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atd Association for Talent Development

Trainer's Guide

Influencing Your Stakeholders

Introduction:

Do you find that, too often, you are working as an order-taker? By that I mean that a manager contacts the talent development (TD) department with a request for a specific learning solution with the clear expectation that this request will be acted upon. Or perhaps you have invested in building the skills of TD team members to work in the role of performance consultants, only to determine, months later, that nothing has changed in terms of the type of work done nor the results obtained.

How frustrating is that?

Unfortunately, many TD departments are designed to work tactically, delivering learning solutions that build capability but not business results. However, we can work in the role of strategic partner, transitioning from order-taker to impact-maker. We also can deliver solutions that yield business and performance results to the organization. To work in that manner requires skills and capabilities that extend beyond instructional design. In this guide, you'll learn different ways to handle training requests, get a peek into obtaining buy-in for your learning programs, and see how Comcast's L&D function drove impact and alignment in their organization.

Chapter 1:

Dealing with Misguided Training Requests

"Training requests" as a fix for anything and everything are a consistent thorn in the paw for all learning and development departments. Learning professionals know the challenge of misguided training requests can be remedied. As natural problem solvers and creative thinkers, we have produced a glut of books, articles, and instructional design systems. We are informed, armed, and ready to address erroneous training requests. We explain to the misguided requester the proper place and application for training, how training can help, and when it cannot. However, are there times when we should just acquiesce? Is there a justification for accepting a "training request" that is not training at all?

Let's look at an example: Vice President Jan requests that all 500 staff members attend a training on the organization's core values. Jan would like this to happen in the next 45 days.

Requests like this, coming from high up in the organizational chain, can give a person nightmares. Before drafting a response, formulate a series of questions to help with analysis and don't forget to include an ego and bias check. The questions will differ based on your role in the organization and who is making the request.

One consideration should never change: the impact of your decision should never put the department's strategic goals at risk. If you don't have strategic goals for your department, stop reading and start writing. As Lewis Carroll wrote, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. But that doesn't mean where you wind up is where anyone wants to be.

1. Is it possible to form a rational, achievable goal out of the request?
2. Are there resources available to devote to the request?
3. What is the short-term impact, both positive and negative, to the target audience and the organization?
4. Will accepting the request set an irreversible, bad precedent for future requests?
5. Imagine this request came from someone you admire or a close friend; how would you respond?
6. Are there political gains to be made by accepting the request—gains that will advance your department's strategic goals?

Here are some starter questions to consider when you are presented with this challenge.

1 IS IT POSSIBLE TO FORM A RATIONAL, ACHIEVABLE GOAL OUT OF THE REQUEST? The last thing you want is to set yourself up for failure, or more accurately, have no measure for success. It is best to set the measure for success to something akin to "Facilitate 5 Core Value sessions before August 1." Keep it specific and time-bound, very much like a SMART goal. The learning professional in you may think the request is a waste of time or fret learning objectives. We will ignore that voice for now.

2 ARE THERE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO DEVOTE TO THE REQUEST? Realistically, despite the advantages the forthcoming questions may uncover, it is not worth running your team or yourself into the ground. Do not divert resources from critical projects or day-to-day tasks that are necessary for the department to function.

3 WHAT IS THE SHORT-TERM IMPACT, BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, TO THE TARGET AUDIENCE AND THE ORGANIZATION? Try to put yourself in your audience's shoes. Will you feel demoralized or disengaged as a result? Will the organization lose a large amount of staff hours if the request involves classroom hours?

4 WILL ACCEPTING THE REQUEST SET AN IRREVERSIBLE, BAD PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE REQUESTS? Even in circumstances where the requester understands that the request is not "training" and promises this will be the last time, you know it will not be. Construct a response for future similar requests and determine its feasibility.

5 IMAGINE THIS REQUEST CAME FROM SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE OR A CLOSE FRIEND; HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND? Especially in the case of repeat offenders, it is easy to allow a gut reaction of dislike to taint clear thinking. Remember, fairness and justice are concepts employed only on people who are not your friends. If there were ever a time to consider fairness, it's now.

6 ARE THERE POLITICAL GAINS TO BE MADE BY ACCEPTING THE REQUEST—GAINS THAT WILL ADVANCE YOUR DEPARTMENT'S STRATEGIC GOALS? "Political will" is the motivation to use political skills to self-empower. A smart balance of doing for others and doing for you can lead to a position of influence. Do not confuse political will with being manipulative or conniving. Helping others can result in help for you and your department in achieving its strategic goals.

