



Showing ROI for Learning Programs

How to Justify Your People Strategies for Executive Support



OVERVIEW

What You'll Get

- A framework for generating buy-in on people strategies
- How to gain broad organizational support
- Examples of people strategies tied to business strategies

Learning is, or should be, an integral part of a business strategy. Companies today cannot operate effectively with the old mindset that people just need to do their jobs and employees are expendable.

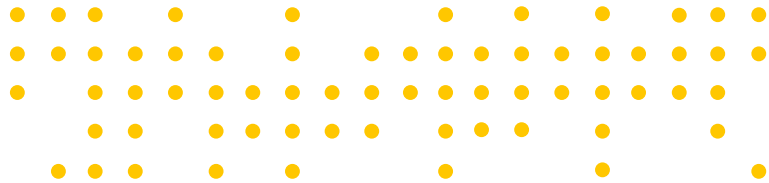
Forward-thinking companies know that in order to meet business goals, they need to recognize and invest in people-first strategies that align with business strategies. Executives at these organizations are tying these business goals to retaining top talent, increasing revenue, enabling sales channels, and customer satisfaction for better business outcomes.

In this whitepaper, you will learn the value of aligning learning and business strategies to gain justification for training, learning, and development programs. You'll also learn the tactics and metrics to measure and justify your people strategies to align with overarching goals of the business.



// Hope is not strategy.

- Vince Lombardi



JUSTIFICATION & ROI

A people strategy is part of every great business strategy. Every year when a company creates its overall organizational goals, it should also develop its people strategy goals. Learning and development should play a large part in that work – education impacts the business at every strategic level.

Employees need to continually learn to be efficient at their jobs, stay compliant, and engage with the company culture. Customers need to learn to use a product effectively, be competitive in their markets, and be leaders in their fields. Sales teams and partners need to know how to sell and produce revenue for business growth. No matter where you look, learning impacts every facet of an organization.

Today, many organizations don't put enough value into people strategies or learning and development, but that can easily be changed. A large part of the battle is disseminating the value of these strategies by tying them to the overarching goals. Too many L&D departments operate in a silo, only focusing on compliance and onboarding employees. The way to gain buy-in is to justify programs and show ROI, which isn't as daunting as it sounds.

Reasons to invest in learning and people strategies include:

- Motivate Employees
- Employee Retention
- Company Agility
- Improve Company Culture
- Build Brand Loyalty
- Customer Satisfaction
- Customer Loyalty
- Time-to-Productivity
- Upskill, Reskill, Reboard
- Address Skill Gaps
- Cultivate Leadership
- Sales / Partner Enablement
- Increase Revenue
- Enable Internal Alignment
- Facilitate Growth

PARTNER UP! YOU'VE GOT ALLIES

Partner up to give clarity to everyone in the business, so they understand the impact of learning and people strategies.



Bridging the Gap

If you can bridge the gap between departments and the strategies to support the larger business goals, you can create efficiencies and gain broader support. Build those bridges with other departments in your organization to gain stakeholder support, and to ingrain learning and development as an integral business strategy.

How do you do it? Dig into the operations of your organization to support the learners across every department and function. Here are some questions you can ask to get started:

1. Do you have a sales team? Do they need to be trained regularly (promos, new products, etc.)? Is there a steep learning curve to productivity?
2. Do you have a partner channel? Do they need to be sales or technically certified?
3. Is there training involved for your customers to get the most from your products? Are there ways to inform customers of product updates, promos, or other initiatives? Do you know what causes customers to leave?
4. Do you have high employee turnover? Do you know what contributes to this – such as overly long onboarding, inadequate training, or employee morale issues?
5. How much does your training currently cost? How long does it take to onboard a new employee?
6. What tools do you use for training and internal communication channels?
7. What tools are used across each department? Can we consolidate redundant tools to present our CFO with a solution for improved productivity and lower costs?

// Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat people well enough so they don't have to.

