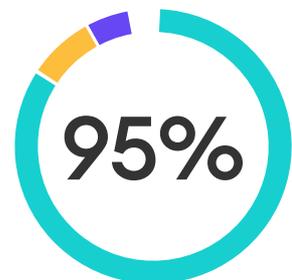# Why Employees Ignore Training:

Nontrivial Ways to Increase Engagement

Team Progress
Courses and Trainings

95%

Anna Simon
Sales Europe / Sales / Sample Company, LLC

100%
5/5 completed

👍 Completed

Corporate training has never had more tools, formats, and design techniques available. Interactive modules, branching scenarios, gamification, AI – the toolbox keeps expanding. Yet one challenge remains: 🤔 **how to get people to engage with learning.**

Low participation is often explained in simple terms: the course wasn't engaging, interactive, or relevant enough. But for many L&D teams, the reality feels less straightforward. Even thoughtfully designed programs can struggle to gain traction, and improving engagement often requires **looking beyond the course itself.**

Let's take a broader view and explore engagement as part of the overall learner experience, including how learning is **introduced, delivered,** and **experienced** within the rhythm of everyday work.

Table of contents

Why learning gets pushed aside

Learning competes with the same forces that shape the rest of the workday: deadlines, meetings, shifting priorities, and the constant need to respond to what feels urgent. When training enters that environment, it often arrives as one more item on an already crowded agenda.

Research consistently shows that the biggest barrier to employee development is not a lack of interest in learning, but a **lack of time to step away from immediate responsibilities**. As a result, learning gets approached as an obligation to get through quickly rather than a meaningful opportunity.

89%

of CHROs cite time away from the job as the biggest barrier to development

The broader learning ecosystem within organizations is also under pressure. The *LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2025* describes workplaces where **employees, managers, and talent teams all feel stretched thin by operational demands.** In this environment, learning is often perceived as something extra – something to get to "when there's time."

15%

of employees say their manager helped them build a career plan

(↓ 5 pp vs. 2024)

Manager support plays a particularly important role here. They often act as the bridge between learning initiatives and day-to-day work priorities. Yet their own bandwidth is shrinking, which directly affects how learning is prioritized within teams.

When learners feel that training is not actively supported or protected by their manager, participation drops — even when the content is strong.

The cognitive demands of work are also increasing. The 2025 Wiley Workplace Intelligence report on change fatigue in the AI era found that **67% of employees expect the pace of change at work to increase, while 35% report experiencing severe stress levels.** In conditions like these, the discretionary energy required for optional learning becomes harder to sustain.

> Disengagement with training rarely comes down to whether a course is interactive enough. More often, it reflects the reality that learning must compete with the broader dynamics of modern work.
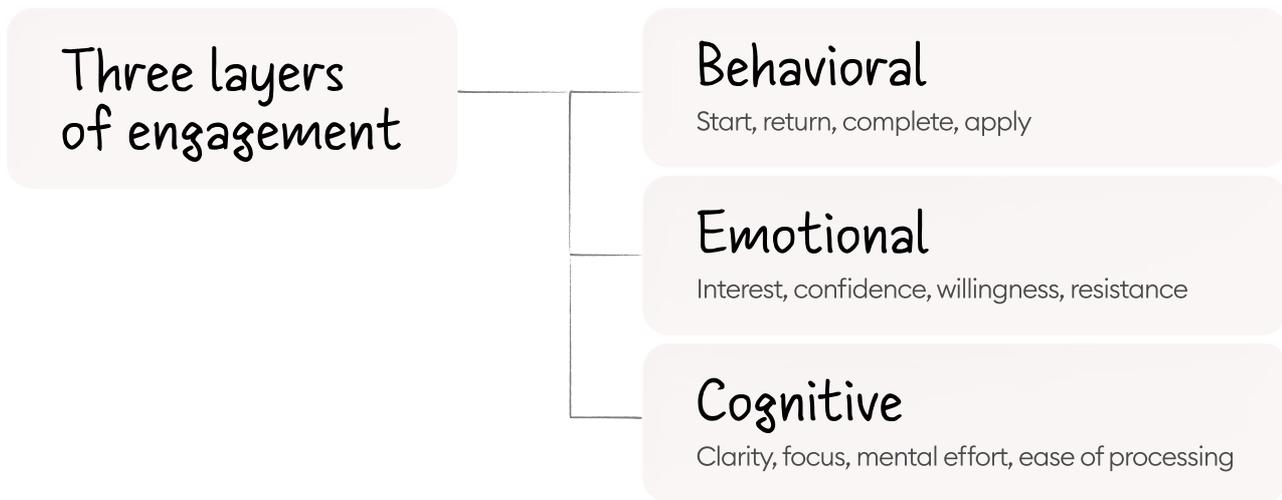
For L&D teams, this means that improving engagement requires looking beyond the course itself and understanding how learning fits (or fails to fit) into the daily experience of employees.