> Taking the time to evaluate the short- and long-term impact of a misguided training request can benefit your organization, your department, and you.

"Training requests" as a fix for everything are a burden. Yet service to our organizations is top priority. Referring to the example of Jan—maybe Jan is making this request because of a commitment to the board of directors that all staff will attend a special core values training session. Conducting a discussion and training session on the organization's core values could be accomplished with minimal resources if planned smartly. The sessions could serve as an engagement boost to staff and garner positive reviews for your facilitators. Moreover, a can-do attitude and willingness to help the organization will not go unnoticed by Jan, who happens to be in a real position of influence.

Taking the time to evaluate the short- and long-term impact of a misguided training request can benefit your organization, your department, and you.

Source: Stanziani, N. 2018. "Dealing With Misguided Training Requests." ATD Links. Accessed at https://www.td.org/newsletters/atd-links/dealing-with-misguided-training-requests

Chapter 2:

When is Training the Answer?

First, Ask the 5 Whys to Improve Your Instructional Design Practice

Here's a fairly common situation for instructional designers: A training request pops up, seemingly out of nowhere, because a problem has been identified. The nature of the "problem" could be technical or interpersonal, process-based or performance-based. And by jumping immediately to a solution—in this case, training—we miss the opportunity to identify the root cause and solve the real problem at hand. This missed opportunity also wastes our finite resources of time and money and risks a loss of credibility when the training solution does not produce expected results for the organization.

Rooted in the manufacturing processes of the Toyota Production System, the 5 Whys technique is an effective way to identify the root cause of a problem. Rather than placing immediate focus on the solution, the 5 Whys allow you to reframe the conversation on the stepwise issues that have contributed to the problem—which, ideally, results in identifying the root cause. Plus, it can help teams avoid blaming and finger-pointing when an issue arises because the process focuses on observable facts rather than hypothetical issues.

Let's take a closer look in the context of a common metric: customer support call times. Imagine you are an instructional designer who receives the following request: "Our support call times are 20 percent longer, on average, over the past two months and we need to retrain agents on our customer database ASAP." Sound familiar? The assumption, of course, is that more training will result in a decreased average call time. But will more agent training solve the problem?

Applying the 5 Whys, we might see the following:

1. **Why has there been a 20 percent increase in average call time over the past two months? The agents are handling more customer questions related to new product features.**

2. **Why do customers have more questions about the new product features? The new features did not come with full instructions and product documentation.**

3. **Why did the new features not come with instructions? The project launch team did not include a technical writer.**

4. **Why did the launch team not include a technical writer? The technical writer is out on maternity leave, and we do not have a temporary replacement.**

5. **Why do we not have a temporary replacement? The technical writers on other project teams are unfamiliar with the new product feature.**

While simplistic, this example illustrates that the increase in average call time is more likely a result of a lack of knowledge or skill on the part of the technical writers responsible for product documentation. As an instructional designer in this situation, your time and effort would be better spent on cross-training technical writers to ensure they are familiar with all product features, rather than re-training agents on the customer database. And training alone isn't the only solution. In this example, the overall staffing structure may require examination to ensure that similar lapses do not occur in the future.

Source: Neibert, J. 2018. "5 Whys to Improve Your Instructional Design Practice." ATD Links. Accessed at: https://www.td.org/newsletters/atd-links/5-whys-to-improve-your-instructional-design-practice

How to Start Using the 5 Whys

To start using the 5 Whys in your organization, follow these steps:

STEP 1

Gather a small group of people who are affected by the problem. Assign one person as the group's facilitator.

STEP 2

Clearly define the problem and, if possible, find an opportunity to observe the problem.

STEP 3

Have the facilitator ask the team the first "Why"—Why is X problem occurring? Document the answer to the first Why.

(Whiteboards are useful for taking notes.)

STEP 4

From each answer, generate another why question—up to five total.

(Five is a general guideline. Asking too few questions may not reveal the root cause, while asking too many questions generates an unwieldy number of potential causes.)

STEP 5

Assign action items and next steps for solutions based on the answers to the questions.

