

The L&D
Professional's
Handbook to:

FROM
Newbie
TO **Ninja**

The 20 Do's and Don'ts

For Mastering Your L&D Career

Executive Summary

As a newcomer to Learning and Development (L&D), the journey from novice to expert can be filled with both opportunities and challenges. This guide, *Newbie to Ninja: The L&D Professional's Handbook to Mastering Your Career*, is designed to provide you with a comprehensive reference that outlines the critical do's and don'ts for achieving success throughout your L&D career.

This guide incorporates 20 essential actions (10 do's and 10 don'ts) that can either propel you forward or hold you back, depending on how well you manage them. Additionally, it integrates key skills that are vital for your professional growth and offers actionable checklists and critical questions to guide your career trajectory.

By following the insights and strategies presented here, you'll be equipped to avoid common pitfalls, leverage best practices, and ultimately achieve career success as an L&D professional.

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Section One

The 10 Do's For Mastering Your L&D Career

Do Master Instructional Design

Why It's a Must:

Instructional design is the foundation of effective training programs. You need to master it to create learning experiences that are meaningful, engaging, and aligned with both organizational goals and learner needs.

Essential Skills:

- **Needs Assessment:** Understanding the gap between current and desired performance.
- **Learning Objectives:** Developing clear, measurable goals.
- **Curriculum Planning:** Structuring content logically and progressively.
- **Content Creation:** Developing engaging materials using various media.

Best Practices:

- Always conduct a thorough needs analysis before designing a course.
- Use surveys, interviews, and performance data to understand real learning gaps.

Reference:

Mager, R.F. (1997). *Preparing Instructional Objectives: A Critical Tool in the Development of Effective Instruction*. Atlanta: Center for Effective Performance.

Career Maker Story: “The Power of Proper Analysis”

Case:

Sarah never considered herself a “data person,” but when she was tasked with designing a leadership program for junior managers at a large insurance company, she knew she had to start with data. Instead of relying on templates from previous programs, she spent two weeks conducting a rigorous needs analysis. She interviewed key stakeholders, surveyed potential participants, and even sat in on manager-led meetings to observe behavior.

The insights she gathered were eye-opening: the leadership gaps were far different than the textbook leadership skills most companies focused on. What the junior managers needed were soft skills like empathy, conflict resolution, and team motivation. Based on these findings, Sarah designed a program that was tailored specifically to these needs.

Outcome:

The result? The program was a game-changer. Not only did the managers show significant improvement in their interpersonal skills, but the company also saw a 15% reduction in employee turnover in departments led by participants. Sarah’s approach became the gold standard for leadership training across the company, earning her a promotion to Senior L&D Manager within a year.

Do Prioritize Facilitation Skills

Why It's a Must:

Effective facilitation can make or break a training session. A good facilitator doesn't just deliver content; they create an environment where learners are engaged, motivated, and inspired to take action.

Essential Skills:

- **Group Dynamics Management:** Encouraging participation and managing energy.
- **Engaging Presentation Techniques:** Using storytelling and interactive elements.
- **Active Listening:** Responding to participants' needs and concerns.
- **Handling Difficult Participants:** Managing disruptions and turning challenges into opportunities.

Best Practices:

- Practice different facilitation techniques and gather feedback from peers to refine your skills.
- Use storytelling and real-world examples to bring concepts to life and engage participants.

Reference:

Brookfield, S.D. (2015). *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Career Maker Story: “From Training Room to Ted Talk”

Case:

When Jason took on his first large-scale facilitation project—a company-wide diversity and inclusion training for a global tech firm—he quickly realized the stakes were high. The topic was sensitive, and he had to ensure that everyone felt heard and respected, while also managing a wide range of opinions and emotions.

Rather than sticking to a rigid script, Jason encouraged open dialogue, allowing participants to share their experiences and concerns. He used storytelling to illustrate the importance of inclusivity, often drawing on real-world examples from other companies that successfully built diverse teams. When a particularly disruptive participant kept challenging the value of the training, Jason employed active listening, addressing the individual’s concerns head-on in a way that allowed them to feel respected while still moving the session forward.

Outcome:

By the end of the training, even the most resistant participants had come around, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The CEO personally commended Jason for handling such a charged topic with grace and skill, leading to Jason being offered a keynote speaker role at the company’s next annual leadership conference.

Do Understand Adult Learning Principles

Why It's a Must:

Adults learn differently than children. By understanding the principles of adult learning, such as self-directed learning and experiential learning, you can design training programs that meet the specific needs of adult learners.

Essential Skills:

- **Andragogy vs. Pedagogy:** Recognizing differences in how adults and children learn.
- **Experiential Learning:** Applying Kolb's model to create impactful learning experiences.
- **Motivation Theories:** Understanding what drives adult learners.

Best Practices:

- Incorporate hands-on learning activities like simulations and real-world scenarios.
- Use reflection and feedback loops to deepen understanding and reinforce learning.

Reference:

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Career Maker Story: “The Simulation Savior”

Case:

Julia was tasked with developing a customer service training program for a major airline. Rather than relying on traditional role-plays or lectures, she decided to create an immersive simulation where participants had to handle real-time customer complaints in a simulated call center environment.

Drawing from Kolb’s experiential learning theory, Julia designed the training so that participants would go through a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying their learning. After each scenario, participants would debrief, reflecting on what went well and what didn’t, then apply new strategies in subsequent simulations.

Outcome:

The feedback was immediate and overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported feeling much more confident in handling difficult customer interactions, and customer satisfaction scores improved by 20% after the program was rolled out. Julia’s innovative approach earned her the company’s “Innovation in Training” award.

