

21 Strategies To Skyrocket Participation And Learner Engagement

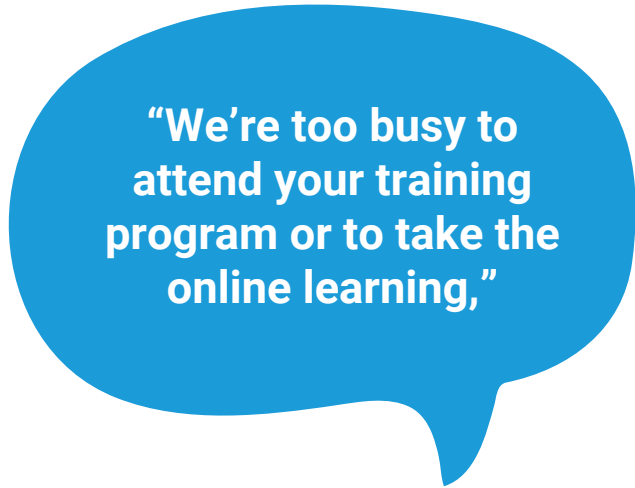


Most employees say....



**“We want growth
and development”**

They also say...



**“We’re too busy to
attend your training
program or to take the
online learning,”**

At LEADx, we've teamed up with and interviewed over one hundred heads of leadership development, and the common challenge is getting busy, overwhelmed employees to actually sign-up, show up, and participate in learning and development (L&D) offerings.

Based on psychological principles of persuasion and behavior change, here are twenty-one ways L&D professionals can maximize attendance and engagement.

1. Gain Manager Support

Nothing will drive engagement and motivation like having a manager who genuinely cares about your training and personal development. Adobe Director of D&I Talent Development, Angela Szymusiak, runs a Women in Leadership program with an impressive 34% promotion rate into Director-level and above positions. After a decade of running and improving this program, Szymusiak found that “increasing interaction with managers” was her most impactful adjustment. Here are three specific ways she increases manager involvement:

She gives her high-potential leaders specific questions to bring up in their one-on-ones. For example:

- "I'd like to learn your best practices on how you do ____."
- "Is there somebody you think who's good at this that you could introduce me to?"
- "Is there feedback you can give me as I apply this new concept?"

She meets monthly with her learners' managers. She fills the managers in on what's happening and how they can best support their employees through the Women in Leadership program. If meeting with your participants' managers isn't realistic, or if you want to bolster that meeting with something physical, use a Pull Through Guide. A Pull Through Guide houses checklist items and critical topics in one clean place for busy managers. Managers can check with the sheet to help participants ground their learnings on the job.

She facilitates an end-of-program, three-way meeting between the high-potential leader, their manager, and their executive coach. The participant shares vital learnings, how they want to continue growing, and how their manager can sustainably support them.

For more detail on the Adobe program,, read:
[How The Adobe Women In Leadership Program Cultivated A 34% Promotion Rate](#)

2. Award Digital Credentials for Full Engagement With Your Program

Digital credentials (i.e., badges and certifications) offer tangible value to learners. Like a degree, learners carry their credentials forever as proof of what they learned.

Digital credentials can serve as a map of ideal engagement with your program; you can specify your own badge criteria by program. For example, to earn a completion badge, learners might be required to:

- complete a self-paced video course
- attend four live group coaching sessions in four months
- complete one micro-mission (i.e., micro action) a week for 8 weeks
- complete an end-of-session reflection

At Grant Thornton, learners could choose between Badge-Earner and No-Badge. To earn a badge, participants had to complete an extensive set of criteria, including components like on-the-job practice, discussions, cohort work, and self-paced learning. The year after the training program, Badge-Earners outperformed Non-Badge-Earners across their top three performance metrics:

- Total billable hours (+1.1%)
- Managed Revenue (+18%)
- Leadership Impact Index (+2%)



Communication Skills
Foundational

For more information on digital badges, read:
[How Digital Badges Motivate And Engage Learners,](#)
[How Grant Thornton LLP Proved The Value Of Their Digital Badges](#)

3. Use the 3-to-1 Model to Focus On Real World Application

Communicate the value of your program by making on-the-job application exercises a significant part of your program (if not the majority). The 3-to-1 model is a powerful way to ensure on-the-job application gets its due attention. Here's how it works: For each formal learning, design and deliver three on-the-job application exercises.