Using the 5 Whys operates on a few assumptions:

- The first assumption is that the problem you are discussing has a linear track of causes and possible solutions. The issues present in many organizations are rarely straightforward, but the 5 Whys can help identify the root cause in a single track of inquiry and kick-start a broader problem-solving process.
- Second, if you are working to address problems within a process or system, you must ask questions about how the process is currently working—not how it should be working, or how it is documented in your procedures, but how your employees are following the process day in and day out.
- Finally, the 5 Whys is most effective for identifying causes that have already occurred, rather than forecasting potential causes and solutions to future problems faced by your organization. To expand your problem-solving repertoire, you can consider other problem-solving approaches, such as inductive reasoning, appreciative inquiry, or root cause analysis.

Chapter 3:

What Does Your Organization Create?

Walt Disney was not your typical CEO. He didn't attend business school and had no use for highfalutin' management theories. He certainly didn't know anything about the now-common practice of developing organizational vision and mission statements. If he had known, he would likely have refused to engage in the practice, given his disdain for bureaucracy. Freed of management theory, Walt aimed not for logic but for emotion. For that, he needed something different…something we will, for clarity, call purpose.

The difference between a vision (or mission) and purpose is emotion. Vision or mission statements are logical. They aim for the head. Purpose is emotional. It aims for the heart. Where vision or mission articulate goals and tactics for achieving those goals, purpose defines the essence of an organization—why it exists, who it exists for, and how it makes the world a better place.

In a new book, *Care Like a Mouse*, Lenn Millbower explains that companies that aim for the head engender little enthusiasm. People buy their products if the price is right, the location is convenient, the need is immediate, or their habits are ingrained. There is little love there.

Companies that aim for the heart have passionate customers who follow them on social media, join their fan clubs, buy their products, and rave about those products to others. Product, of course, matters. But it is purpose, not product, that drives success. Highly successful companies know this. They lead with purpose.

Apple is an excellent example of a purpose-focused company. Although it appears to be technology-driven, it has a distinctly human focus. Apple harnesses technology to serve human lifestyle needs in simple, seamless, and integrated ways.

Southwest Airlines is another example. It wears its heart on its sleeve, literally. Its stock market symbol is LUV. Its logo is a heart. The entire organization is people-centered. Flight officers and attendants have fun, pitch in to help each other, and deliver a relaxed atmosphere for passengers. Southwest Airline's business may be transportation, but they connect people with each other, both internally through people-focused behaviors and externally by making plane travel as hassle free and engaging as possible.

Hamilton Health Care System, a self-contained healthcare provider in Georgia and one of Lenn's clients, knew intuitively why they served. As with most healthcare professionals, Hamilton's people entered the field because they wanted to help others. But it wasn't until Hamilton specified their purpose that their Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems scores rose. The result of a clearly stated purpose was an increase in patient satisfaction that led to enhanced local reputation and higher reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid.

Lowes Foods, a 100-plus Carolina-based grocery chain I worked with extensively, offers another example. It is local and proud of it. Its billboards champion its locally grown connection. Its stores are reminiscent of a small-town Carolina farmer's market. Stores showcase local products whenever possible. They host in-store cooking and nutrition classes. They support local events. They treat you like a neighbor. When you shop at Lowes, you are visiting friends who will help you plan the perfect meal.

And Walt Disney is, of course, the ultimate example. Walt was very clear on his purpose—creating happiness. He even called Disneyland "the happiest place on earth." Everything the Disney organization did was aligned with the goal of creating happiness.

When an organization is clear about its purpose, as Disney is, and articulates that purpose clearly to its people, individual, departmental, and corporate actions become focused. At Disney, the need to deliver happiness was codified into a sentence. "We create happiness by delivering the finest in family entertainment for people of all ages, everywhere." For ease in comprehension, to tighten focus for frontline service personnel, and to make training more effective, the sentence was shortened into a three-word purpose statement: "We create happiness."

"We create happiness" is inculcated into every aspect of a Disney cast member's career. It is taught in orientation and on-the-job training, reinforced in performance reviews and promotional opportunities, and stated in meetings. Happiness success stories are shared and celebrated at every Disney event.

"We create happiness" is simple but truly profound. It offers several distinct advantages for aligning and motivating Disney's entire team.

Purpose is simple, concise, emotional, and profoundly human. It delivers an emotional hook that guides leaders, motivates employees, and turns customers into lifelong fans. It is also the magic ingredient that makes it so easy for Disney to outperform the competition. Your organization can beat its competition, too. Harness purpose and you will create your own kind of happiness.