Do Embrace Technology Integration

Why It's a Must:

Technology has become an essential component of modern learning. Leveraging tools like Learning Management Systems (LMS), virtual training platforms, and e-learning authoring tools can enhance the learning experience and improve efficiency.

Essential Skills:

- **Learning Management Systems (LMS):** Managing and delivering content.
- **Virtual Training Platforms:** Conducting and facilitating online sessions.
- **E-learning Authoring Tools:** Creating digital learning materials.
- **Digital Collaboration Tools:** Enhancing learner interaction and engagement.

Best Practices:

- Stay updated on the latest learning technologies and experiment with new tools.
- Use technology not just for convenience, but to enhance the learning experience and make it more engaging.

Reference:

Kapp, K.M. (2012). *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Career Maker Story: “The Simulation Savior”

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Do Implement Assessments and Evaluations

Why It's a Must:

Assessments and evaluations are crucial for determining whether your training programs are effective. Without measurement, you can't demonstrate the value of your programs or identify areas for improvement.

Essential Skills:

- **Creating Effective Assessments:** Designing quizzes, projects, and role-plays.
- **Kirkpatrick's Four Levels:** Applying this model to evaluate training effectiveness.
- **ROI Measurement:** Calculating the financial return on investment.
- **Continuous Improvement Strategies:** Using evaluation data to refine programs.

Best Practices:

- Use both quantitative and qualitative data to measure the effectiveness of your training programs.
- Apply all four levels of Kirkpatrick's model to ensure you capture the full impact of your initiatives.

Reference:

Kirkpatrick, D.L., & Kirkpatrick, J.D. (2006). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Career Maker Story: “The Data-Driven Dynamo”

Case:

Raj worked for a global logistics company, where he was responsible for developing leadership training programs. After running his first few workshops, Raj noticed something troubling: while the workshops were popular and well-attended, he had no concrete data to show their impact.

Determined to change this, Raj dove into Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels of Evaluation and set up a robust measurement system for his next training cycle. He used pre- and post-training assessments, gathered participant feedback, tracked on-the-job behavior changes, and even worked with HR to track promotions and performance improvements.

Outcome:

The results were staggering. Raj was able to demonstrate that his leadership program led to a 25% improvement in team productivity and a 15% increase in employee retention. Armed with this data, he successfully pitched the program for expansion across all regions and was promoted to Global L&D Director within two years.

Do Develop Leadership Theory and Practice

Why It's a Must:

To effectively train leaders, you need a deep understanding of leadership models and the ability to apply those concepts in a practical way. Strong leaders drive organizational success, and you can play a pivotal role in shaping their development.

Essential Skills:

- **Leadership Models:** Understanding situational, transformational, and servant leadership.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Developing self-awareness, empathy, and social skills.
- **Change Management:** Applying Kotter's 8-Step Process.
- **Coaching and Mentoring:** Developing and guiding leaders.

Best Practices:

- Incorporate emotional intelligence training into your leadership programs.
- Use a combination of theory, real-world application, and peer learning to develop effective leaders.

Reference:

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.

Career Maker Story: “The Leadership Architect”

Case:

Amanda was tasked with developing a leadership program for a fast-growing tech startup. The company’s rapid growth had created a need for agile, innovative leaders, but Amanda knew that simply teaching standard leadership principles wouldn’t cut it. She decided to design a program that combined transformational leadership theory with emotional intelligence development.

Amanda brought in external experts, used real-world case studies from leading tech companies, and included practical exercises in emotional intelligence and adaptability. She also introduced a peer-coaching model, where leaders coached each other through challenges.

Outcome:

The impact was immediate. Within six months, the company saw a significant improvement in cross-functional collaboration and a marked decrease in employee burnout. Amanda’s program was credited with playing a critical role in preparing the company for its IPO, and she was named Director of Leadership Development.

Do Cultivate Your Business Acumen

Why It's a Must:

L&D professionals who understand the business they work for are better equipped to align training with organizational goals. Cultivating business acumen allows you to speak the language of executives, build stronger relationships with stakeholders, and demonstrate the tangible value of L&D initiatives.

Essential Skills:

- **Understanding Organizational Structures:** Knowing how different structures impact training needs.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Translating business objectives into learning outcomes.
- **Financial Literacy:** Understanding budgets and ROI.
- **Industry Trends:** Keeping up with L&D best practices and industry dynamics.

Best Practices:

- Regularly meet with business leaders to understand their goals and challenges.
- Learn to communicate the financial and strategic value of your training programs in terms that resonate with decision-makers.

Reference:

Phillips, J.J., & Phillips, P.P. (2007). *Return on Investment (ROI) Basics*. Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.

Career Maker Story: “The Profit Translator”

Case:

Maya, an L&D manager at a large financial services company, was struggling to get buy-in for her training programs. The leadership team didn't see the value in soft skills training, and her budget requests were regularly rejected. Frustrated, she decided to change her approach. Instead of focusing solely on the training content, she began to analyze the business's KPIs and strategic goals.

She identified customer retention as a critical company priority and tied her proposed customer service training program directly to that metric. Maya presented the potential impact of her program in financial terms, projecting a 15% increase in customer retention that would translate into millions of dollars in additional revenue. She created a business case that resonated with the C-suite, and her program was greenlit.

Outcome:

The training program was a resounding success, leading to a 12% improvement in customer retention over the following year. Maya was invited to present her results at the company's board meeting, and shortly thereafter, she was promoted to Director of L&D.

Do Practice Strong Project Management

Why It's a Must:

Training programs often involve multiple stakeholders, tight deadlines, and limited resources. Without strong project management skills, even the best-designed programs can fail. Project management helps ensure that your training initiatives are delivered on time, on budget, and with the desired outcomes.