For example, let's say you want your managers to give more effective feedback. Your "curriculum" would become an action learning journey:

- Week 1: Live workshop to learn and practice a feedback framework. For example, a facilitator could teach the B.I.G. model of feedback (Behavior, Impact, Get Agreement).
- Week 2: Participants would ask their team members for feedback (supporting materials could include model emails, discussion guides, and a job aid on how to receive feedback)
- Week 3: Participants would give their team members feedback – but only positive feedback.
- Week 4: Participants would give constructive feedback as appropriate. If they see something, they'll say something.

Rather than "suggesting" these application activities during weeks two through four, you treat this time as more important than week one. You:

- ask for feedback activities to be scheduled
- ask to be cc'd on email communications related to the activities
- require participants to fill out reflection worksheets (what went well, what didn't, what questions do they have about what happened)
- hold follow-up coaching conversations

Here's an example of the 3-to-1 model laid out over six months for New Managers:

LEADx FIRST-LINE LEADERS > Phase 1					
	COMPETENCY	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
MONTH 1 ▶	Self-Awareness Big 5 Personality	Assess	Learn	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching
MONTH 2 ▶	Transition to Manager	Learn	Self-Assess	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching
MONTH 3 ▶	Effective Feedback	Learn	Self-Assess	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching
MONTH 4 ▶	One-on-One Meetings	Learn	Self-Assess	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching
MONTH 5 ▶	Critical Conversations	Learn	Self-Assess	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching
MONTH 6 ▶	Coaching with G.R.O.W.	Learn	Self-Assess	Apply	Reflect Group Coaching

4. Deliver Personalized Nudges

Nudges engage learners by delivering bite-size, personalized, and applicable information. A good nudge concisely reinforces essential information. A great nudge will offer a strategy to apply based on a learner's assessment results or target behaviors.

Here's an example where "Jenny" receives two nudges. The first nudge helps Jenny practice applying her Positivity strength. The second nudge reminds her of her team member's Activator strength and how Jenny should help leverage that strength as a manager.



5. Share Testimonials from Successful Alums

Testimonials provide social evidence of your program's value, grounding it in positive, relatable outcomes. It can be helpful to think of alum testimonials as falling into two types:

- Short: Your goal is to show a relevant title and an impressive result. One sentence loaded with tangible results can work wonders to engage your learners.
- Long: Your goal here is to show a story. The testimonial should describe how a learner used to be and used to behave, then break down what they learned and how it helped them improve.

In either case, avoid vague language and unnecessary rambling. Try to get testimonials that are as clear and concise as possible.

Here's a case example of a long testimonial:

Our Women in Leadership Program helped me connect to my authentic self, find my unique voice, and communicate my value. I was promoted to Director level within one year of this program. By actively participating in this program, I am now part of a community of smart, passionate women for years to come. –Director of Product Development

Here's a case example of a short testimonial:

After working through this program, my team's engagement scores increased by seven points. –Manager of Customer Support

For a few more examples of internal testimonials, read: [Leadership Can Be Learned At Boon-Chapman](#)

6. Follow Up with Participants Individually

Reaching out to participants who no-show or seem to be falling behind can be a highly effective engagement tactic, although also time-consuming. Consider your program, your audience, and how you approach your follow-up. A reminder of the benefits of the program and sincere offers of help can go a long way to getting them back on track. If participants are in a nomination-based program, they can be reminded that they took a slot that many others were fighting for.



7. Deliver Micro-Learning in the Flow of Work

If employees claim they are “too busy” to attend your workshops or to complete multi-hour eLearning programs, change the delivery to bite-size modules delivered in the flow of work.

At Sam’s Club, store Associates spend all their hours on the floor in front of customers. Instead of pulling Associates off the floor for days-long training sessions, they delivered micro-learning on handheld devices. Since Associates use their phones to do their job (i.e., check inventory and availability of products), incorporating micro-learning into their workflow was natural and highly effective. Plus, with the content available on their phones, Associates could pull up learning on-demand to recall valuable strategies and ideas.



