

Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro

Strategies to Ignite Learning



BIANCA BAUMANN AND MIKE TAYLOR

More Praise for *Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro*

“As an EdTech consultant advising chief learning officers, I can confidently say this book is a game-changer for L&D leaders. It brilliantly bridges the gap between traditional L&D and modern marketing, offering invaluable insights for creating compelling digital learning experiences.”

—**Lori Niles-Hofmann**, EdTech Strategist and Global Adviser, NilesNolen

“This is the L&D and marketing crossover you are looking for. Discover how to transform dull learning content into engagement gold with skimmable writing, snappy headlines, and calls to action that demand action.”

—**Cara North**, Founder and Chief Learning Consultant, The Learning Camel

“*Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro* presents a compelling argument for combining marketing ideas and strategies with current L&D techniques to create a powerful combination with the potential to take the L&D function to the next level. Bianca Baumann and Mike Taylor have created a work that will help you envision and achieve a future in which employees eagerly take charge of their learning journeys, acquire new skills, and apply them in real time through this unique intertwining of disciplines. The writing team provides actionable strategies, ideas, and concepts that empower L&D professionals to create training that captivates, motivates, and delivers lasting impact. This book will change the way you think about developing instruction forever.”

—**Karl M. Kapp, EdD**, Professor of Instructional Design and Technology, Commonwealth University

“So much value on every page! Bianca and Mike have struck the right balance of instilling high-impact strategies and tactical design advice. *Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro* is essential reading for any learning and talent leader who is looking to elevate their practice and bring fresh perspectives to their teams. Keep this one beside your desk at all times.”

—**Josh Cardoz**, Chief Creative and Learning Officer, Sponge Learning Group

“‘Get attention, influence behavior’—the book recognizes that these are the central concerns of both learning designers *and* marketers, and that learning designers have a lot to learn from marketers on these topics. Packed full of useful tools and frameworks, this book has so much material to help create more engaging and impactful learning.”

—**Julie Dirksen**, Author, *Design for How People Learn*

“Dang! I love this book. Bianca and Mike have written the go-to resource for what-to and how-to for instructional designers and the leaders who guide them. Insightful, readable, actionable, and chock full of activities, this is a must-read for you and your team.”

—**Megan Torrance**, CEO, TorranceLearning; Author, *Agile for Instructional Designers* and *Data and Analytics for Instructional Designers*

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BIANCA BAUMANN AND MIKE TAYLOR

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Preface

Hey there, friends! We're Mike and Bianca, and we're thrilled to be your guides on a journey to revolutionize the way you approach learning and development (L&D). Before we discuss the strategies and insights that we hope will transform your practice, we want to share a bit about the paths that led us to write this book.

In 2017, we met at an online Learning Guild conference. We were both speakers at the event, sharing our passion for a topic we thought had never been fully explored: the intersection of marketing and L&D. Despite being relative strangers, we felt an immediate connection as we listened to each other's presentations and engaged in a lively panel discussion. We were both giving voice to ideas that had been percolating for a while but hadn't yet found an outlet—and it was an exciting moment.

The session crackled with high-voltage energy. By the end, it was clear that we had tapped into something powerful: a hunger for fresh perspectives and new approaches. We knew we couldn't let that momentum fade, so we committed to continuing our conversation, diving deep into the challenges facing modern L&D professionals and envisioning what a new frame of reference for workplace learning could look like. Our conversation is still going on more than eight years later and has resulted in this book and a consulting partnership that has enriched our work.

Our varied professional experiences inform the questions we ask and the conclusions we've arrived at during the process of writing. We've had the privilege of working with all types of learning organizations, from small

startups to Fortune 500 giants, and with marketing firms. Bianca worked at Eloqua, a marketing automation company now owned by Oracle. Mike spent time at Mindset Digital, a digital marketing agency. In these roles, we first discovered the powerful connection between marketing and L&D.

For Mike, the “aha” moment came while leading a workshop for a room full of skeptical marketers, introducing them to adult learning principles and instructional design techniques. As he watched the lightbulbs switching on for each of the participants, Mike suddenly realized that L&D could also learn a ton from marketing.

Meanwhile, Bianca was geeking out over the way her marketing colleagues used data and analytics to optimize their campaigns in real time. She couldn’t help wondering how those same tools could be used to personalize learning and measure its impact.

These experiences, coupled with our recognition of the challenges facing L&D, sparked a fundamental shift in our thinking and a deep conviction that the future of learning lies at the intersection of these two disciplines. We knew we had to spread the word, so a few years ago, we designed a workshop together. We poured our combined energy into crafting an experience that would engage learners, demonstrate the power of a marketing mindset, and provide practical takeaways that attendees could implement immediately.