Essential Skills:

- **Planning and Scheduling:** Creating timelines and managing resources.
- **Stakeholder Management:** Engaging and managing expectations.
- **Risk Assessment:** Anticipating and mitigating potential issues.
- **Resource Allocation:** Effectively using human, financial, and material resources.

Best Practices:

- Develop detailed project plans and track progress rigorously.
- Anticipate risks and create contingency plans to keep the project on course.

Reference:

Kerzner, H. (2017). *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Career Maker Story: “The Rollout Mastermind”

Case:

Chris was responsible for rolling out a new global training initiative at a pharmaceutical company. The stakes were high—this training was part of the company’s compliance with new industry regulations, and failure to deliver could result in hefty fines. Chris knew that meticulous planning would be crucial to the project’s success.

He created a detailed project plan that included timelines, milestones, and a communication schedule for all stakeholders. He identified key risks, such as delays in content approval from regulatory bodies, and built contingency plans to mitigate them. Chris also conducted regular check-ins with his team and stakeholders to ensure everyone was on track and that any issues were addressed promptly.

Outcome:

The training program was rolled out across 12 countries within the deadline, ensuring the company’s compliance with the new regulations. Chris’s ability to manage a complex, high-stakes project earned him recognition from the company’s executive team and a spot on the next major global initiative.

Do Hone Data Analysis and Reporting Skills

Why It's a Must:

In today's data-driven business environment, L&D professionals must be able to collect, analyze, and report on training data. These skills allow you to demonstrate the value of your programs and make data-driven decisions to improve learning outcomes.

Essential Skills:

- **Collecting and Interpreting Data:** Understanding different data collection methods.
- **Creating Meaningful Reports:** Presenting data in a way that informs decision-making.
- **Data Visualization:** Using charts and graphs effectively.
- **Driving Decision-Making:** Leveraging data to improve training outcomes

Best Practices:

- Collaborate with data analysts to collect and interpret relevant metrics.
- Use data visualization techniques to create compelling reports that demonstrate the impact of your programs.

Reference:

Phillips, J.J., & Phillips, P.P. (2016). *Handbook of Training Evaluation and Measurement Methods*. New York: Routledge.

Career Maker Story: “The Metrics Maestro”

Case:

At a leading retail chain, Melissa had been running a popular sales training program for years. But while anecdotal feedback from participants was positive, there was no concrete data to show whether the program was having a real impact on sales performance. Recognizing this gap, Melissa decided to introduce data analytics into her evaluation process.

She partnered with the company’s analytics team to track key metrics like sales growth, customer satisfaction, and employee retention among participants. She also conducted pre- and post-training assessments to measure knowledge acquisition. With these data points, she created comprehensive reports that demonstrated a clear correlation between the training and a 20% increase in sales performance within the first quarter after training.

Outcome:

Armed with this data, Melissa was able to secure additional funding for the program and expand it to all sales teams nationwide. Her data-driven approach also earned her a promotion to Director of Sales Training.

Do Continuously Develop Soft Skills

Why It's a Must:

As an L&D professional, your technical knowledge is only part of the equation. Your success also depends on your soft skills—your ability to communicate effectively, adapt to changing circumstances, build relationships, and manage your time. These skills will not only make you a more effective trainer but also help you navigate your career and achieve long-term success.

Essential Skills:

- **Communication:** Articulating ideas clearly and effectively.
- **Networking:** Building and maintaining professional relationships.
- **Adaptability:** Responding to changes and unexpected challenges.
- **Time Management:** Prioritizing tasks and managing deadlines effectively.

Best Practices:

- Continuously assess and improve your soft skills through self-reflection and professional development.
- Actively seek out opportunities to network, build relationships, and expand your influence.

Reference:

Carnegie, D. (1936). *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Career Maker Story: “The Connector”

Case:

Jennifer had always been great at designing content, but early in her career, she struggled with networking and building relationships with stakeholders. She realized that to advance in her career, she needed to focus on her interpersonal skills. Jennifer began attending industry conferences and networking events, where she made valuable connections with peers and mentors. She also took a communication skills course to improve her public speaking and presentation abilities.

Over time, Jennifer’s soft skills began to shine through. She built strong relationships with key stakeholders, who became champions for her training initiatives. Her improved communication skills also made her a sought-after facilitator, and she was invited to speak at several company events.

Outcome:

Jennifer’s ability to connect with others and communicate effectively led to rapid career advancement. She was promoted to Head of Learning and Development within five years and became known as a thought leader in her field.

Section Two

10-point Checklist for Career Success

CHECKLIST

Career Builders Do's

- ☐ 1. **Set Clear Objectives:** Ensure every training program has specific, measurable, and achievable goals.
- ☐ 2. **Know Your Audience:** Tailor your content to meet the diverse needs of your learners.
- ☐ 3. **Follow the ADDIE Model:** Use a systematic approach to training design and development.
- ☐ 4. **Use Diverse Materials:** Incorporate various learning resources to engage different learning styles.
- ☐ 5. **Iterate Your Design:** Continuously refine your content based on feedback and testing.
- ☐ 6. **Balance Theory and Practice:** Provide practical applications for every theoretical concept.
- ☐ 7. **Ensure Accessibility:** Design content that is inclusive and accessible to all learners.
- ☐ 8. **Engage with SMEs:** Involve Subject Matter Experts in the content development process.
- ☐ 9. **Foster Continuous Learning:** Stay updated with industry trends and continuously improve your skills.
- ☐ 10. **Leverage Technology:** Utilize the latest learning technologies to enhance your programs.