For more detail on Sam’s Club’s learning delivery, read: [How The CPO Of Sam’s Club Develops Great Leaders](#)

8. Design and Launch an Ongoing Communication Campaign

Your goal with internal communication and marketing is to be clear, quick, and concise. Don't just deliver a stream of pesky reminders that your participants inevitably tune out. Instead:

- Communicate on a platform your learners use regularly (Slack, MS Teams, etc.).
- Be clear and concise.
- Communicate consistently but prudently (you don't want communications to become noise).
- Be creative. For example, you might deliver relevant metrics about how "learners who excel at this skill see a 20% increase in engagement from their teams." Or, you might have senior leaders record a video on the importance of your training.

The Gold Standard for Internal Communication: Your internal communication helps spark peer learning. Your participants respond to "drips," discuss challenges, and share their experiences.

The Platinum Standard for Internal Communication: Your internal communication network becomes a platform and community for ongoing learning. Alums continue to participate and practice your monthly topics (and sometimes those topics become especially relevant to them at a specific moment). Learners and alums discuss ideas and strategies, share experiences, and establish a long-term support network.

For an example of internal communication that achieves the Platinum Standard, read: [How The Adobe Women In Leadership Program Cultivated A 34% Promotion Rate](#)

9. For Professional Services Audiences: Make Training Billable

Since many professional services employees bill their hours, they can be a challenging audience to engage. Each hour of training can feel to them as though it's at direct odds with their performance.

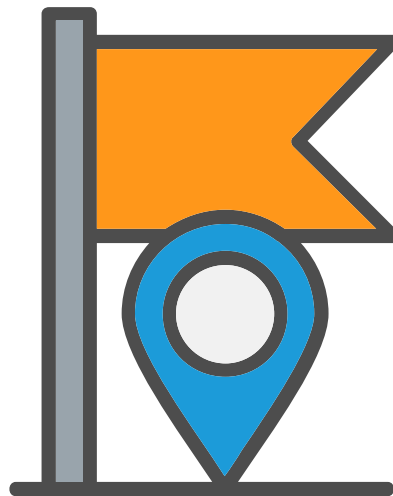
Duck Creek Technologies had a simple yet brilliant solution: They worked with their CEO to make it so professional services employees could record up to three hours of training per week as billable.

For more detail on Duck Creek's approach to training and engagement, read:
[How Duck Creek Enabled 1600 Leaders To Soar As Leaders In Just One Year](#)

10. Add Monthly or Quarterly Coaching to Your Program as “Checkpoints” in the Learning Journey

Coaching helps establish engaging checkpoints throughout your learners’ journeys. If learners know they have a monthly or quarterly coaching session around what they’re learning, they’ll be much more likely to complete work between sessions.

As a bonus, monthly coaching (one-on-one or group) also gives learners an opportunity to talk through challenges they face as they apply what they learned. This helps bridge the gap between “ideas” and “practicality.” Group coaching, which is the most cost-effective way to add coaching, also has the added benefit of building a peer network and letting learners hear about each others’ challenges and learnings.



11. Use Metrics: Test, Re-Test, and Pulse in Between



Measuring your leaders' performance before training shows them exactly where they stand to improve. Measurement midway through training helps show leaders their progress (or lack thereof). And measurement at the end of the program adds an objective form of accountability.

For example, a CAT Scan (Cultural Analysis of a Team) survey shows leaders how their team is doing in terms of team culture and engagement. When your leader sees specific areas for improvement, they feel more engaged and motivated to improve on those behaviors. They see a metric tied to a particular behavior they need to impact. A test-retest process can also work well with an engagement survey, 360 assessment, or even a self-assessment.

For more consistent measurement throughout your program, use pulse surveys to check progress. For example, if your leader's goal is to have more effective one-on-one meetings, you can pulse their direct reports halfway through the program to ask, "Have you had a good conversation with your manager in the last two weeks?"

Metrics are a more objective form of accountability that helps remind leaders of the purpose of training. Metrics help leaders put a number on their improvement.