Source: Millbower, L. 2018. "What Does Your Organization Create?" ATD Links. Accessed at: https://www.td.org/newsletters/atd-links/what-does-your-organization-create

SIMPLICITY. It explains Disney's service expectations with absolute clarity and simple language that everyone in the organization, at every level, can understand and articulate.

BOUNDARIES. It puts a stake in the ground. It is Disney's red line that no one dare cross.

ROLE EXPECTATIONS. It places the tasks to be delivered—safe ride operations and a clean park, for example—within the larger purpose of creating happy guests.

TRAINING. It unites all training and development activities and aims them toward a specific, easily measured goal. It particularly breathes life into orientation, redirecting it away from a "here's your keys and locker" mentality and toward an alignment of employee and organizational purpose.

TASK PRIORITIZATION. It prioritizes the order in which tasks are performed. If a custodian walking the park, for instance, spots a guest whose popcorn has spilled on the ground, the custodian knows that replacing that popcorn, thus making the guest happy, is more important than sweeping up the spill.

COACHING AND FEEDBACK. It provides a simple context within which guidance, mentoring, and discipline can be delivered. That context is one question: "Is the guest happy?"

DECISION FILTER. It offers a guest-focused filter for decision making at all levels of the organization, including senior management.

ATTRACTING PEOPLE. A clear purpose statement motivates talented people to want to work there, investors to want to invest there, and customers to want to purchase there.

Chapter 4:

Tips for Defending Your Budget

The annual budgeting process instills fear in the hearts of many training managers. It is a time of deadlines, paperwork, meetings, meetings, and more meetings. However, it's also a chance to question your programs and procedures, look for alternatives, and redesign or improve existing processes. It is the perfect opportunity to ensure that you—and your training programs—are aligned to the strategic direction of the organization and the needs of your internal customers.

Here are tips to consider as you and your team go through the budgeting process:

- **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** What are your manager's expectations for the budget? What about their manager? Ascertain how management likes the information to be presented. Do they want to see the big picture, or will they delve into the details?
- **TIE YOUR RESOURCES TO SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES.** In this manner, you will be able to specifically defend the budgeted amounts for a particular program and explain how budget cuts will affect the training programs for organizational initiatives.
- **DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF.** Focus on big-ticket items. But be careful! Some line items, such as travel or donations, may not be significant, but they are highly scrutinized. Know which line items will be subjected to a thorough review regardless of the budgeted amount.
- **DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT.** You will need this information to answer questions during the review process.
- **KNOW YOUR NUMBERS.** You should be able to discuss your budget without using the phrase "I don't know" or "I will get back to you." No one should be able to explain the numbers better than you!
- **PREPARE FOR THE REVIEW.** Have your finance liaison or a colleague ask you hard questions on your work plan or budgeted figures.
- **AVOID GETTING DEFENSIVE.** You have put in a lot of work. Do not get defensive if your manager questions your work plan or your numbers. This type of situation can quickly deteriorate into a nonproductive and stressful discussion. Argue your case with data and facts, not opinions or speculation.
- **HAVE A PLAN B.** Be ready to present alternatives if you are asked to reduce your budget by a certain amount. Anticipate what areas or programs could be reduced and be prepared to discuss the organizational implications of these budget cuts.

Source: Bigas, L. Oliver. 2017. "Preparing and Defending Your Training Budget." TD at Work. *Alexandria, VA: ATD Press.*

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Chapter 5:

Case Study: Comcast's Winning Formula—Impact and Alignment

From her vantage point atop the learning organization at Comcast Cable, it's easy for Martha Soehren to forget how radically different things were only six years ago.

That was before she and her team tapped a hidden wellspring of support from within senior management to help centralize their far-reaching learning operation.

Little has remained the same. Today's Comcast University (CU) has been reconceived for maximum effectiveness—its 550 learning and development professionals divided among five colleges, one for each business function. Its 5 million hours of annual delivered training merely hint at the impact it is now making on the company's business.

Most importantly, the learning enterprise is supported by a powerful governance structure created to help drive the learning agenda and align outcomes with business metrics. Participants include Comcast Cable's chief operating officer, who is firmly committed to running operations with a talented and well-trained workforce.

And Soehren? She is no longer Comcast Cable's chief learning officer, her title back then. She is senior vice president and chief talent development officer, an expanded role she claims has made a profound difference in the university's ability to provide impact and meet expectations.

Here's the story.