Section Three

The 10 Dont's For Mastering Your L&D Career

Don't Neglect Business Alignment

Why It's a Don't:

Focusing solely on training content without considering the organization's goals can make your programs irrelevant and ineffective. If your training doesn't address business needs, it will fail to deliver measurable results, and you may struggle to secure support and funding.

Best Practices:

- Always align your training initiatives with the organization's strategic goals.
- Meet regularly with business leaders to stay informed about current priorities and challenges.

Reference:

Phillips, J.J., & Phillips, P.P. (2007). *Return on Investment (ROI) Basics*. Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.

Career Killer Story: “The Ivory Tower Trap”

Case:

Mark was an L&D professional at a large marketing agency, where he was known for creating detailed, content-rich training programs. His pride and joy was a comprehensive marketing strategy course he'd spent months developing. However, Mark had never taken the time to consult with the business leaders to understand what the company actually needed.

When the program launched, it quickly became clear that it wasn't aligned with the company's objectives. The training focused on outdated marketing tactics that were irrelevant to the company's new digital-first strategy. Participation rates were low, and those who did attend complained that the training was a waste of time.

Outcome:

When Mark's program failed to deliver results, his credibility took a hit. The marketing executives cut his budget, and he was passed over for promotion in favor of a colleague who had developed a training program directly aligned with the company's business goals.

Actions:

- **Engage Stakeholders Early:** Meet with business leaders and department heads to understand their strategic objectives, pain points, and the skills their teams need to succeed.
- **Identify Organizational Priorities:** Align the training program with the company's long-term goals and current business challenges to ensure it delivers measurable value.
- **Conduct a Thorough Needs Assessment:** Use surveys, interviews, and performance data to identify gaps in knowledge, skills, and behaviors that the training should address.
- **Tailor Training Objectives to Business Goals:** Translate business objectives into specific, measurable training outcomes that directly support organizational performance.
- **Use Data to Inform Program Design:** Leverage data and analytics to ensure that the training is focused on high-priority areas that will have the greatest impact on business outcomes.

Checklist:

- ☐ Schedule stakeholder meetings to gather insights on business goals and departmental needs.
- ☐ Create a needs assessment survey to collect feedback from employees and managers about current skill gaps.
- ☐ Analyze performance data to identify critical areas for improvement that the training should address.
- ☐ Document business objectives and link them to specific learning outcomes in your training plan.
- ☐ Develop a business alignment plan that tie training initiatives to key performance indicators (KPIs) and company metrics.
- ☐ Review the needs assessment results with stakeholders to ensure alignment and gain approval before designing the training program.

Don't Overcomplicate Training Design

Why It's a Don't:

Complexity can be the enemy of clarity in training design. Overcomplicating your training program with too much information or overly complex content can overwhelm learners and diminish retention. Simplicity and focus are key to creating impactful learning experiences.

Best Practices:

- Focus on delivering clear, actionable content that learners can easily apply.
- Use microlearning techniques to break complex information into digestible chunks.

Reference:

Sweller, J., Ayres, P., & Kalyuga, S. (2011). *Cognitive Load Theory*. New York: Springer.

Career Killer Story: “The Information Overload”

Case:

At a global consulting firm, Paul was tasked with developing a training program for new hires. Eager to impress, he included everything he thought they might need to know—hundreds of slides, extensive reading materials, and dense case studies. Paul's rationale was that more information would make the new hires more competent, faster.

Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect. Participants found the program overwhelming and confusing. They complained that the content was too complex and that there wasn't enough time to absorb all the information. As a result, completion rates were low, and those who finished the course struggled to apply the knowledge on the job.

Outcome:

Paul's training program was quickly scrapped, and the company brought in an external consultant to redesign it. Paul's reputation was damaged, and he found himself sidelined from future high-profile projects.

Actions:

- **Stay Informed of Organizational Shifts:** Regularly communicate with leadership and key stakeholders to understand upcoming changes, such as new technology, processes, or strategic goals, that could impact your training programs.
- **Regularly Review Training Programs:** Periodically evaluate your existing programs to ensure they align with new business priorities, organizational structures, or market trends.
- **Align L&D with Change Management:** Collaborate with change management teams to incorporate training as a key component of organizational change initiatives, ensuring that employees have the skills they need to adapt.
- **Anticipate Future Needs:** Stay proactive by identifying emerging trends and technologies that may influence your industry, and develop forward-thinking programs that prepare the workforce for future changes.
- **Communicate Change Clearly:** Ensure that your training programs include clear communication about how new organizational changes will affect employees' roles and responsibilities.

Checklist:

- ☐ Schedule quarterly meetings with organizational leadership to stay updated on upcoming strategic changes.
- ☐ Review and update training materials at least once a year to ensure alignment with new organizational priorities or changes in industry standards.
- ☐ Incorporate change management strategies into training programs to help employees navigate transitions smoothly.
- ☐ Develop a future-skills training plan that prepares employees for evolving roles, technologies, and processes.
- ☐ Create a feedback loop with employees and managers to assess how well training is preparing them for changes within the organization.
- ☐ Communicate the “why” behind organizational changes in your training materials to help employees understand the importance and impact of the changes on their work.

Don't Ignore Learner Engagement

Why It's a Don't:

Learners who aren't engaged won't retain the material or apply it on the job. Engagement is critical to ensuring that participants are actively learning and motivated to complete the training. Ignoring engagement leads to poor outcomes, low satisfaction, and reduced program effectiveness.

Best Practices:

- Incorporate interactive elements such as discussions, group work, and real-world case studies to keep participants engaged.
- Use storytelling and multimedia to make your training more engaging and relatable.

Reference:

Silberman, M. (2016). *Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips*. New York: Wiley.