For more information on using pulse surveys to motivate learners, read: [How UiPath's CPO Uses An Outside-In Mentality To Develop Leaders](#)

12. Assign Senior Learning Champions or Mentors

Champions and mentors help ground your training in reality and signal its importance. Champions are senior leaders who go through the training program alongside learners. Champions chime in with stories and examples of how they have applied learnings on the job.

Similarly, you can pair senior leaders with your learners to have monthly or quarterly mentorship meetings. In these meetings, senior leaders act as mentors. Mentors ask learners about critical skills and behaviors, and then mentors share examples of how they apply those skills on the job.

For more detailed examples of mentorships, read:
[Leadership Development At Republic First Bank](#)
[How A Soldier In The U.S. Army Leverages Mentorships To Build Great Leaders](#)

13. Involve Your CEO and C-Level

Senior executive advocacy signals your program's value. Five minutes of a senior executive's time can create an outsized impact. Try to ask your CEO or executive to:

- Kick off your program with a five-minute speech.
- Record a video emphasizing the value of your training to send out to learners.
- Check on training program progress with other leaders during weekly meetings.

The idea is to ask for something that takes minimal time but helps you a lot.

If you have substantial senior buy-in already, you might ask for deeper involvement. At Keysight Technologies, for example, their CEO holds a yearly meeting where top company leaders discuss company strategy and define the leadership behaviors needed to deliver on that strategy. They take those behaviors and cascade training content through the company.

For an example of CEO-led leadership development, read:

[At Keysight Technologies, Leadership Development Is Focused On 'Strategy Activation'](#)

[From the CEO Down And From The Frontline Up: How ZoomInfo Develops Great Leaders](#)

14. Make Sure Your Content Is Relevant and Applicable

This strategy sounds like common sense, but it isn't practiced often enough. Remember to consistently show the relevance and applicability of your program. Ideally, your training is relevant and applicable on an individual level and a company level. To hit both, connect your initiative to the following:

- Company goals, objectives, and initiatives
- WIIFM: "What's in it for me."

Once you know the relevance and applicability on both the individual and the company level, remember to incorporate it early and often.



15. Sign a Pledge or Contract

Group pledges can help inspire your learners and motivate them to drive change together. At a leading restaurant chain, for example, learners all sign one giant banner at the start of the program to commit to learning. The first person to sign the banner is their CEO (a nice combination with strategy #13). They display the banner in their office throughout the program.

A contract can also be a more personal, reflective tool. An effective contract may also serve as a reflective tool that helps your learners consider the benefits of training and the potential barriers to their success. By considering the likely benefits and challenges, your participants will build a more realistic vision of success.

Here's a sample of a reflective contract signed only by the learner:

> DEVELOPING OTHERS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

> BEHAVIORAL CONTRACT

> Growth and development is a top driver of employee engagement, and organizations need people to develop over time to fulfill ever-changing role requirements. Beyond traditional learning and development programs, leaders have a key role in guiding talent on their career paths and giving them critical feedback and performance advice along the way.

Research indicates that making a contract with yourself—as silly as it may seem—dramatically increases the likelihood that you will take action, build habits, and reach your goals.

1.1 BENEFITS: How will I personally benefit by improving in this area? How will my team members benefit? How might my organization benefit?

1.2 BARRIERS: What might stop me from making progress in this area, and how can I overcome these barriers?

TIP! Schedule a weekly recurring meeting on your calendar to spend time learning about this topic. Even a 15-minute meeting once a week, ideally scheduled early in the morning, will help you to stay on track.

I will complete the action items in my coaching plan and be mindful of the above information.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

© 2021 LEADx, Inc. All rights reserved. LEADx is a registered trademark of LEADx, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Product specifications are subject to change without notice.

LEADx

16. Generate Buzz around Your Program With Raffles, Prizes, and Awards

Get creative with prizes and awards to generate buzz around learning. At a leading restaurant chain, for example, their leadership development team offers raffles with prizes that range from airplane tickets to lunch with the CEO. It's a simple way to boost engagement and get people talking about learning.