– Sir Richard Branson



Partnering up with senior leadership is also essential. You need to understand the objectives of the business and they need to understand the impact that L&D can have on goals. If you can offer programs that directly correlate to business operations, you'll gain executive support. Having a member of senior leadership as a sponsor, or champion, for each L&D initiative will also help to ensure the values of programs disseminate throughout the organization.

Here are some examples of who should sponsor your programs:

1. The Chief Revenue Officer (CRO), VP of Sales, VP of Sales & Marketing, etc., should be the executive sponsor for sales training, sales enablement, and programs that can directly tie to generating new revenue for the organization.
2. The Channel Chief, VP of Product Marketing, or VP of Channels should be the executive sponsor for partner training, certification, and enablement programs that generate revenue through selling channels.
3. The Chief People Officer and / or VP of L&D should be the executive sponsor of employee training and engagement programs.
4. The VP of HR should be the executive sponsor of all onboarding and compliance programs.
5. The VP of Customer or Client Success or the VP of Support should be the executive sponsor for all customer training and engagement programs.
6. For upskilling, reskilling, and ongoing education, each department head should be a champion to formalize programs that tie to talent development.

You will be able to justify L&D spend or get investment in initiatives from senior leadership if you have cross-departmental buy-in, can deliver measurable impact across multiple teams, and can show efficiencies – cost, operational, or both – by the approach you're proposing. Add an executive sponsor and you have a winning pitch for a long-term commitment.

94% of employees would stay with a company longer if there was an investment in learning.

– Gallup

• FORMALIZE & DOCUMENT

90% of a good strategy is documentation and communication.

Saying that, treat your strategy as a living document. Set the expectation that it will be agile – based on data, feedback, and ROI – and continue to set those expectations early and often. Instill value in flexibility and you'll gain the freedom to test, document, and find the correct formula for your organization. A company strategy molds the decisions it will effectively make over an amount of time. Be sure to set strategies so you can make intelligent near-term decisions, with long-term impacts in mind.

A great formula that is simple, effective, and easy to document is:

Decide → Do Refine → Do

It sounds simple, because it is. Half the battle is getting started. If you don't know what you don't know, setting the expectations and acting as an "organizational learning scientist" will help you formalize, document, test, and refine strategy in an agile and flexible way to get the most out of your resources.

Decide → Do, Refine → Do

This process is essential to figuring out your people strategy. The best part is you don't have to wait until you have buy-in or people ready to support your plans. You want to go into the project with a clear, defined plan – and all you have to do is decide what, or how, you want to do something, do it, and then refine and do it again.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF TYING PEOPLE STRATEGIES TO BUSINESS GOALS

This section will give you examples of how to tie people strategies to business goals. It's just the tip of the iceberg, but it will provide you with a starting point for success.



Goal: Customer Retention & ARR

Many companies have customer retention and annual recurring revenue (ARR) as goals. For this example, let's say the goal is to have a 98 percent customer retention rate. Whether the ARR goal is \$10M or \$500M, the underlying strategy will be the same: Invest in customer learning, satisfaction, and retention programs to maximize business outcomes.

1. Invest in customer service training to ensure customer satisfaction.

- Market example: Walt Disney World's customer satisfaction is out of this world. Disney invests in training and enabling all employees to be agents of customer service, from performers in the parade to workers in the main street shops. Take a page from Disney's book – happy customers equal customer retention and recurring revenue.