Career Killer Story: “The Snooze Fest Setback”

Case:

Jennifer prided herself on creating content-rich training materials, but she often neglected to think about how her sessions would keep participants engaged. In one particular compliance training, she presented a 90-minute lecture, with no interaction, no visuals, and no hands-on activities. Midway through, participants were visibly bored, with some checking their phones or falling asleep.

When the post-training feedback came in, the reviews were brutal. Participants called the session “boring,” “irrelevant,” and “a waste of time.” Worse, compliance scores barely improved, suggesting that no one retained the information.

Outcome:

It took Jennifer months to rebuild her reputation as an effective trainer. She had to redesign the entire program with more engaging activities and interactive elements to salvage the training's effectiveness.

Actions:

- **Create Feedback Mechanisms:** Develop multiple channels for collecting learner feedback, such as post-training surveys, feedback forms, or one-on-one interviews.
- **Analyze Feedback Regularly:** Set up a process to review learner feedback after each training session or program.
- **Prioritize Actionable Feedback:** Focus on identifying patterns and actionable insights from the feedback received to improve future sessions.
- **Close the Feedback Loop:** Communicate to learners how their feedback has been implemented to reinforce that their input is valued.
- **Continuously Improve Based on Feedback:** Use feedback as a key component of your continuous improvement cycle, regularly refining content and delivery methods.

Checklist:

- ☐ Develop a standardized post-training feedback form to gather insights on content, engagement, and facilitation.
- ☐ Collect both quantitative (ratings) and qualitative (comments) feedback to ensure a well-rounded perspective.
- ☐ Review feedback with the L&D team within one week after each session to identify trends and areas for improvement.
- ☐ Update training content or delivery methods based on common feedback patterns.
- ☐ Communicate changes to future participants based on previous feedback to demonstrate responsiveness and encourage future feedback.
- ☐ Follow up with dissatisfied learners to clarify issues and ensure continuous improvement.

Don't Fail to Measure Impact

Why It's a Don't:

Failing to measure the impact of your training programs leaves you without proof that they're effective. Without data, you can't demonstrate value to stakeholders or make necessary improvements. This can lead to your programs being underfunded or deprioritized.

Best Practices:

- Implement post-training assessments and regularly collect data to measure the impact of your programs.
- Use ROI calculations and other metrics to demonstrate the value of your initiatives.

Reference:

Silberman, M. (2016). *Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips*. New York: Wiley.

Career Killer Story: “The Assumption Trap”

Case:

Alex was confident in his workshop facilitation skills. His training sessions were always full, and participants seemed to enjoy them. However, when the CFO asked for data on how the training programs were impacting performance and productivity, Alex realized he had nothing concrete to offer. He hadn't implemented any post-training assessments or tracked on-the-job outcomes.

The CFO wasn't impressed. Without measurable results, Alex's programs were deemed non-essential, and his department's budget was slashed. His colleague, who had rigorously tracked ROI on her leadership training programs, was given priority funding instead.

Outcome:

Alex's failure to measure impact cost him credibility and opportunities. His programs were scaled back, and he was passed over for promotion.

Actions:

- **Track Key Metrics:** Define and track important metrics such as learner engagement, course completion rates, knowledge retention, and behavior change post-training. These will provide measurable insights into the program's effectiveness.
- **Use Pre- and Post-Assessments:** Conduct assessments before and after the training to measure knowledge gained, skill improvement, or behavior changes as a direct result of the program.
- **Leverage Learning Management System (LMS) Analytics:** Use LMS reporting tools to analyze learner performance data, including time spent on modules, quiz scores, and engagement patterns.
- **Correlate Training Data with Business Outcomes:** Work with relevant departments to link training performance data with business metrics such as productivity, revenue growth, employee retention, and customer satisfaction.
- **Present Data to Stakeholders:** Create clear, visually compelling reports using charts and dashboards to present the impact of training initiatives to stakeholders, demonstrating ROI and making the case for continued investment in L&D programs.

Checklist:

- ☐ Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with both training objectives and business goals.
- ☐ Develop a pre- and post-assessment plan to evaluate learner progress and skill improvement.
- ☐ Set up regular analytics reviews using LMS tools or other data collection methods to track learner engagement, completion rates, and feedback.
- ☐ Analyze how well training correlates with desired business outcomes such as increased productivity, sales, or employee retention.
- ☐ Create a data-driven impact report that summarizes program performance and communicates the ROI of your L&D initiatives to stakeholders.
- ☐ Use feedback and analytics to refine and improve future training programs based on what the data reveals.

Don't Resist Technology Adoption

Why It's a Don't:

Resisting new technologies can leave your training programs outdated and less effective. The L&D field is constantly evolving, and failing to embrace technological advancements means missing out on opportunities to improve learning outcomes and efficiency.

Best Practices:

- Stay current with learning technologies and be open to experimenting with new tools.
- Regularly update your training programs to incorporate the latest tech advancements.

Reference:

Rosenberg, M.J. (2006). *Beyond E-Learning: Approaches and Technologies to Enhance Organizational Knowledge, Learning, and Performance*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Career Killer Story: “The Change-Resistant Casualty”

Case:

Mike had been running the same leadership program for five years at a large automotive company. When a new CEO announced a shift to a more agile, innovation-focused culture, Mike insisted that his traditional in-person program was still relevant. He refused to adopt new technology, arguing that leadership principles were timeless.

Meanwhile, other L&D professionals in the company began experimenting with virtual reality (VR), gamification, and e-learning tools. When the CEO pushed for a company-wide shift to digital training, Mike found himself out of step with the company's vision. His program was phased out, and external consultants were brought in to design a more modern approach.

Outcome:

Six months later, Mike's role was eliminated as the company embraced digital learning solutions. His refusal to adopt new technologies left him behind, while his more tech-savvy colleagues thrived in the new environment.