"It's about the connection of assessing talent, completing the succession planning, and helping with internal talent mobility. Those are my three key functions."— **SOEHREN**

First, fundamental changes

Philadelphia-based Comcast is a global media and technology company with two primary businesses: Comcast Cable and NBCUniversal. Comcast Cable is one of America's largest providers of video, high-speed Internet, and phone products. NBCUniversal, which the company acquired in 2011, has an array of broadcast and cable TV networks, film studios, theme parks, digital properties, and other assets. The cable business is run through three operating divisions divided into 18 regions.

In 2009, as head of Comcast's then decentralized corporate university, Soehren held limited authority over the unit. "I had accountability for L&D, but not the responsibility for it," she says. During a conversation on the subject with her HR supervisor, Soehren voiced her simple philosophy about learning—that a consistent learner experience drives a consistent customer experience, and that's what the cable business is about. She suggested it was time to emphasize this priority.

The discussion ultimately led to a decision by senior management to centralize CU's operations. But to make that happen, Soehren and her team needed to devote a full year to formulating a centralized learning model, presenting its business case to senior leaders, and creating a broad-based transformation team.

Soehren also understood that success of its model depended on the creation of the powerful governance structure that would, among other things, create trust and credibility among Comcast business units concerning the university's response to training needs. With support from Comcast Cable's chief operating officer

Dave Watson, the university created a top-level advisory board called the National Executive Learning Council (NELC). This group drives learning that is strategically aligned with business objectives.

The council's members include the presidents of the company's three divisions and executive vice presidents of products and functions, among others. Watson and Soehren are co-chairs of the council, which meets quarterly.

Another fundamental change was a decision by HR leadership in 2012 to fold the talent management function into the L&D team's domain, empowering the university to manage the entire life cycle of talent development within Comcast Cable, from assessment to development to movement.

"I think that having talent management linked to talent development and L&D, and having them all under one umbrella, is the ideal way to ensure that we can identify, grow, develop, promote, and retain really great people in our organization," Soehren explains.

A Finely Tuned Process

To suggest that CU seized and ran with its new talent responsibilities is an understatement. "When I took over this function three years ago, it was handed to me in three binders," says Soehren. "Today it's a systematic and finely tuned process for assessing our talent and managing succession planning for the enterprise through very robust talent management reviews."

Talent development initiatives include boot camps for high-potential employees, various leadership forums, and an executive leadership advancement program for high potentials.

Reflecting on a just-completed slate of annual executive talent management reviews, Soehren notes that almost every assessment included participation by Watson or the cable division president. "It doesn't get any better than that," she boasts.

How does Soehren define her new CTDO duties? "It's about the connection of assessing talent, completing the succession planning, and helping with internal talent mobility. Those are my three key functions." For example, she says, whenever an executive-level vacancy opens at the company, the CU team works to identify qualified internal employees based on talent assessments and discussions.

Succinct Expectations

Watson agrees that Comcast has found a winning formula with the realignment of CU under executive council oversight. "We are indeed in a fast-paced, ever-changing environment," he says. "Having a well-trained and focused organization at every level, Comcast University helps us drive the focus around our key priorities."

He identifies his two principal priorities as alignment of training around business goals, and impact of L&D on the organization. Watson says the university is continually rated by the council on both expectations. "The council is not bashful. Martha demands that people show up and participate. It's a terrific forum to make sure we're on track on the right things," he explains.

Watson says he values his role as council co-chairman because it keeps him abreast of the dynamic communications field. "It's important to stay vigilant on the effectiveness of company initiatives, and whether course corrections are needed around goals and priorities," he contends. Watson believes that a principal reason for CU's success is Soehren's ability to "think like a general manager," such as stressing scalability and operational consequences of learning initiatives.

His expectations for the university are echoed by Bill Strahan, executive vice president and chief HR officer at Comcast Cable, and Soehren's direct supervisor. "My expectation is that CU will prepare people for practical outcomes that will create a customer experience that is our best product," he says. Strahan adds that to do so, CU must stress agility and appreciate how rapidly the company's external markets are evolving.

Strahan has a ready explanation for the impressive strength of CU's learning function: the "sheer excellence" of the learning work provided and the capability of its CTDO. Strahan also explains that the training profession's "seat at the table" cliché is irrelevant at Comcast. "Martha doesn't just have a seat at the NELC table, Martha is the table," he says. "The council participants come to Martha to engage in a disciplined, organized, and team-oriented way with her work. Her work is essential to how we run the business."