On the opening day of the workshop, we met in person for the first time and clicked immediately. The energy and feedback we experienced over those few days were incredible. Participants told us this was an entirely new perspective, and they were eager to apply our marketing strategies and techniques in their own L&D projects. For us, that workshop solidified the importance of integrating these two powerful disciplines.

Fast forward to today, and here we are, putting the finishing touches on the book you now hold in your hands or see on your screen. The journey has included long days, countless revisions, moments of doubt, and flashes of inspiration. But through it all, we’ve been driven by a deep belief in the potential of our approach.

In the pages that follow, we’ll break down the key principles of a marketing-driven approach to L&D. We’ll share stories from our own experiences and

provide you with practical, actionable steps you can take to start infusing a marketing mindset into your work right away.

We want this book to be the start of a conversation that challenges assumptions, embraces new possibilities, and unlocks the potential of L&D innovators. We invite you to join us in a larger discussion about the future of L&D. Visit us at TrainLikeAMarketer.com to join the conversation and access bonus resources and case studies, or find us on social media using the [#TrainLikeAMarketer](https://twitter.com/TrainLikeAMarketer). You can also join a community of like-minded professionals who are ready to reimagine L&D in our Train Like a Marketer LinkedIn group at [linkedin.com/groups/14552471](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14552471). We can't wait to hear about your "aha" moments, answer your questions, and celebrate your successes.

Your partners in learning,

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Introduction

The Power of Marketing for Learning and Development

Creativity is just connecting things.

—Steve Jobs

Organizations spend more than \$350 billion globally on training each year, but only a fraction of that investment results in improved performance. That's a problem that needs a solution, and we believe the best solution is for L&D professionals to adopt the strategies, techniques, and mindset of modern marketers.

In an uncertain and evolving business landscape, organizations of all kinds are facing the challenge of helping their employees keep up with rapid changes in the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need for success. As workplace learning strategists, we often see traditional L&D approaches fail to deliver what organizations and employees need, leaving everyone grappling with a widening skills gap. We think it's time for a bold new approach to training that builds on the science and art of marketing to transform the way employees learn and grow.

Get Attention, Influence Behavior

At first glance, marketing and L&D may seem like an unlikely combination. But upon closer inspection, these fields share two core goals: getting people's attention and influencing their behavior.

Marketing is about captivating and persuading, which is the bread and butter of learning designers. It's about finding and engaging the hidden levers of human motivation and decision making. When done well, marketing speaks to our brain's automatic processing system on an intuitive, emotional level. The same is true of a great training experience: It captures participants' attention and engages them emotionally as well as intellectually. The experience then helps change participants' behavior through information, stories, and shared activities. As Nobel laureate and psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) eloquently explained in his groundbreaking book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, our actions are often swayed more by compelling narratives and emotional connections than by mere facts and figures.

Marketing and L&D are both about *creating value*. Marketing is never just about selling products; it's also about the valuable experiences, emotions, and practical solutions attached to those products. Marketers try to understand what people want and need, sometimes even before they realize it themselves, and create products or services that meet those needs. As L&D professionals, we design our products to provide the ultimate value—new knowledge and skills for learners that will help them become more effective and improve the bottom line for their organizations.

Marketing and L&D share other characteristics too: Both require research, strategy, creativity, and a good grasp of human psychology. Both must effectively communicate ideas by crafting compelling narratives that resonate with the target audience, using a variety of content types and channels, including print, video, social media, and email. All these connections between marketers and L&D pros are compelling, aren't they?

When we imagine the future of marketing-inspired L&D, we see a workplace where employees are fully engaged in their learning journeys, eagerly acquiring new knowledge, skills, and abilities and applying them to their work in real time. Data-driven insights guide and optimize learning programs to align with the organization's changing needs. We see companies in which L&D initiatives are seamlessly integrated into the flow of work, delivering the right content at the right moment, all in fresh, engaging formats.

What to Expect in This Book

In the chapters that follow, we will explore the potential of marketing-inspired L&D, diving into essential principles and practical strategies that can help you transform your learning experiences. Here is a brief look.

In chapter 1, we consider how our brain's automatic processing system determines what we pay attention to and what drives our behavior. And in chapter 2, we explore how to create detailed learner personas that capture your audience's unique needs, preferences, and motivations.

Every great marketing campaign starts with a clear understanding of the customer journey. In chapter 3, we'll apply that idea to L&D, showing you how to create learner journeys that take participants from awareness to mastery.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 guide you through the process of creating content that ignites the learner's interest and inspires them to act. We'll explore proven marketing techniques to craft a comprehensive strategy and develop captivating copy and visuals. We'll bring it all together as we consider how to produce a learning campaign that resonates with your audience. In chapter 8, we'll see how we can bring all the elements to life by harnessing the power of marketing technology. Finally, in chapter 9, we'll dive into the world of learning analytics, showing you how to measure the true impact of your programs and continuously optimize for better results.