A product lens on learning engagement

Learning engagement is often discussed as if it were a single concept: learners are either engaged or not. In practice, engagement is more complex than that.

Research commonly describes it as a combination of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. That means engagement shows up not only in what learners do, but also in how they feel about the experience and how easy or difficult it is to process.

Three layers of engagement

Behavioral
Start, return, complete, apply

Emotional
Interest, confidence, willingness, resistance

Cognitive
Clarity, focus, mental effort, ease of processing

This immediately broadens the conversation. If engagement includes action, emotion, and cognition, then interactivity alone cannot explain why people stay engaged or drop off.

In product and UX work, people rarely look at experience as a single moment. They map the whole journey: how someone discovers a product, what gets them to try it, where they hesitate, and what keeps them moving.

Learning works in much the same way. Employees do not simply open a course and magically become engaged. They first notice it, decide whether it feels relevant, try to access it, choose whether to begin, and then keep making small decisions about whether it's worth continuing. If workplace learning is also an experience — and it is — then it makes sense to apply the same logic here.

Case: A sales manager is invited to complete a short training on a new CRM workflow that their team will start using next quarter.

Phases	Awareness	Consideration	Access	Course experience	Application
Action	Notices the training announcement	Decides whether to start now, postpone, or ignore the training	Decides whether to continue or abandon the process	Starts the course and decides moment by moment whether to stay	Uses the workflow with their team and reflects on the experience
Touchpoints	Email notification, Slack message, manager note, LMS alert	Course description, estimated duration, reminder message	Deep link, LMS login, mobile access, portal navigation	Intro screen, scenarios, navigation, examples, interactions	Live deals, team meetings, manager follow-up, job aids
Feelings	😊	🤔	😒	😌	🤩
Pain points	• Feels like another corporate initiative • Too busy closing deals	• Feels optional • The manager hasn't mentioned it	• Too many login steps • Poor mobile experience	• No subtitles for videos	• No follow-up after completion
Positive moments	• Clear promise of practical value	• Short, realistic time estimate	• Opens directly from the reminder	• Realistic sales scenarios • Clear progress indicator • Purposeful interactions	• Uses the workflow in real deals • Reduces administrative time in the CRM

Seen this way, engagement starts to look more like a question of adoption than a feature of course design.

The 4 points of friction behind resistance to learning

In workplace learning, engagement rarely breaks for just one reason. More often, it builds through recurring points of friction, where the experience becomes harder to enter, justify, process, or apply at work.

Access friction

Access friction is everything that makes learning harder to reach than it should be.

That may sound like a minor operational issue, but it plays an important role in learner engagement. **Access is the first point where learners decide whether the experience feels easy enough to begin.** Before they see the quality of the content, the usefulness of the examples, or the value of the course, they encounter the path in.

If that path includes too many clicks between the reminder and the first screen, extra login steps, separate platforms, poor discoverability, or generic homepages instead of direct links, the learner is being asked to spend too much effort before any value appears.