17. Channel Grassroots Energy to Foster a Culture of Learning

Ironically, often people's interest in programs increases when it's not delivered by HR or L&D. Enlisting respected team members with different expertise can increase credibility and interest. Consider employee-led TED Talks, more official employee-led learning, or "upskilling" from within. Similarly, peer-learning circles or peer-coaching circles are an affordable, scalable way to develop team members without structured classes.

The idea on your end is simple. Create a platform or system to help employees express topics of interest and to enable subject matter experts to share their expertise.

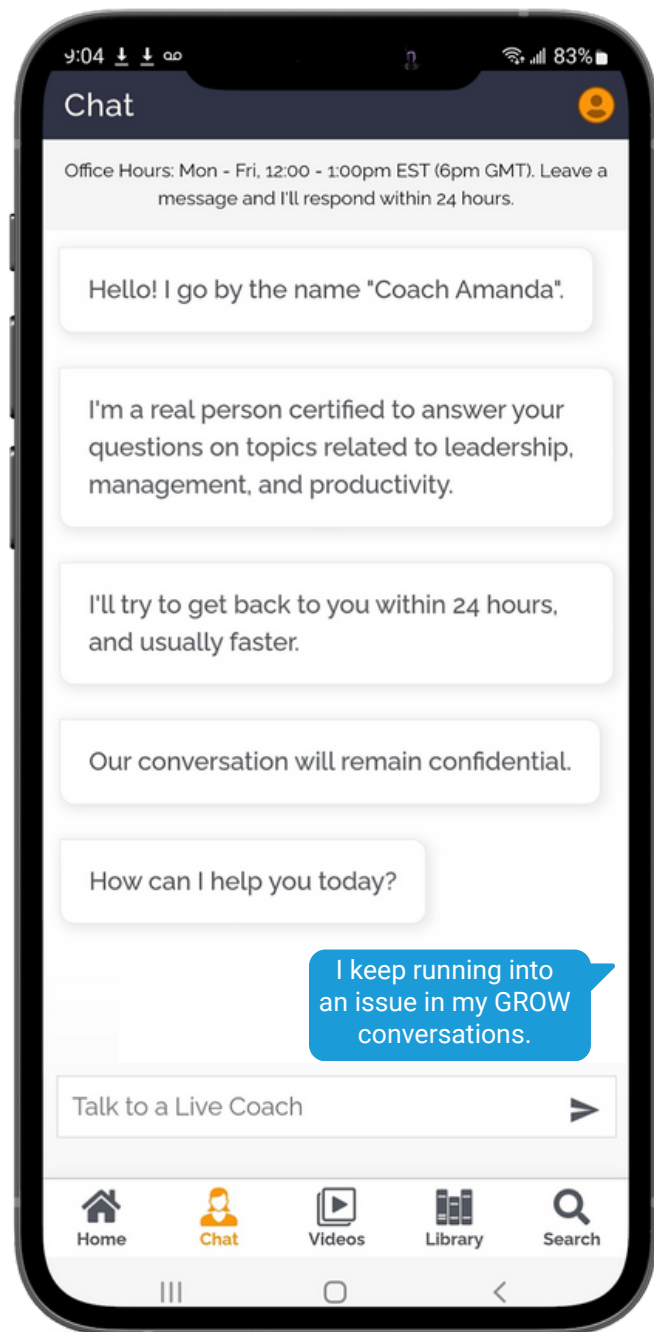
For examples of grassroots learning, read:

[Seven Valuable Lessons in Leadership Development from AML RightSource](#), specifically #5 about their internal TED talk platform.

[Four Strategies Guidewire Uses To Develop Great Leaders](#), specifically #3, about their grassroots approach to fostering a culture of learning.

18. Hold “Office Hour” Style Coaching

An “office hour” approach fosters engagement by addressing real problems first, then learning second. Employees come in with questions and challenges they’re facing. A coach or trainer then helps solve that problem using the learning frameworks from your program. At LEADx, we built out a live messaging system where learners can send messages directly to expert coaches asking about problems they’re facing as they apply what they learned.



19. Make Your Training **TIMELY**

Grab your learners' attention by training them around a specific, highly-relevant challenge. At Nestlé, for example, they train at the moment someone transitions from individual contributor to people leader. They simulate and train around the most common challenges faced during that transition. For instance, how do you manage the person who was your peer a week ago?