Our Call to Action

We see this book as both a how-to manual and a call to action. We hope to convince other L&D pros to embrace a new way of thinking and working that can transform our organizations and change our working lives for the better. When L&D has a more tangible, positive impact on business performance, we can also elevate its strategic role to secure a seat at the table as a trusted partner.

In the end, we're guided by one fundamental principle: The learner should be at the heart of everything we do. By applying marketing strategies to L&D, we can create learning experiences that resonate on a deep, emotional level, driving real behavior change and inspiring employees to achieve their full

potential. It all starts with a simple shift in perspective and, as Steve Jobs might say, a willingness to connect things.

We're excited for you to join us on this journey to explore the untapped potential of marketing-inspired L&D. The future of learning awaits. Let's get started!

Chapter 1

Design Learning for the Way People Think

We are very influenced by completely automatic things that we have no control over, and we don't know we're doing it.

—Daniel Kahneman, psychologist, economist, and author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

Imagine two trainers, Jen and Juan, each leading a remote training course on effective sales techniques for LuxeKitchens, a high-end kitchen design company. Jen, who has a background in marketing, designs her program to engage the learners' fast, intuitive, and automatic thinking processes at every turn. She begins with the gripping story of a struggling salesperson's journey to success. She creates an emotional hook that illustrates the real-world impact of the strategies she'll share during the training. Her slides feature striking before-and-after visuals of contrast and progress that elicit a visceral, immediate response in the audience.

Throughout the session, Jen puts herself in her audience's shoes, constantly linking abstract concepts to their everyday challenges and goals. Participants actively practice techniques in interactive, realistic simulations, and afterward, Jen provides targeted feedback and encouragement. She uses other techniques, including visually impressive slides that trigger recognition of key concepts and brief quizzes that reinforce automatic recall of essential tasks.

Juan takes a more traditional approach to crafting his version of the training experience. He only uses text-heavy slides to methodically work through definitions and models, with few examples or stories to provide context and illustrate abstract concepts around customer centricity and data analysis. Juan's exercises lack opportunities to actively build practical skills. His delivery relies heavily on logical analysis and deliberate reasoning, and he rarely tries to connect with learners' emotions or motivations.

As you might expect, these two approaches yield dramatically different results. Jen's participants rate their training experience highly, with most saying they feel confident applying the techniques they've learned on the job. Their sales metrics support these instinctive assessments, showing sustained increases in their sales. Juan's learners don't rate their experience highly, report lackluster engagement, struggle to remember key points, and see little, if any, improvement in sales after the training program.

In designing her course, Jen drew on her education and experience in marketing, especially the application of insights from cognitive psychology about the way people process information. Juan relied on an approach dominated by a lecture-style presentation that didn't engage learners' attention, emotions, or imagination. Using what she knew about the human need for novelty, narratives, and deeper social and emotional connections, Jen succeeded in capturing her learners' attention, engaging all dimensions of their thinking, and driving their actions going forward. In this chapter, we'll explore how understanding a little more about how our audience thinks can help us design more effective learning experiences.

Intuitive Plus Deliberative Thinking

Research in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics, led by luminaries like Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, revolutionized our understanding of how people think—how they process information and make decisions. The dual process theory of the mind, developed gradually from the 1960s to the 1990s, was a central tenet of this research (Kahneman 2011). Kahneman and others popularized the theory in the 2000s, suggesting that we all have two distinct modes of thinking:

- A fast, automatic, and intuitive mode, or System 1 thinking
- A slower, more deliberate mode, or System 2 thinking

Many researchers emphasize the interconnectedness and interaction of intuitive and deliberative thinking rather than viewing them as rigidly separate processes. They argue that thinking is highly complex, with multiple cognitive processes occurring simultaneously and influencing one another. However, we believe that more effective learning and behavior change involves the activation of both “fast” (intuitive) and “slow” (deliberative) thinking.

Taking the evolving research into account, we still find it helpful to discuss two approaches to processing information and making decisions. Although some aspects of Kahneman’s cited studies have sparked academic discussions, his work remains highly influential in marketing and behavioral economics because it has proven so useful. For example, Udo Kannengiesser and John Gero (2019) applied the “two systems” approach in their studies of information systems and design science (Table 1-1).

In this book, we’ll refer to *intuitive thinking* and *deliberative thinking* with the understanding that both operate simultaneously and can lead to rational or irrational conclusions.

