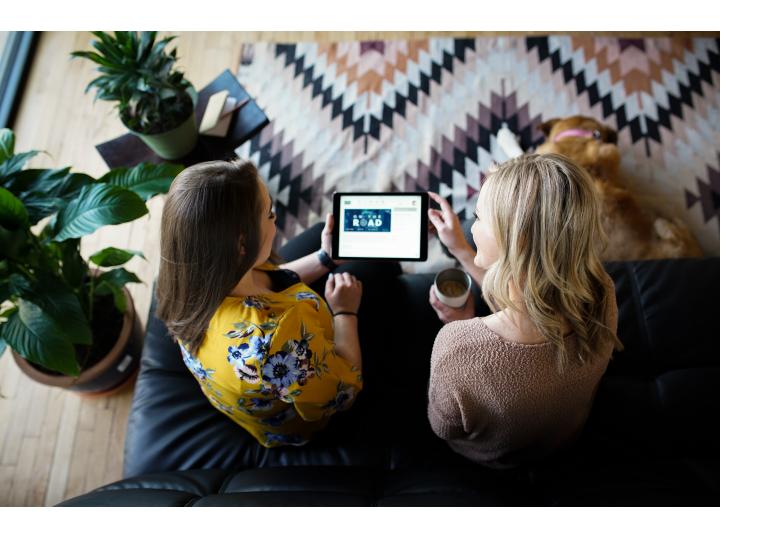
EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:

Q: What's the key to fostering honest and transparent communications amongst peers?

Employee Feedback: Trust and encouraging everyone to provide feedback, whether good or bad, even when they aren't asked to do so (ex: one-on-ones).

Q: How does the feedback you receive help you grow?

Employee Feedback: I believe our team has a culture of providing honest and timely feedback. Meaning, the feedback can be constructive in times of need to help an individual grow and it's always given in the moment or shortly thereafter.



Conclusion

The goal with all of this is to give you the tools to demonstrate and communicate the actual value of learning and development in your organization. These metrics, these Key Performance Indicators—they're all meant to improve the internal conversation around L&D and continuing education.

After all, more than 80% of companies consider their business complex and challenging for employees. Executives intuitively understand the need for continuing education and the practicality of skills development. The challenge is figuring out how to translate your work into a language that executives—whether they're people-oriented or quants—can easily grasp.



The exact causes of rising or falling profits will always be a minor mystery. But in retail, you can track per associate sales data before and after product training. In knowledge industries, you can follow the relationship between the company's Net Promoter Score and Employee Net Promoter Score. In the restaurant industry, onboarding carries some financial heft. The effectiveness ratio (gross profit per dollar spent on cost of workforce) has utility across any number of industries.

The ROI of L&D is a nuanced concept. It's less of a set process and more of an ongoing, evolving conversation where we're learning what resonates with who in what ways. We hope you try these metrics and measurements out. See how they apply to your organization, what's really effective. And then get back to us about what you tried and how it worked. It's the only way to push the conversation forward.

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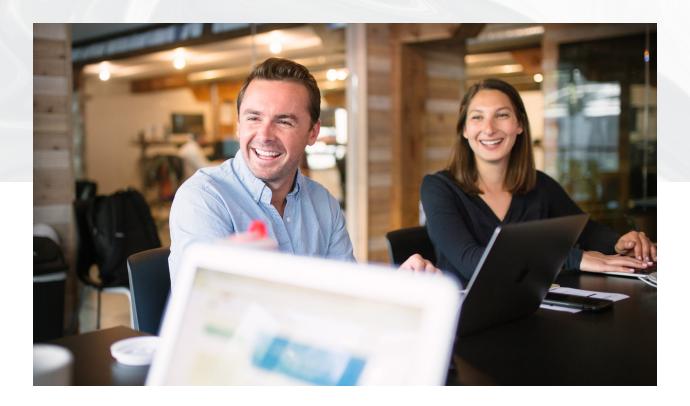
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About Wisetail

Wisetail is a forward thinking training and communication platform built to engage today's workfroce. Based in the heart of Bozeman, Montana, we build Learning Management Systems for innovators who, like us, know a people-first culture is the most important driver of success in the modern workforce.

Our software gives millions of users the chance to learn and develop in an engaging environment and our platform is crafted to meet the unique needs and challenges in today's workplace. That's why so many of today's leading brands-including Shake Shack, SoulCycle, Bonobos, Cheesecake Factory, Einstein Bros, and many more—use Wisetail's LMS every day.

We combine award-winning learning management with unequaled customer support for organizations to create an online community. Administrators are able to develop and share content while investing in each learner's personal and professional development, while we focus on the human side of eLearning, and encourage culture as well as growth.

We are proud to have ranked as one of the "Fastest Growing Companies in the U.S." on Inc. "5000's" list, "50 Best Small Workplaces" by Fortune Magazine, "One Of The 50 Best Small Workplaces In The U.S." by Great Places to Work Institute and Outside Magazine's "The 100 Best Places to Work."