For more detail on timely training, read:
[How Nestlé Personalizes Leadership Development For 30,000 Leaders](#)

20. Tailor and Customize Training at the Team Level

Specific teams and departments may benefit from training around particular skills. For instance, a customer care team may struggle with high-stakes conversations. By pinpointing that problem and building training around it, you almost guarantee engagement. Tailoring at the team level ensures that every learner sees the connection between training and their performance.

For an example of “diagnosed” learning, read: [Six Key Ingredients to Culture-infused Learning At Wix, specifically #6.](#)

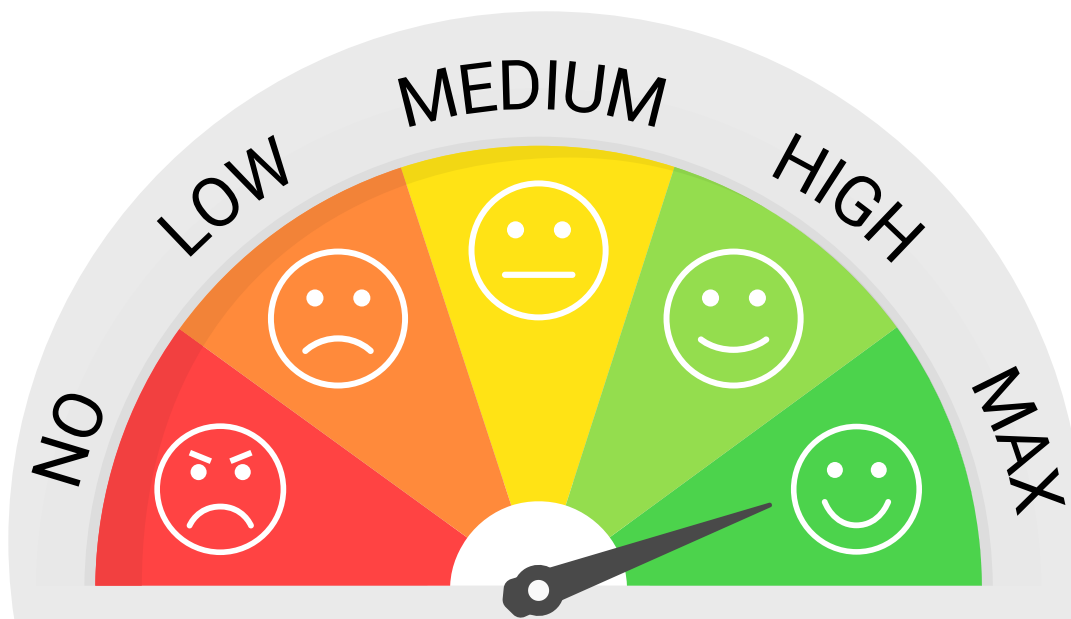
21. Create Content in Response to Need Areas

During your training, look for areas where learners struggle to grasp or apply an important concept or skill. Then, build out guides, infographics, and video lessons that address that specific challenge.

For an example of “diagnosed” learning, read: [Six Key Ingredients to Culture-infused Learning At Wix](#), specifically #5.

Apply These Strategies One at a Time

Rather than try to implement all twenty-one at once, we recommend picking one or two that best fit your audience, budget, resources, and style. Commit to making that strategy work. Once that strategy becomes a fixture in your program, choose another and commit. Before long, you'll have a set of tactics that spark engagement sewn into the fabric of your program.



Build and Sustain Behavior Change with the LEADx Development System

Looking to build, refine, or revamp a leadership series? We team up with companies like Northwestern Mutual, Syneos Health, and Duck Creek Technologies to roll out highly-engaging leadership development series for Emerging Leaders, New Managers, Women in Leadership, High-Potential Managers, and more!

What makes our series so uniquely engaging? We help you build a full system of development that leverages our cutting-edge platform and world-class training. We blend together:

- world-class, cohort-based virtual training and group coaching
- personalized nudges
- micro-learning
- on-demand "office hour" style coaching



[Book a strategy call here.](#)