Table 1-1. Characteristics of Intuitive and Deliberative Thinking

Characteristic	System 1. Intuitive Thinking	System 2. Deliberative Thinking
Speed	Fast	Slow
Effort	Effortless	Effortful
Automaticity	Automatic	Controlled
Intuition	Intuitive	Analytical
Heuristics	Relies on heuristics and mental shortcuts	Uses deliberate reasoning
Emotion	Influenced by emotions and gut feelings	Less influenced by emotions, more rational
Capacity	High capacity for parallel processing	Limited capacity, focused processing
Conscious awareness	Often operates outside conscious awareness	Requires conscious awareness

Source: Adapted from Kannengiesser and Gero 2019.

Kahneman describes intuitive (System 1) thinking, which marketers often aim to exploit, as an always-on kind of mental radar that rapidly processes environmental cues. He suggests that it evolved to keep our ancestors alive in dangerous environments by enabling lightning-fast decisions. These rapid judgments rely on emotion, instinct, and mental shortcuts called *heuristics*, bypassing the slower process of deliberative reasoning. The intuitive system operates in parallel with our more analytical thought processes (Gilovich et al. 2002).

While we no longer encounter saber-toothed tigers or other lethal predators regularly, our intuitive thinking—the rapid, automatic cognitive process—remains perpetually active in our daily lives. We still continually scan for signs of social threats and opportunities, primed to make snap judgments and react instantaneously. This explains the outsized impact of first impressions: Our rapid, intuitive thinking swiftly forms lasting assessments. System 1 prioritizes emotionally charged and seemingly urgent information, which is why we tend to respond more strongly to vivid, emotive experiences than dry, statistical data.

Deliberative (System 2) thinking is a slower program that can weigh trade-offs and consider decisions from multiple angles. This is vital for complex problem-solving and planning but is always in communication with other programs running at the same time, including the intuitive rapid-response thinking marketers and educators are trying to engage (Stanovich and West 2000).

Think of your brain as an incredibly advanced computer system that is always running multiple programs simultaneously. Deliberative and intuitive thinking are partners in a never-ending dance—although our intuitive thinking often leads because it reacts in less time than it takes to blink. Deliberative thinking jumps in to collaborate with intuitive thinking when more deeply thoughtful reasoning is needed.

Effective learning design orchestrates a delicate balance between intuitive and deliberative thinking. It captures immediate attention through emotional resonance and relevance while simultaneously satisfying the need for structured, substantive content. The goal is to avoid both overly sensational approaches that feel manipulative and dry academic presentations that fail to

engage. The ideal learning experience harmonizes these elements and ensures that information is both intuitively appealing and intellectually satisfying, leading to potentially more effective and lasting learning outcomes.

Six Ways to Engage Intuitive Thinking for Learning

Marketing researchers have identified a small set of meta-biases that may underlie many of our cognitive biases, the systematic mental shortcuts we take in decision making. In *The Persuasion Code*, neuromarketing experts Christophe Morin and Patrick Renvoise (2018) distill these meta-biases into six stimuli, or ways to engage intuitive thinking. When information aligns with these stimuli, learners are likelier to engage with and remember it. For example, learning content that evokes strong emotions or provides immediate solutions to urgent problems tends to be more effective because it resonates strongly with our instincts.

Let's now consider six ways to engage a learner's intuitive thinking like a marketer might and some specific tactics for applying them in learning design.

1. Make It Personal

We all crave personal relevance, tuning out generic information and perking up when content feels directly applicable to *me, here, and now*. As instructional designers, our job is to create experiences that feel tailor-made for each learner's needs, goals, and context.

Consider our two trainers again, Jen and Juan. Jen frames her content around how it will benefit learners directly. She uses relatable examples and case studies to show how the skills she's teaching will help them build stronger work relationships, advance their careers, and reduce daily stress. Juan, meanwhile, delivers content only in broad, theoretical terms without connecting it to his learners' personal situations. Guess whose training is more engaging and effective?

Research backs up the power of personalization. Studies have shown that personalized content can result in longer attention spans, improved memory retention, and greater willingness to engage with information (Tam and Ho 2006; Kalyanaraman and Sundar 2006; Walkington and Bernacki 2020).

We must put ourselves firmly in our learners' shoes to reap these benefits. What are their pain points and aspirations? How can our content help them

achieve their goals? One powerful tool that we'll explore in the next chapter is the *learner persona*, which helps us understand our learners' needs and guide the creation of content that connects with them more deeply.

You can also try a quick litmus test: Scan your materials and tally how often you use the word *we* versus *you*. If the word *we* dominates your content, your learners may check out because it's not about *them*. Reframing the way you present the information to center on the learners can make it feel more immediate and relevant.