The good news is that access friction is often one of the most fixable problems in the learner experience. And in many cases, the fix has less to do with redesigning the course and more to do with improving everything around the first click.

01   Remove unnecessary login steps

A good starting point is single sign-on (SSO). **Every extra authentication step, such as a second password, a verification code, a detour through a generic LMS homepage, increases the effort required to begin.** The goal is simple: move from "find, log in, search, click" to "click and start."

In platforms like iSpring LMS, employees who are already signed into their corporate environment can access training without logging in again.

This also means **using direct links** rather than generic entry points.
If a reminder email announces a required course or a manager shares
a training recommendation in Slack, it should take the employee directly
to the assigned module.

A quick audit question for L&D teams:

How many actions stand between the learner and the first
screen of the course? If the answer is more than one or two,
there is probably room to simplify.

02   Embed learning where work already happens

McKinsey argues that in many organizations, learning still feels like something employees have to step away from "real work" to do. More forward-looking companies are trying to do the opposite: bring learning closer to the tools, routines, and workflows employees already use.

Microsoft makes that approach concrete with Viva Learning. Instead of asking employees to leave their work environment and visit a separate training platform, Microsoft positions learning as something that can be surfaced directly inside Teams and Microsoft 365. That matters because discoverability improves when learning appears inside the systems employees already use throughout the day.

For L&D teams, this principle can be applied in several ways:

- Place learning inside the corporate portal
- Share links to training inside Teams channels, Slack spaces, or CRM dashboards
- Include contextual learning prompts in the tools employees already use

03 Design for mobile access intentionally

Mobile access should not be treated as a backup option for employees who are away from a laptop. For many roles, mobile learning is the only viable solution, especially for retail floor staff, warehouse and production employees, logistics teams, field workers, and anyone whose work doesn't happen behind a desk.

A course that "works on mobile" but is frustrating to navigate still creates access friction.

Mobile-friendly learning means designing for short bursts, smaller screens, and real working conditions, not simply shrinking the desktop version.

Mobile access also needs to account for unreliable connectivity.

In iSpring LMS, the mobile app allows learners to access content offline – for example, on a warehouse floor with limited signal, during travel, or in field environments – so they can review materials, complete a quick refresher, or check a knowledge base when needed.

ispring lms

Deliver learning that fits into real workdays with the top-rated mobile app for iOS and Android.

Learn more →
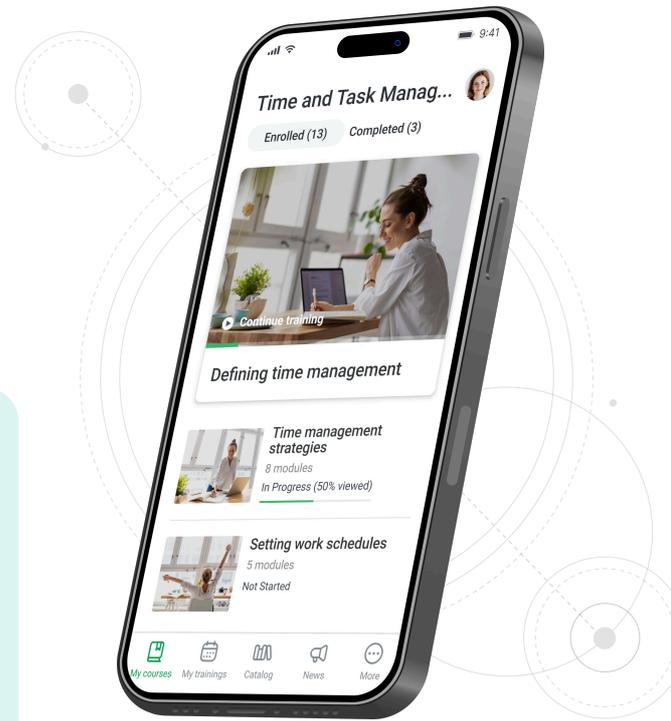
Do not ask only whether the course technically opens on a phone. Instead, ask:

- Is the text readable without zooming?