Actions:

- **Create Post-Training Resources:** Develop supplementary materials such as job aids, quick reference guides, or FAQs to help learners apply their new skills on the job.
- **Schedule Follow-Up Sessions:** Plan check-ins, follow-up workshops, or Q&A sessions to reinforce learning and provide opportunities to address challenges learners may face after the initial training.
- **Implement Mentorship Programs:** Pair learners with experienced mentors or coaches to provide ongoing guidance and feedback as they apply their new skills.
- **Monitor Skill Application:** Work with supervisors to track how effectively learners are applying the skills in real-life scenarios and provide additional resources where needed.
- **Provide Continuous Access to Learning Materials:** Ensure that learners have access to training materials, recordings, or an online learning portal for future reference.

Checklist:

- ☐ Develop a set of post-training job aids or cheat sheets that learners can refer to while applying new skills.
- ☐ Schedule a 30-60-90-day follow-up session to reinforce learning and check on the application of skills.
- ☐ Create a feedback loop with managers to track how well learners are applying new skills on the job.
- ☐ Set up a mentorship or peer-coaching program to provide learners with ongoing support.
- ☐ Ensure learners have access to an online knowledge base or community where they can ask questions and find additional resources.
- ☐ Provide a point of contact or a support team that learners can reach out to with post-training questions or challenges.

Don't Overlook Soft Skills Development

Why It's a Don't:

Focusing solely on hard skills and neglecting soft skills can limit your effectiveness as a trainer and a leader. Soft skills like communication, empathy, and adaptability are essential for building relationships, navigating challenges, and creating a positive learning environment.

Best Practices:

- Balance technical training with soft skills development in leadership programs.
- Continuously work on improving your own communication, empathy, and adaptability.

Reference:

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.

Career Killer Story: **“The Technically Brilliant But Isolated Trainer”**

Case:

Rachel was a whiz at designing complex technical training programs. Her courses were known for their depth and rigor, but she struggled to connect with participants on a personal level. She rarely engaged in discussions or made an effort to understand the learners' emotional states. As a result, while her content was strong, her sessions were often described as “dry” and “impersonal.”

When a major reorganization at her company required trainers to play a more active role in leadership development, Rachel's lack of interpersonal skills became a liability. She couldn't build the relationships necessary to lead transformational change, and she was passed over for the role of Director of Learning and Development.

Outcome:

Rachel's technical expertise wasn't enough to propel her to the next level. Her inability to connect with others and lead with empathy held her back in her career.

Actions:

- **Break Content into Smaller Modules:** Divide complex subjects into smaller, digestible chunks of information that are easier for learners to absorb and retain.
- **Implement Microlearning:** Use short, focused learning modules (10-15 minutes each) to deliver essential information without overwhelming learners with too much content at once.
- **Prioritize Key Learning Objectives:** Focus on the “need to know” information first, ensuring that your training addresses the most critical skills and concepts. Provide “nice to know” material as optional supplementary content.
- **Incorporate Spaced Learning:** Allow time between learning sessions for learners to reflect, practice, and apply new knowledge. This improves retention without overloading the brain.
- **Offer Frequent Breaks and Interactive Activities:** During longer training sessions, ensure there are regular breaks and interactive exercises to keep learners engaged without overwhelming them with continuous information.

Checklist:

- ☐ Segment training content into smaller, manageable modules to avoid cognitive overload.
- ☐ Focus on no more than 3-5 key learning objectives per training session to ensure clarity and retention.
- ☐ Use microlearning techniques to deliver focused, bite-sized lessons that are easy to understand and apply.
- ☐ Design training with spaced intervals between sessions to allow time for reflection and application of knowledge.
- ☐ Include breaks or energizing activities in training sessions longer than 60 minutes to maintain engagement and avoid mental fatigue.
- ☐ Provide post-session resources for learners who want to dive deeper into the content at their own pace without feeling overwhelmed during the initial session.

Don't Mismanage Stakeholders

Why It's a Don't:

Failing to effectively manage stakeholders can derail your training initiatives. Stakeholders play a critical role in providing resources, support, and feedback, and mismanaging these relationships can lead to conflicting priorities, lack of buy-in, and project failure.

Best Practices:

- Engage stakeholders early in the training design process and keep them informed throughout.
- Create a communication plan to manage expectations and gather input from all relevant parties.

Reference:

Kerzner, H. (2017). *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Career Killer Story: “The Stakeholder Stonewall”

Case:

Sarah was leading a high-profile training initiative for a major product launch at a tech company. Confident in her design, she moved forward without involving key stakeholders in the planning process. She didn't consult the marketing or sales teams, believing that their input wasn't relevant to her vision.

As the launch date approached, conflicts began to arise. The sales team was frustrated that the training didn't address critical customer-facing issues, while the marketing team felt their messaging wasn't reflected in the materials. Without stakeholder buy-in, the program faced resistance and ultimately fell apart. The product launch suffered as a result.

Outcome:

Sarah's failure to engage key stakeholders cost her the trust of the executive team. She was removed from the project, and the training initiative was handed to a more collaborative colleague.

Actions:

- **Incorporate Interactive Elements:** Use quizzes, polls, discussions, and hands-on activities to engage learners actively during the training.
- **Align Training with Learners' Goals:** Help learners understand how the training benefits them personally by linking it to their career development, job performance, or personal growth.
- **Use Storytelling and Real-World Examples:** Bring learning concepts to life through stories, case studies, and real-world scenarios that are relevant and relatable to the learners' experiences.
- **Foster a Growth Mindset:** Encourage learners to view challenges and mistakes as opportunities for growth, which increases engagement by making learning less intimidating.
- **Gamify the Learning Experience:** Add gamification elements, such as rewards, leaderboards, or badges, to motivate learners and keep them engaged throughout the training process.