The bottom line is that if we want our training to stick, we must make it personal. By appealing to learners' core needs and goals and making that personal relevance crystal clear, we engage intuitive thinking and pave the way for real behavior change. In the battle for attention and retention, personalization is our not-so-secret weapon.

2. Make It Contrastable

Our brains are wired to notice differences and to quickly spot something that stands out from the surrounding environment. Learning content packed with vivid contrasts jolts learners to attention because they associate contrast with importance. If something stands out, it must be worthy of attention (Heath and Heath 2007). This has significant implications for learning design. By incorporating contrasts into our content and delivery, we can keep learners alert and focused.

Try some of these techniques:

- Introduce surprising twists or juxtapose different outcomes in your storytelling. For example, start with a story about a dramatic failure caused by poor communication, then contrast it with an example of how effective communication saved the day in a similar situation.
- Highlight key differences between concepts, historical periods, or case studies. Comparing and contrasting helps learners understand similarities and differences, aiding critical thinking and retention.
- Create visual contrast in your slides and materials, using bold colors, striking images, and varied layouts to draw the eye and maintain interest.

- Alternate between different types of content, including stories, facts, discussions, and practical exercises. Variety keeps learners engaged.
- Design “before and after” scenarios that demonstrate the influence of learning. Show the painful consequences of not having a skill, then contrast that example with the positive outcomes of mastering the skill.

Returning to our two trainers: Jen’s program is full of contrasts. She starts with a dramatic story of an initial communication failure and a later success, uses visually striking slides, and skillfully mixes different teaching methods. Her approach combines short, focused talks with team activities where learners solve real-world problems together. Her learners are alert and engaged throughout.

Juan’s workshop, on the other hand, lacks contrast. He presents a long series of similar text-heavy slides, rarely varies his tone or delivery, and provides few opportunities for interaction. His learners quickly tune out.

As L&D professionals, we must embrace contrast to capture and keep learners’ attention. By creating learning experiences full of variety, surprise, and visual interest, we can drive deeper engagement and retention.

3. Make It Tangible

In addition to responding to contrasts, we tend to prefer the concrete—anything we can see, touch, smell, hear, or feel. Consider two different active-listening training sessions:

1. “Imagine communication as a game of tennis,” Jen says in her workshop. “Before you can hit the ball back, you first have to let it land fully in your court. That’s active listening at work, fully receiving your partner’s message before formulating your response.” By using this visual analogy, Jen gives learners a *tangible framework* for understanding an abstract skill.
2. Juan packs his presentation with dense jargon about “multimodal discourse competencies.” Because he lists concepts without grounding them in real-world examples, the audience is unable to find a way to connect.

The difference between the two learning experiences is that one focuses on grounding abstract concepts in concrete examples, analogies, and sensory language. Concrete examples tend to reduce extraneous mental “noise” during learning, freeing up energy for deeper engagement (Sweller 1994). When we can see, hear, and feel an idea, it is more likely to stick.

One way to make learning more tangible is by simplifying your content. Break down complex topics into their core elements and strip away academic and other specialized jargon. Relate abstract ideas to familiar objects and situations, like Jen’s tennis analogy. Analogies facilitate learning by mapping relationships between familiar and novel concepts (Gentner et al. 2003). Use sensory language to paint vivid mental pictures, describing concepts in terms of sights, sounds, and textures. Sensory language can evoke mental simulations that aid comprehension (Zwaan 2016).

By giving learners some sort of handle with which to grasp our learning content, we prime them to engage and retain the ideas and information. For learning designers, this can transform experiences from mind-numbing to memorable, which brings us to our next way to engage intuitive thinking.

4. Make It Memorable

Memorable learning experiences depend on the information we’re sharing and the way we deliver it. Learning must be novel, emotionally evocative, and vividly imagined if we’re going to create a lasting impact.

As we’ve already noted, we are more likely to encode and retain information that stands out from the ordinary and sparks an emotional response (Heath and Heath 2007). This is because our brains constantly filter the barrage of stimuli they receive, prioritizing the things that seem most important for survival or success. What key factors influence how memorable your learning experiences will be?

- **Repetition.** Just as it takes multiple exposures to learn a new language or master woodworking, it takes repeated encounters with information for it to stick in our long-term memory. The more frequently learners engage with a concept, especially over spaced intervals, the more deeply embedded it becomes.

- **Emotion.** Experiences that evoke strong feelings, whether positive or negative, leave a more vivid imprint on the mind. When we're emotionally invested, we pay closer attention and process information more deeply. That's why storytelling, humor, and suspense are such powerful tools for memorable learning.
- **Primacy and recency.** We tend to remember best what comes first and last in a sequence, with the middle being more of a blur. This means the opening and closing moments of a learning experience have outsized importance for retention.