- Are buttons large enough and are interactions usable on mobile?

- Does the course launch cleanly from email, Teams, or chat?

- Can the learner complete a meaningful portion in a few minutes?

- Are videos captioned and easy to follow without ideal audio conditions?
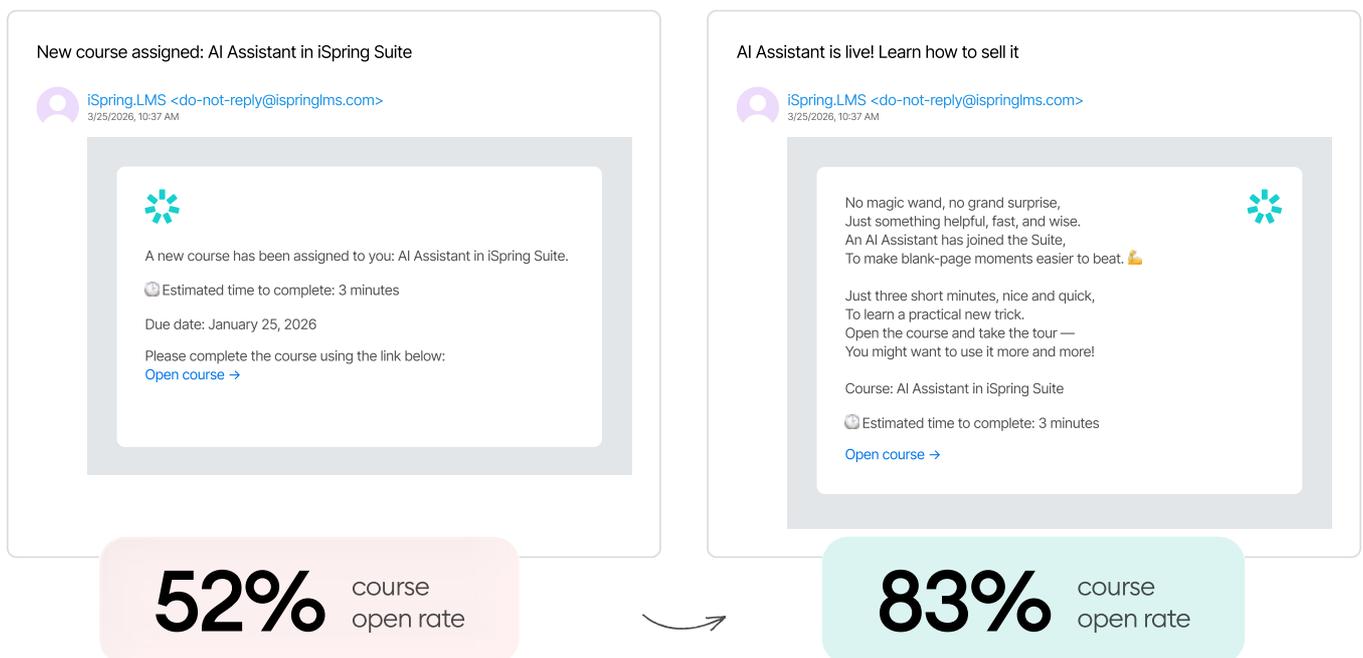
04   Add a small human touch at the point of entry

The reminder email, launch message, portal banner, or Teams notification is already part of the learner experience, the first moment of contact – and often the moment when the learner decides whether to click now, later, or never.

In a 2023 study of working adults learning online, personalized email reminders improved on-time progress **by 14 percentage points** compared to general reminders.

The point is not that every reminder needs to be elaborate. It is that generic prompts are easier to ignore, while messages that feel relevant and specific are more likely to move people to act.