2. Upskill or reskill workers to stay competitive in the market.

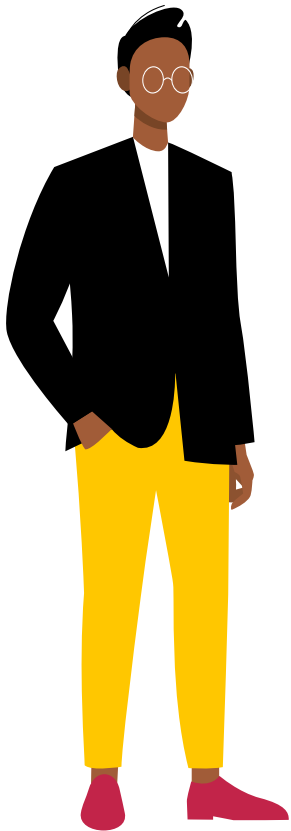
- Today, many restaurants will attest to having to stay relevant and open in a challenging market. Restaurants were hit hard in the pandemic. According to Forbes, more than 110,000 eating and drinking establishments closed in 2020 and the National Restaurant Association says nearly 2.5M restaurant jobs were erased.
- Wisetail impact: Bagel Brands L&D team reacted quickly to changing operational demands. Although they had to reduce the number of employees per location to remain open, its L&D jumped in to deliver training to upskill and reskill workers to take on new roles for smaller teams. The speed and agility in providing training and communications are attributed to their use of their Wisetail platform.
- Market example: Forward-thinking teams leveraged learning to stay relevant with initiatives that include changing service to curbside pickup, delivery, loyalty, programs, and strategic seating schedules. All of these programs were enabled by multi-departmental buy-in and organizational flexibility, which is why partnering up is key.

“ A satisfied customer is the best strategy of all.

– Michael LeBoeuf

// How you sell is more important than what you sell.

- Andy Paul



● Goal: Growth via Location, Markets, or Velocity

Fast growth can be exciting and scary all at the same time. If growth is a goal, first define the type of growth to understand what is needed to accelerate the business towards the goal.

1. We need to launch X new locations in the next year.

- Rapid expansion depends upon repeatable, scalable, and consistent hiring, onboarding, and continued training. This process can get more complex if you are a franchise, depending on your geographical expansion and business model. Plan training programs that are consistently applicable without demanding additional resources with scale, and you'll get buy-in across your organization.

2. We need to hire X new employees within X years.

- Start by training managers. Effective interview and hiring processes are the first steps towards rapid personnel expansion – and many organizations overlook it. In a rapid growth phase, you can start by developing programs that pair manager recruitment training and recruiters to maximize the talent search. It's more expensive to hire the wrong people than to take a little longer and get it right the first time – quality over quantity is a real thing. Enable your leadership and management with the skills to find the right fit every time.
- Next, shore up your onboarding. Onboarding is the first real impression a new employee will have of your brand, culture, and expectations. You want to build a company of brand-loyal employees, but you also want to speed up time-to-productivity. Measure programs' impact on time-to-productivity to be able to justify resources for training programs to support people strategies. [Learn how to calculate time-to-productivity >](#)



Jamba cut its training time by 40% and saved \$5.2M in labor costs with its new onboarding program.

[Learn More >](#)

PLANNING PEOPLE PROGRAMS

// However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.

– Winston Churchill

There are several frameworks for planning and mapping learning and development programs. No matter what framework you use, be sure to ask the right questions, evaluate your processes, and gain the correct stakeholder buy-in.

Creating learning personas will help you define your people programs.

To do that, we've provided essential steps below:

ULTIMATE PROGRAM PLANNING STEPS

1. Define a target group of learners and their sponsors or stakeholders.
2. Define the group's needs, goals, and how they support the business.
3. Determine KPIs and what success looks like for each group.
4. Sample the group – create a survey or focus group to determine what really matters. How do they learn? What do they value? How can they learn in the flow of work? Can they learn from each other? What is their motivation?
5. Outline – Pick your framework and outline your program.
6. Review the outline with stakeholders, revise as needed.
7. Remember your testing approach: **Decide → Do. Revise → Do.**

SUMMARY: METRICS MATTER

Metrics are the language of any senior leadership team. Looking at ROI and how it impacts the goals of the overarching business is a powerful tool. If you can effectively communicate strategic plans and how the metrics impact business outcomes, you can justify people strategies and programs.