Let's examine an example to see these principles in action. Jen designs her learning experiences around hands-on activities that allow learners to experience concepts viscerally. She uses a card-sorting game that simulates information overload and a tense role-play negotiation. These emotionally charged exercises burn lessons into participants' memories. Jen also bookends each session with a powerful story and a clear recap of core takeaways, leveraging the primacy and recency effects.

By designing her content to make ideas memorable, Jen not only engages her learners in the moment but also ensures they will recall and apply the lessons long after the workshop ends.

5. Make It Visual

Imagine you're a veteran sales associate at LuxeKitchens, the company mentioned at the opening of this chapter. You and your colleagues are called into a workshop on new sales strategies. You're not sure why your team was required to attend. Sales seem a little sluggish but nothing to worry about. The facilitator moves to a new slide. Before you can process the words at the bottom of the screen, you see the logo of your primary competitor and a graph with a large red upward arrow, tracking their stunning growth in sales revenue over the past six months. You get a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach and direct your full attention to the facilitator. That's the power of great visuals. They grab our attention in a way that text simply cannot.

The human brain is remarkably adept at processing visual information. A significant portion of the brain is dedicated to visual processing, enabling

the rapid and efficient interpretation of images. In other words, we're wired to prioritize visual input.

This has huge implications for learning design. Too often, we rely on text-heavy slides and wordy lectures to convey vital information. However, as John Medina (2014) notes in his book *Brain Rules*—and a wide array of evidence demonstrates—people usually remember just a fraction of information delivered orally, but understanding and retention skyrocket if relevant images are added.

Why such a dramatic difference? It again comes down to how we process information. Reading text engages both the auditory cortex (the part of the brain that processes sound) and the visual cortex (the part that processes images) because our inner voice silently pronounces the words we are reading. But images (without text) hit the visual cortex first, allowing for fast and efficient processing. We can extract meaning from a picture in as little as 14 milliseconds, compared with 140 milliseconds for a single word (Ware 2010). Materials that blend traditional text and striking visuals enhance learning by engaging both verbal and visual processing.

Consider this example: If someone asked you to count the number of windows in your kitchen, you'd probably visualize the room and "see" the answer quickly. That's your rapid visual processing in action. Now think about a compelling advertisement you saw recently. Do you remember the words on the screen or the narrator's voice? Or are you seeing and imagining the feel of leather seats in a sleek black car, the pop of bright red lipstick, or the taste of a cheesy slice of pizza? The most effective ads rely heavily on striking visuals as well as words to convey their messages and evoke emotional and sensory responses. It's a cliché because it's true: A picture is worth a thousand words.

As learning designers, how can we harness the power of visuals? Jen is leading your workshop on effective sales strategies—the one that started with the scary graph of competitors' upward-trending sales. To drive home the importance of preparation, she displays a ticking 24-hour countdown clock on the screen. "What would you do if you only had 24 hours to prepare for a make-or-break sales pitch?" she asks. As participants brainstorm, Jen captures their ideas in a colorful, striking mind map next to the clock. The map helps focus everyone's attention and cement the essential steps to formulate a pitch.

Jen taps into our minds' natural processing preferences by putting visuals, in the form of a colorful, evolving mind map, at the center of her learning design. The images grab attention and help participants grasp and retain the core concepts more effectively.

6. Make It Emotional

“We are not thinking machines that feel. We are feeling machines that think.” In this quote, widely attributed to Antonio Damasio, an eminent neuroscientist at the University of Southern California, we find a fundamental truth: Our emotions are not peripheral to cognition; they are central to that process.

Emotions play a crucial role in memory formation, motivation, and decision making (Phelps 2006). They are the intuitive thinking signal that something matters, driving attention and action. Yet, too often in designing learning experiences, we focus solely on conveying information and neglect the emotional dimension of learning. We assume learners will engage with and apply the knowledge we present if the facts are organized clearly and logically. This approach ignores the constant interplay between intuitive and deliberative thinking.

As Damasio suggests, deliberative thinking isn't alone in swaying our decisions. Emotions are the fuel that powers behavior. They shape what we pay attention to, what we remember, and what we do. This has profound implications for learning designers. We must engage learners emotionally to create experiences that truly resonate and inspire change. Let's revisit Jen one more time.

Jen is now leading a new workshop on conflict resolution. Rather than diving straight into a list of techniques, she structures the session as an emotional arc. She begins by evoking the tension and frustration of an unresolved conflict, the despair of stalled projects and frayed relationships. As she introduces new tools and techniques for resolving conflicts, she builds a sense of hope and possibility for the learners. They practice their new skills in role plays, experiencing the triumph of successful resolution. Throughout the workshop, Jen shares vivid stories and interactive exercises to make the emotional stakes feel real and relevant.