At iSpring, the internal L&D team applied that idea in a distinctly human way. Instead of sending standard reminder emails about new courses, they used short haiku and playful mini-verses that often **reflected current topics, familiar memes, or just described the topic in a more human way:**

New course assigned: AI Assistant in iSpring Suite

iSpring.LMS <do-not-reply@ispringlms.com>
3/25/2026, 10:37 AM

A new course has been assigned to you: AI Assistant in iSpring Suite.

🕐 Estimated time to complete: 3 minutes

Due date: January 25, 2026

Please complete the course using the link below:

Open course →

52% course open rate

AI Assistant is live! Learn how to sell it

iSpring.LMS <do-not-reply@ispringlms.com>
3/25/2026, 10:37 AM

No magic wand, no grand surprise,
Just something helpful, fast, and wise.
An AI Assistant has joined the Suite,
To make blank-page moments easier to beat. 💪

Just three short minutes, nice and quick,
To learn a practical new trick.
Open the course and take the tour —
You might want to use it more and more!

Course: AI Assistant in iSpring Suite

🕐 Estimated time to complete: 3 minutes

Open course →

83% course open rate

Because the reminders felt timely and relevant to the audience, they resonated more strongly and helped increase course opens from email notifications.

Meaning friction

Meaning friction appears when the learner cannot answer a basic question fast enough: **why does this matter to me right now?** They may even agree that the topic is useful in principle. But if the value feels abstract, delayed, or disconnected from today's work, the course is easy to postpone.

Meaning friction often shows up in very predictable ways:

- The course title is generic and says nothing about the real outcome

- The description explains the topic, but not the payoff

- The course is positioned as broadly useful "someday," rather than clearly relevant now

- The employee can't see how it connects to performance, confidence, upcoming change, or a specific work problem

01 Connect the training to a work problem

Do not describe the topic in broad terms if the learner actually cares about a task, pressure point, or recurring problem.

Lead with the operational payoff, not the instructional category.

This is a feature name

This is a reason to care

02 Position learning around role-specific use cases

The same course can feel far more relevant when employees see their own reality reflected back to them. That means using examples tied to role, workflow, or team context rather than presenting the topic at a generic organizational level.

A sales manager is more likely to engage with a new CRM workflow course when it is framed around pipeline visibility, faster follow-up, or fewer administrative delays. A people manager is more likely to engage with feedback training when it is tied to performance conversations they already have to lead this quarter.

This idea can be taken further when learning is aligned not just with roles but with **individual development needs.** This is especially relevant ahead of a new role, a promotion, or when a group of employees consistently struggles with the same skill or task.

✳ **In iSpring LMS,** this is supported through individual development plans **that connect learning to actual performance signals.** Instead of assigning generic courses, L&D teams can define specific competencies to develop, such as decision-making, cross-team communication, or leadership readiness, and link them to targeted learning, practical tasks, and observable outcomes that can be tracked over time.

The result is a much clearer sense of meaning for the learner: the training is not abstract or "for everyone," but is directly connected to what they need to do next in their role.

03   Bridge the motivation gap with immediate incentives

Generic points and decorative badges rarely do much for engagement if nothing meaningful sits behind them. If they do not unlock anything, signal anything, or lead anywhere, learners quickly learn to ignore them. In that form, they become interface decoration rather than a real reason to begin.

> The more useful question is not "Should we reward learning?" but "What kind of immediate payoff helps a learner act now while the bigger value is still distant?"

This is where immediate incentives can help. Used well, they give the learner a concrete reason to begin, continue, or finish while the longer-term payoff – stronger performance, better fluency, and more confidence, isn't visible yet.

One of the most straightforward ways to create that immediate payoff is through tangible rewards. This often means simple, concrete incentives: gift cards, limited-edition merch, small perks, or access to something employees value.

Salesforce Trailhead, for example, uses learning quests tied to rewards such as gift cards, certification vouchers, exclusive merchandise, event access, and charitable donations made on the learner's behalf.

The takeaway for L&D teams is simple: **immediate incentives work best when they reduce the psychological distance between effort now and value later.**

Comprehension friction

Learning science supports this directly. Cognitive Load Theory distinguishes between the complexity of the material itself and the extra mental effort created by poor instructional design.