Soehren's own expectations for her department are equally succinct: "My [top] expectation of our team is that we impact the customer experience in a positive way with everything we do, whether it's developing our leaders or developing our frontline employees—those employees who impact the customer experience either face-to-face or over the phone."

It's All About Impact

The strongest possible emphasis on impactful L&D initiatives, each one carefully measured by key performance indicators, has been the cornerstone of the National Executive Learning Council's agenda since day one. To emphasize that priority, every one of CU's people leaders is required to submit two impact stories each year. Last year alone, CU issued 91 stories.

Three learning initiatives stand out for their ingenuity, their ability to address serious pain points, and their impact on the company's operations.

LEARNING NUCLEUS. Comcast call centers sometimes struggled to meet personnel demands because of high turnover and a sluggish onboarding pipeline that required six weeks of classroom instruction. The business unit complained that the training was slow and inefficient. Following discussions in the council, the university decided to revamp the onboarding process. Out went the classroom-based training. In came a self-paced, self-directed curriculum delivered on an iPad at a learning hub purposely located in the middle of the call center action. The new method, called the Learning Nucleus, is staffed not by a trainer, but by a performance consultant who is available on-call. New hires must complete the course by mastering three sections of material, but are free to decide how much training they require to pass.

Following a proof of concept and two pilots, the Learning Nucleus is being rolled out at other Comcast call centers. In addition, the self-paced onboarding method is helping to fill the talent pipeline while also meeting retention goals. It especially appeals to "digital natives" who like self-paced learning.

CAREER ADVANCE. Another call center learning innovation is aimed at modifying Comcast Cable's approach to customer service. Called Career Advance, it reflects opinions submitted on employee satisfaction surveys concerning turnover rates and difficulties encountered by managers in distinguishing high-performing agents from others.

A diverse team of individuals, including CU, customer care, and HR leaders, was tasked to find a solution that involved the specialized training of agents. So important was their effort that the assignment included direct input from Comcast's board of directors.

The initiative synchronizes the training curriculum of agents around a more targeted method of segmenting customer calls by a customer's commercial profile (such as the number of products purchased and length of tenure) and their specific functional request. Doing so provides the company with talent resources that are fully prepared to serve the needs of the business rather than meet a generic skill set, says Strahan.

PRODUCT DEMONSTRATION LABS. Comcast has introduced a variety of new innovative products and services to customers within its various fields, including its X1 Entertainment Operating System and wireless gateways. The rapid output of products, reports Watson, encouraged frontline employees to ask for the ability to interact with the new products in a more intimate setting than that provided by online, digital, or classroom situations, he says.

Following discussions within the council, the CU team led the building of product demonstration hubs at Comcast facilities throughout the country to showcase products in interactive settings. Some 150 labs have been built so far. It's a "real win for the organization," says Watson, who calls the initiative an example of the CU team's ability to take a concept and drive it through the organization. "Today we're reaping the benefits," he says.

An Eye on the Future

With success stories like these, one might think that Soehren could occasionally relax. Not likely. In the competitive field of telecommunications, there is a pothole seemingly around every bend.

One of those potholes, disappointingly, concerns public opinion surveys that continually rank Comcast Cable among America's least favorite companies. "I have some ownership for that," says Soehren. "Leading the learning organization and being in top management, I take it very seriously."

She says she's confident that CU's talented personnel are doing everything they can to improve the customer experience and make it Comcast's "best product." It's the company's top priority. But she concedes that continued improvement will take additional changes in employee training around products, processes, billing systems, and leadership.

That is just one of the objectives behind a five-year innovation plan called Vision 2020. Other proposed initiatives address the ever-increasing complexity of the business, speed-to-market demands, and the need to be more nimble and economical.

One initiative under way within the university, "Perfect for Me Learning," is an energetic plan to enable every employee to access learning at any time and on any device. It will be made possible by a new integrated platform that will enable all L&D technologies to work seamlessly together.

"What we're working on now is how we can make learning more simplistic—how we can give efficiency back to the business while being more effective in the learning solutions that we deliver," says Soehren. Stay tuned.

Facing Challenges Makes You Stronger

Comcast University's talent development skills were stretched dramatically during the company's 2014 merger attempt with Time Warner Cable. CU personnel were dispatched to identify top talent within Time Warner for possible reassignment into new roles within the merged company.