By designing for emotional resonance, Jen *motivates* learners while also informing them. She creates an experience that speaks to their core challenges and aspirations, priming them to internalize and apply the information.

A Toolkit for Engaging Learners

Let's now put our understanding of intuitive and deliberative thinking into practice. Try one, several, or all of the tools and techniques discussed here, which combine elements of intuitive and deliberative thinking in a way both Jen and Juan would appreciate.

Story-Based Learning

From case studies to simulations to role plays, stories are a powerful way to make learning personal, emotional, and memorable. They activate natural empathy and pattern-seeking circuits in our minds, allowing us to step into someone else's shoes and vicariously experience the consequences of different choices (Andrews et al. 2009). They can introduce concepts, illustrate their application, or reinforce key takeaways. Stories can be told through various media, including text, audio, video, and interactive scenarios. The key is to make the stories relatable, emotionally compelling, and connected to learning objectives (Reamy 2002).

Scenario-Based Learning

Realistic scenarios, whether presented as branching e-learning modules or live group challenges, immerse learners in authentic contexts and force them to grapple with the messy complexities of real-world decision making (Clark 2013). By providing a safe space to experiment, fail, and reflect, they build the kind of flexible expertise that transfers to actual performance.

Microlearning and Performance Support

Short, focused bursts of content, delivered at the point of need, cater to our preference for the immediate and applicable but can demand both intuitive and more deliberative ways of thinking (Kapp and Defelice 2019). Microlearning modules or performance-support tools that provide just-in-time guidance and feedback can help learners apply new skills when it matters most—in the heat of the moment, when the stakes are high and they're overwhelmed.

Visual Design

From graphic organizers to data visualizations to animated explainers, visuals can make complex information more accessible, engaging, and memorable (Malamed 2015). When designed with intention and restraint, they not only capture attention but also clarify key concepts and connections. The best visual aids don't decorate your content; they integrate with and elevate it.

Emotional Design

Small touches like warm color palettes, reader-friendly fonts, and encouraging language can make a big difference in how learners feel about a learning experience (Um et al. 2012). More elaborate techniques like gamification, humor, and surprise can inject moments of delight and discovery that keep learners motivated and engaged. The goal is not to manipulate emotions, but to create an authentic sense of connection and care.

Analogies and Metaphors

Analogies and metaphors help learners grasp unfamiliar ideas by relating them to familiar experiences. By linking abstract concepts to concrete images and sensations, we offer learners a new handle to grab onto. Effective analogies are vivid, memorable, and emotionally resonant (Bulgren et al. 2007).

Social Learning

Humans are intensely social creatures, wired to learn by watching and mimicking others. Social learning leverages this natural inclination by providing opportunities for people to observe, collaborate with, and learn from peers and experts (Bandura 1977). From discussion forums to group projects to mentoring relationships, social learning taps into our need for belonging and validation and can also allow for slower, more deliberative thinking during conversations.

Experiential Learning

Learning by doing is perhaps the most powerful way to engage intuitive thinking. Experiential learning activities, such as simulations, role plays, and real-world projects, allow learners to apply new skills in authentic contexts and learn from direct experience (Kolb 1984). By engaging both mind and body,

they create the kind of rich, multisensory memories that are easy to retrieve and apply.

Intuitive Thinking and Instructional Design

At this point, some learning designers might be skeptical of our emphasis on instinct, emotion, and experience. What about the tried-and-true principles of instructional design (ID)? What about the need for clear objectives, structured content, and rigorous evaluation?

We believe that an approach to learning design that pays attention to intuitive thinking doesn't replace traditional design foundations; it builds on them. We are not abandoning instructional design best practices; we are simply infusing them with a deeper understanding of how people learn and become inspired to act on their newfound knowledge.

Consider your go-to instructional design model. Whether you swear by the time-tested ADDIE framework, prefer the agility of the Successive Approximation Model (SAM), or use another approach, the intuitive thinking techniques we've explored can elevate every phase of your design process.

This doesn't replace your existing model; it enhances it. By infusing intuitive thinking principles into each stage, from initial analysis to final evaluation, we can create learning experiences that are not just effective but truly engaging. It's about marrying the structured approach of traditional models with the power of intuition, resulting in a flexible methodology that adapts to diverse learning contexts and design philosophies.