Too much information on one screen, too many concepts introduced at once, long explanations, or weak visual hierarchy – in UX terms, the interface and information design create avoidable mental effort. The result is familiar: learners skim, lose the thread, postpone completion, or click through without absorbing much.

01 Reduce cognitive load by design

📌 **Use a clearer course structure.** A learner should not have to decode the logic of the course while taking it. That means:

- Group related ideas into clear sections

- Signal transitions explicitly

- Make each module feel like it has one clear purpose

- Remove detours that do not support the learning goal

📌 **Introduce fewer concepts at once.** Many corporate courses overload the learner by trying to explain everything in one pass. A better approach is to:

- Focus each screen or segment on one main idea

- Separate essential information from supporting detail

- Avoid stacking multiple new terms, rules, and examples together

📌 **Strengthen visual hierarchy.** If everything looks equally dense, everything feels equally hard to process, so it's better to:

- Use headings and subheadings purposefully

- Highlight key phrases sparingly

- Use spacing to separate ideas

- Make examples visually distinct from explanations
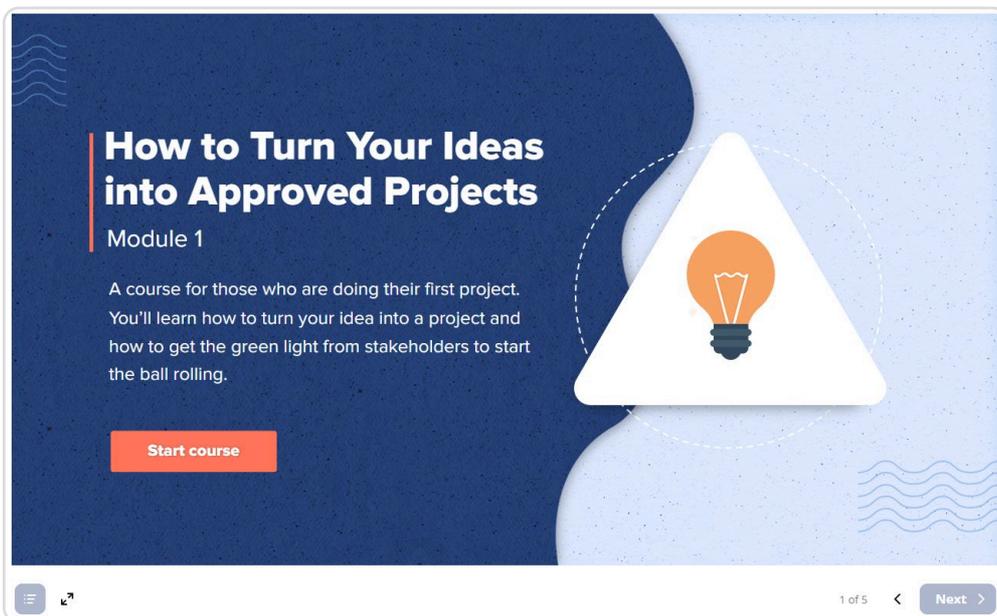
Some tools are designed in ways that support clearer instructional choices by default. For example, the course creation tool inside ✷iSpring LMS. It is built for creating scrollable courses directly on the platform, with tools that help authors structure content more clearly: logical chapters, step-by-step navigation, self-check questions, and flexible design options.

Instead of forcing everything into long, dense pages, it makes it easier to break information into smaller, more readable units and create a course flow that is easier to follow.

📌 **Use plain language:** shorter sentences, familiar wording, direct instructions, fewer abstract phrases, and less jargon unless the audience needs it.

"Use this approach when a client asks about pricing" is easier to understand than "This module explores strategies for addressing cost-related objections in customer-facing interactions."

Isolation friction

Isolation friction shows up when learning is treated as a solo activity, but the organization expects it to change how people work together.