Checklist:

- ☐ Design interactive activities for each training session that encourage learner participation and engagement.
- ☐ Tailor content to the learners' personal or professional goals to make the training relevant and meaningful.
- ☐ Use storytelling or case studies to connect abstract concepts to real-world applications.
- ☐ Integrate a growth mindset philosophy by framing challenges as learning opportunities.
- ☐ Incorporate gamification elements like points, badges, or competitions to keep learners motivated and invested in the training.
- ☐ Collect feedback on engagement levels to identify what resonates most with learners and refine your approach based on their preferences.

Don't Neglect Personal Development

Why It's a Don't:

Focusing solely on developing others while neglecting your own growth can stall your career progression. The L&D field is constantly evolving, and staying current with trends and best practices is essential for long-term success.

Best Practices:

- Create a personal development plan and review it regularly to ensure you're continuously growing.
- Attend industry conferences, pursue relevant certifications, and stay curious about new trends and practices in L&D.

Reference:

Covey, S.R. (1989). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Career Killer Story: “The Stagnant Trainer”

Case:

Tom had been with the same company for nearly a decade. He was comfortable in his role and didn't see the need to pursue new certifications or attend industry conferences. Meanwhile, his colleagues were actively engaging in professional development, earning new qualifications, and expanding their skill sets.

Over time, Tom's once cutting-edge training programs became outdated. His lack of curiosity and reluctance to embrace new methods left him behind. When a restructuring opened up new leadership opportunities in the L&D department, Tom was overlooked in favor of younger, more proactive trainers who had kept their skills current.

Outcome:

Tom's refusal to invest in his own development limited his career growth. While his colleagues advanced, he remained stuck in the same role, eventually becoming irrelevant as the industry evolved around him.

Actions:

- **Stay Informed About Emerging Technologies:** Continuously explore new technologies, such as e-learning platforms, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), that can enhance the learning experience.
- **Integrate Technology Strategically:** Use technology to complement and enhance traditional learning methods rather than replacing them entirely. For example, use VR for simulations, or AI for personalized learning paths.
- **Leverage Learning Management Systems (LMS):** Use LMS platforms to manage, track, and analyze learner progress, ensuring the delivery of consistent and measurable learning experiences.
- **Embrace Mobile Learning:** Ensure your training programs are accessible on mobile devices to facilitate on-the-go learning and cater to different learning preferences.
- **Use Data Analytics to Optimize Training:** Utilize analytics tools within e-learning platforms to gather insights into learner behavior and performance and use this data to improve training design and delivery.

Checklist:

- ☐ Research new learning technologies at least quarterly to stay current with trends and advancements in the field.
- ☐ Pilot test new technologies (e.g., VR, gamification tools, AI) to assess their potential impact on learner engagement and knowledge retention.
- ☐ Implement a Learning Management System (LMS) to track learner progress and collect data on program effectiveness.
- ☐ Ensure all training materials are mobile-friendly to increase accessibility and cater to remote or mobile learners.
- ☐ Use analytics from learning platforms to gather data on learner engagement, completion rates, and knowledge gaps for continuous improvement.
- ☐ Solicit feedback from learners and stakeholders on the effectiveness of technology used in training and make adjustments as needed.

Don't Deliver Inconsistent Training Quality

Why It's a Don't:

Inconsistent training quality can damage your credibility as an L&D professional. Learners expect a certain standard, and if the quality of your programs varies too much, it will reflect poorly on you and your department.

Best Practices:

- Develop and adhere to instructional design standards to ensure consistency across all programs.
- Create a quality assurance process that includes peer reviews and feedback from participants.

Reference:

Pfeiffer, J.W., & Jones, J.E. (1975). *The Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*. San Diego: University Associates.

Career Killer Story: “The Inconsistent Trainer”

Case:

Emily was responsible for delivering leadership training at a major retail company. While some of her sessions were well-received, others felt rushed and underprepared. She often skipped important content to fit everything into the allotted time, and the quality of her materials varied depending on her workload.

When participants from different regions compared notes, they realized that they weren't all receiving the same quality of training. Complaints began to filter back to HR, and Emily's inconsistent performance became a major issue.

Outcome:

Emily's lack of consistency led to a loss of trust from both participants and the HR team. She was eventually removed from the leadership training program, and her department implemented a rigorous quality assurance process to prevent similar issues in the future.

Actions:

- **Conduct a Learner Analysis:** Understand your audience's varying skill levels, learning styles, and job roles before designing your training programs.
- **Tailor Content for Different Learning Styles:** Incorporate a mix of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning methods to accommodate diverse learner preferences and ensure higher engagement.
- **Personalize Learning Paths:** Use adaptive learning technologies or assessments to create customized learning paths that focus on the unique needs and goals of individual learners.
- **Segment Learners by Experience Level:** Divide participants into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels to ensure the training content is appropriate for each group's knowledge and skill set.
- **Use a Blended Learning Approach:** Combine self-paced e-learning with instructor-led sessions, group activities, or hands-on workshops to offer a variety of learning experiences suited to different preferences.

Checklist:

- ☐ Conduct a pre-training assessment to evaluate learners' skill levels and needs before designing the program.
- ☐ Create multiple versions of training content (e.g., basic, intermediate, advanced) to cater to different learner proficiency levels.
- ☐ Incorporate diverse instructional methods (e.g., videos, interactive activities, role plays) to engage learners with various learning styles.
- ☐ Use learning analytics and feedback to adjust training programs based on individual progress and learner needs.
- ☐ Offer flexible learning options such as self-paced online modules, in-person workshops, or hybrid models to accommodate various learning preferences.
- ☐ Regularly update training content to reflect the evolving needs of different learner segments, including new hires, experienced staff, and leadership teams.