As Soehren explains it: "For about six months, I along with my team were on planes, trains, and autos every day to visit Time Warner markets, getting to know their talent and working with leaders to learn who were high potentials, and figuring out what this new organization would look like. I helped to design the new organization from a talent perspective."

Comcast withdrew the proposal in April 2015 after the U.S. Justice Department announced its opposition to the deal. But for Soehren and her colleagues, the exercise paid big dividends. "We got to know our own talent even better because we learned that our people can be stretched to do more." She says Comcast has "a much stronger organization today because we got to know our own talent even better during the process."

Source: Harris, P. 2015. "Impact and Alignment." CTDO Magazine, *Winter. Alexandria, VA: ATD Press. Accessed at:* https://www.td.org/magazines/ctdo/impact-and-alignment

COMCAST

Learning Initiatives

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What’s Next for Me?

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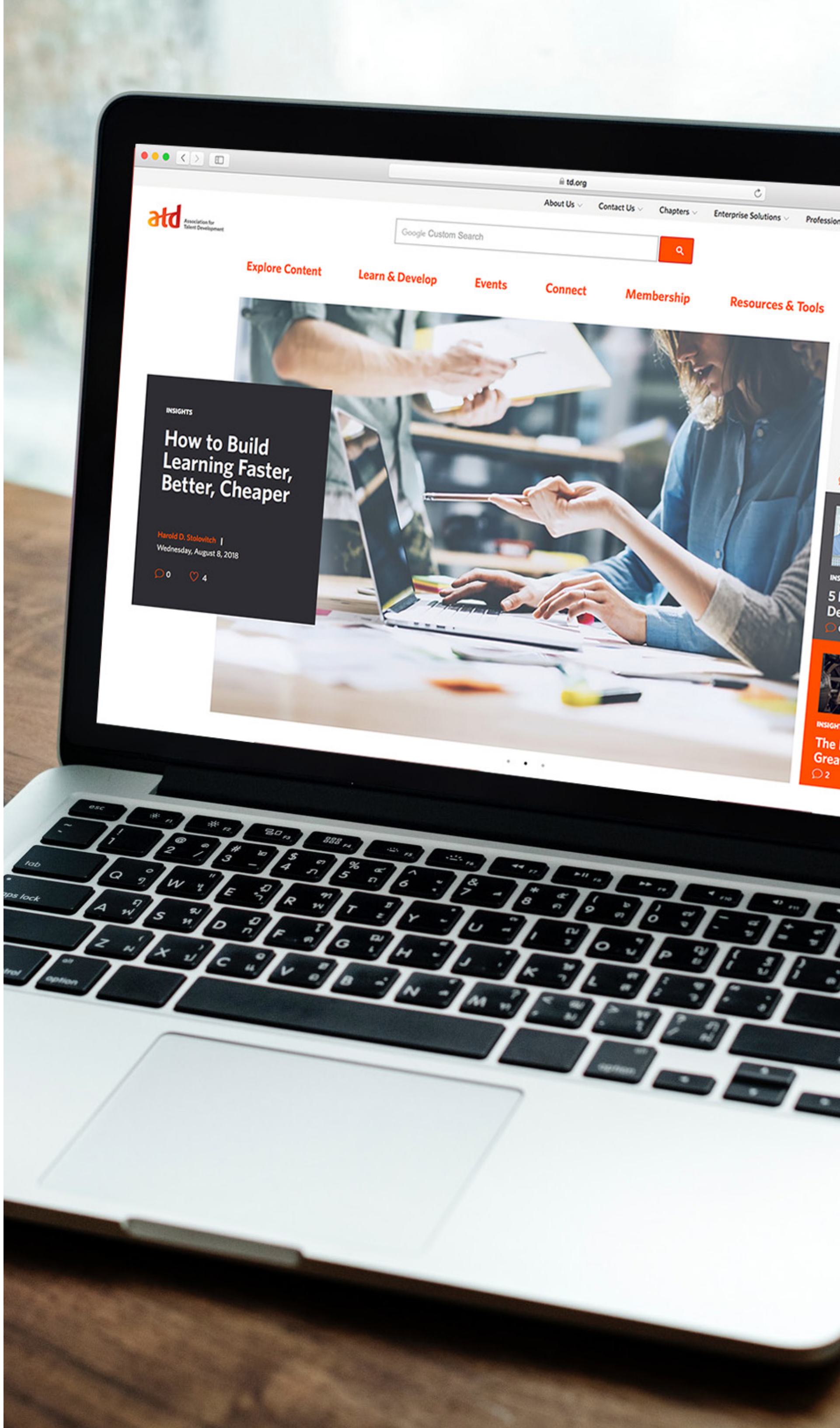
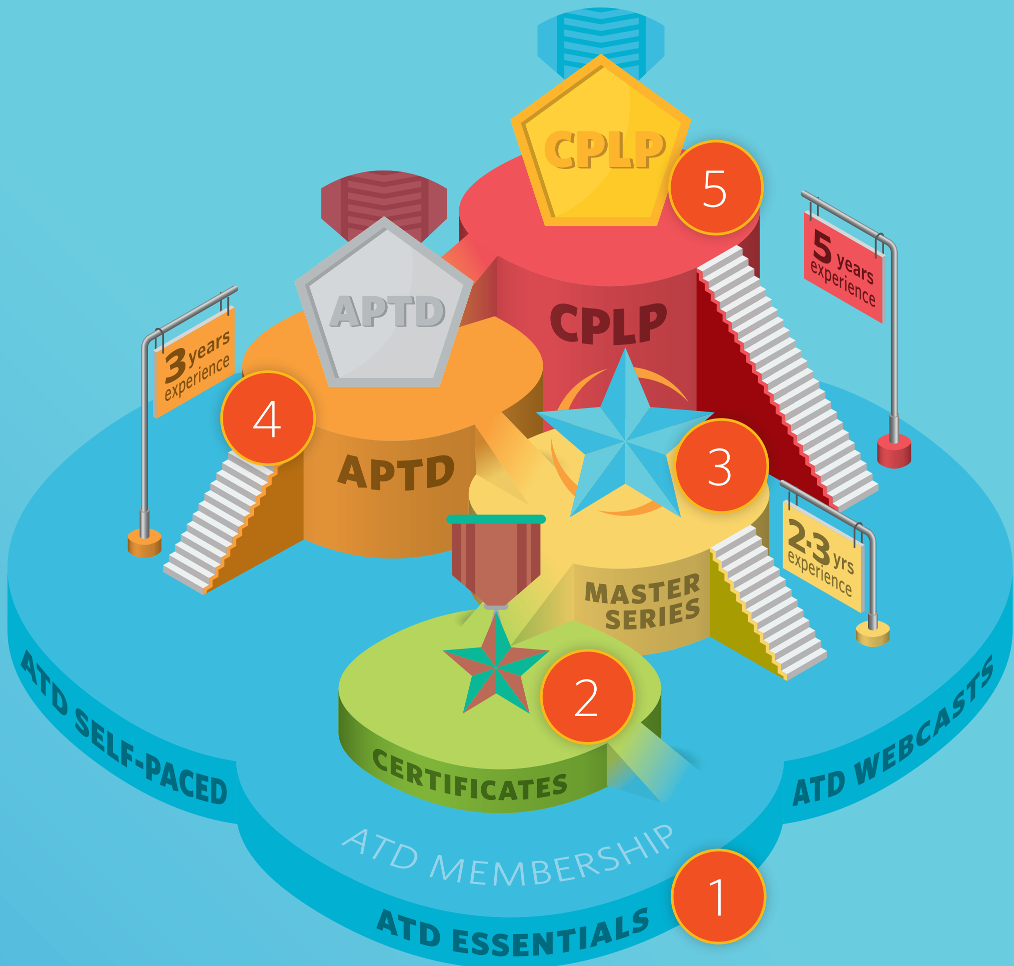


ATD's Stackable Framework allows you to map a career growth plan. You can combine your skills and years of experience to find the path that's right for you, saving you time and propelling your career forward.

ATD Stacked **Career Development Framework**

1. **TACKLE COMMON CHALLENGES:** Essentials of Data Driven Decision Making
2. **EXPAND YOUR SKILLSET:** Measuring Return on Investment Certificate
3. **VALIDATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE:** ATD Master Performance Consultant
4. **GET CERTIFIED — ELEVATE YOUR CREDIBILITY:** Associate Professional in Talent Development (APTD) Certification
5. **GET CERTIFIED — DEMONSTRATE EXPERTISE:** Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) Certification



Depending on your role within the organization and/or your career aspirations, ATD has a variety of learning opportunities to help you professionalize your skills and continue learning.

LEARN MORE

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