When learning stays invisible, engagement usually drops as well. People are less likely to invest in it, talk about it, or carry it into practice if it feels like something they are doing on the side, in isolation, with no clear social signal around it.

01 ## Use peer-led sessions where they make sense

One of the most effective ways to reduce that isolation is to stop treating teaching as something only facilitators or course authors do.

In many cases, the most credible person to explain a workflow, a tool, or a customer-facing practice is someone inside the business who already uses it well. That is the logic behind **Google's g2g ("Googler-to-Googler")** network, where employees teach, mentor, and support one another across the organization. According to Google's own description of the program, the network includes more than 6,000 volunteer employee instructors and mentors, and nearly 80% of tracked internal training is delivered through this peer-to-peer model.

🔍 Google did not build engagement by making learning more entertaining. It built engagement by **making learning more social, more credible, and more embedded in how people learn from each other at work.**

That does not mean every company needs a Google-sized internal teaching network. But it suggests a clear direction:

- Bring practitioners into the learning experience

- Use peer-led sessions where lived experience matters

- Let employees hear how colleagues actually use a skill or a tool in real work

02 Turn individual learning into shared practice

The reason this works is not only visibility, though that matters. Once learners know they may need to explain the material to others, they tend to engage with it differently. They pay closer attention, organize their thinking more actively, and notice gaps in their own understanding sooner.

That is one of the core findings behind the protégé effect: people often learn more deeply when they expect to teach what they are learning.

There is also a strong motivation effect here. For ambitious employees, the chance to share what they learned in front of colleagues brings a more visible payoff. Learning starts to carry social value, which often makes the effort feel more worthwhile.

For L&D teams, this can take several forms:

- Post-course teach-backs in team meetings

- Short "what I learned and how I'm using it" shares

- Cross-functional recaps after important training

- Learning circles where peers compare how they applied the same idea

- Internal champions who help carry the learning into everyday work

Conclusion

Learning engagement grows when the experience reflects the reality of work.

People respond to learning more readily if the value is easy to recognize, the content is easy to process, and the experience does not end in isolation. These are often small design decisions, but together they shape whether learning feels worth starting and worth carrying forward.

For L&D teams, this creates a useful design standard. When that happens, engagement stops looking like something L&D has to constantly chase and starts to emerge as a natural response to the way learning is designed.

iSpring lms

Make knowledge easier to reach, retain, and apply

Observation Score

87%
based on 14 metrics

Feedback

➕ **Strengths**
1. Listens carefully to what customers want.
2. Demostrates extesive knowledge about the products v

🔶 **Areas for improvement**
Does not stock shelves well.

💬 **Comments**
I would recommend an additional course on standards.

Welcome Aboard!
September 12 – September 13 · **Current Stage**   2 / 5

☑ Meet the team, ask plenty of questions,
and get familiar with your new environment.

☑ Take an office tour and meet your supervisor,
teammates, and mentor.

☐ Set up your laptop and workstation; receive your
employee ID card and system access.

Remove barriers at the start ☑

With SSO, mobile access, and
a clean learner portal, iSpring LMS
makes it easier to start learning
in the middle of a real workday.

Target training more precisely ☑

With role-based assignments and
individual paths, employees gain
knowledge that matches their job
responsibilities and career goals.

Bring social energy into learning ☑

Live sessions, discussions,
a knowledge base, and leaderboards
make learning more visible, social,
and easier to reinforce.

Identify friction points and fix them ☑

25+ real-time reports help L&D teams
move beyond completion data to spot
engagement patterns and drop-offs early.

Book a live demo   **Try it free for 30 days**

Welcome to the iSpring Community!

Blog →

Explore the exciting world of eLearning together with our helpful articles and how-tos.

Webinars →

Get eLearning tips and tricks from top-notch industry experts.

Guides →

Get step-by-step directions on how to create and launch eLearning.

YouTube →

Enjoy weekly eLearning videos and don't forget to subscribe.