Don't Resist Organizational Change

Why It's a Don't:

Resisting organizational change can leave your training programs outdated and irrelevant. Organizations are constantly evolving, and L&D professionals must be agile enough to adapt to these changes in order to stay relevant and effective.

Best Practices:

- Stay informed about changes in your organization and industry, and update your training programs accordingly.
- Develop a change management mindset and proactively seek out opportunities to align your programs with the organization's evolving needs.

Reference:

Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Career Killer Story: “The Stubborn Traditionalist”

Case:

When a global media company shifted its focus to digital content, Claire, the company's lead trainer for print media, refused to adapt. She continued to deliver the same training programs she'd been using for years, even as the company's business model evolved around her.

Meanwhile, her colleagues were creating new digital skills training programs that aligned with the company's future direction. Claire, however, remained stubbornly attached to her traditional methods, arguing that print media was still relevant.

Outcome:

When the company restructured, Claire's role was eliminated. Her unwillingness to embrace change had made her training programs obsolete, and she found herself struggling to find a new position in an industry that had moved on.

Actions:

- **Research Cultural Norms:** Take time to understand the cultural backgrounds of your learners, including their values, communication styles, and learning preferences. This will help ensure the training resonates with them and avoids any cultural insensitivity.
- **Localize Training Content:** Adapt examples, case studies, language, and visuals to reflect the local cultures, values, and social norms of the learners. This increases relevance and engagement.
- **Incorporate Culturally Diverse Learning Styles:** Recognize that some cultures may prefer more collaborative learning environments while others might lean toward individual tasks. Tailor the training delivery method accordingly to suit these preferences.
- **Encourage Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** Create opportunities for learners to discuss how cultural differences affect their work and learning, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- **Avoid Stereotyping:** Be mindful of not making assumptions or generalizations about different cultures. Recognize that individual learners may differ within their cultural context.

Checklist:

- ☐ Conduct a cultural needs assessment to identify the key cultural factors that could affect learning methods and content design.
- ☐ Localize case studies and examples to reflect the cultural context of the learners, making the training relevant and relatable.
- ☐ Use diverse instructional methods that cater to a variety of cultural learning preferences, such as collaborative group work or individual reflection time.
- ☐ Review training materials with a local SME (subject matter expert) or cultural advisor to ensure they are culturally appropriate and respectful.
- ☐ Incorporate culturally relevant stories or scenarios to illustrate key learning points and increase engagement.
- ☐ Create an inclusive learning environment by fostering dialogue about cultural differences and their implications in the workplace.

Section Four

Questions to consider during program discovery, design, deployment and optimization phases.

1. Questions for Meetings with Senior Business Leaders:

- What are your department's top 3 priorities for the next quarter?
- Which skills or knowledge gaps are most critical to address in your team?
- How have recent training initiatives impacted your department's performance?
- What upcoming changes or challenges do you anticipate that might require new training?
- How can our L&D initiatives better support your department's goals?

2. Strategic Planning Meetings:

- What long-term organizational goals should our training programs support?
- Which emerging industry trends should we be preparing our workforce for?
- How do you see our company's workforce needs evolving in the next 3-5 years?
- What potential disruptions to our industry should we be considering in our L&D strategy?
- How can L&D contribute to the company's competitive advantage?

3. Stakeholder Check-ins:

- How satisfied are you with the current training programs affecting your department?
- What improvements would you like to see in our training delivery or content?
- Are there any immediate learning needs we should be addressing?

- How well are employees applying what they've learned in recent training?
- What metrics would you find most valuable in assessing training effectiveness?

4. Quarterly Meetings with Strategy Team:

- What major strategic initiatives are planned for the next 6-12 months?
- How might these initiatives impact workforce skills requirements?
- What potential organizational changes should we be preparing for?
- Are there any new markets or products that will require specialized training?
- How can L&D better align with the company's overall strategic direction?

5. Focus Groups with Learners:

- What aspects of our current training programs do you find most valuable?
- What topics or skills do you feel are missing from our current offerings?
- How do you prefer to learn new skills (e.g., in-person, online, on-the-job)?
- What barriers do you face in applying what you learn in training?
- How can we make our training programs more engaging and relevant to your work?

6. Analytics Team Collaboration:

- Which performance metrics are most closely tied to our training initiatives?

- How can we better track the impact of training on employee performance?
- What data do we need to collect to demonstrate ROI on our training programs?
- Are there any patterns or trends in our training data that we should be aware of?
- How can we integrate learning data with other HR and performance data for better insights?

7. HR Partnership Meetings:

- How can we better integrate soft skills development into performance reviews?
- What skills gaps are you seeing across the organization?
- How can our training programs support talent retention and development?
- What feedback are you receiving about our current L&D offerings?
- How can we collaborate to create more comprehensive employee development plans?

8. Innovation Lab Planning:

- What new learning technologies or methodologies should we be exploring?
- How can we create a culture of continuous learning in our organization?
- What experiments in training delivery or content should we prioritize?
- How can we measure the success of our innovation initiatives?
- What resources do we need to support ongoing L&D innovation?

Section Five

Reference Summary

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This comprehensive guide, *Newbie to Ninja: The L&D Professional's Guide to Mastering Your Career*, is designed to be your go-to resource as you navigate the complexities of the L&D field. By following the do's and don'ts outlined in this guide, and by continuously developing the essential skills highlighted here, you will be well on your way to achieving career success and becoming an influential leader in the world of Learning and Development.



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