Imagine ADDIE, but with an emotional intelligence upgrade, or SAM, but with an intuitive edge that makes each iteration more effective. That's the transformative potential we're tapping into. Keep these core principles in mind:

- **Emotional connection.** Engage learners' emotions and personal experiences.
- **Intuitive processing.** Leverage rapid, instinctive cognitive processes.
- **Deliberative thinking.** Balance intuitive elements with opportunities for deep, analytical thinking.

- **Flexibility.** Adapt to different learning contexts and design models.
- **Iterative refinement.** Continuously improve based on feedback and outcomes.

Elevate Your Current ID Model

When we advocate for using insights from marketing, behavioral economics, and cognitive psychology in instructional design, it's not about reinventing the wheel—it's about adding a new set of gears. The strategies outlined in this section are designed to seamlessly integrate with your existing ID model. These tactics will help you transform your current model into a more holistic, learner-centered approach that not only imparts knowledge but also inspires action and fosters lasting change. Let's explore some strategies to elevate your practice, one phase at a time.

Needs assessment and analysis:

- Investigate learners' attitudes, motivations, and emotional connections to the topic.
- Identify potential cognitive biases or preconceptions.
- Balance intuitive insights with data-driven analysis.
- Explore the learner's hopes and fears, as well as and how the content connects to their identities and aspirations.

Design and development:

- Craft learning objectives that address both cognitive and affective domains.
- Use storytelling, analogies, and vivid examples to make content relatable and memorable.
- Incorporate visual design elements that guide intuitive understanding.
- Create opportunities for both quick, instinctive responses and in-depth analysis.
- Make each point personal, contrastable, tangible, memorable, visual, and emotional.
- Design activities that help learners discover and apply concepts intuitively.

Implementation:

- Set an emotional tone that promotes psychological safety and openness to learning.
- Use a mix of rapid, engaging activities and deeper, reflective exercises.
- Model vulnerability and growth mindset to encourage learner engagement.
- Create a sense of safety, belonging, and purpose in the learning environment.
- Provide feedback that feels supportive and constructive.

Evaluation:

- Assess both immediate, intuitive reactions and long-term, deliberative learning outcomes.
- Gather qualitative feedback on emotional engagement and personal relevance.
- Measure changes in attitudes and behaviors, not just knowledge acquisition.
- Collect stories from learners about their experiences and how they're applying what they've learned.

**Dual Process Instructional Design:
Intuitive and Deliberative Questions****Intuitive questions:**

- What immediate reactions or emotions might learners have to the subject matter?
- What preconceptions or biases might learners bring to the topic?
- How can we use visual cues or intuitive layouts to guide learners?
- What metaphors or analogies can quickly convey complex ideas?
- What elements can we include to capture immediate attention (e.g., striking visuals or compelling stories)?
- How can we chunk information for easy processing?
- How can we create a positive first impression to engage our learners' emotions?
- What quick, interactive elements can maintain engagement?
- How can we gather immediate, intuitive feedback from learners?

Deliberative questions:

- What in-depth knowledge or skills do learners need to acquire?
- How can we encourage learners to critically examine their existing beliefs about the topic?
- What problem-solving activities will require deep, analytical thinking?
- How can we scaffold learning to gradually increase mental complexity?
- What opportunities can we provide for learners to practice deliberate, step-by-step reasoning?
- How can we incorporate reflective exercises to encourage deeper processing?
- How can we allocate time for learners to engage in deep discussion or complex problem solving?
- What strategies can we use to help learners overcome cognitive biases?
- How can we evaluate learners' ability to apply concepts in novel, complex situations?

By applying these strategies, considerations, and questions, you can enhance any instructional design model with principles of intuitive thinking, creating learning experiences that are both emotionally engaging and intellectually rigorous. Remember that emotion and cognition are inextricably intertwined in the learning process. By addressing both, we create more effective and memorable learning experiences.

Integrating these principles into each phase of your instructional design model helps to create learning content that is affective and effective, touching hearts as well as minds. The rigid separation of emotion and cognition is a false dichotomy. Intuitive and deliberative thinking are inextricably intertwined (Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007). We cannot learn without feeling, and we cannot feel without learning. Emotion is not the enemy of reason but its essential partner.

Moreover, intuitive thinking is not a primitive, irrational impulse to be suppressed—it's an important part of how our brains work. The brain has different areas that do different jobs, like thinking logically, feeling emotions, and making choices. Intuition works with these other parts to help us understand complex situations and the world around us. When these brain areas work

together, they shape who we are. Our brain's interconnection and teamwork influences our beliefs, motivates us, and helps us be creative. It's a big part of what makes us human.

Tap Learners' Emotions and Drive Action

To design learning that ignores intuitive thinking is to design for machines, not people. It is to assume that learners are empty vessels to be filled with facts and concepts rather than active, meaning-making agents with their own goals, desires, and perspectives.

Design attuned to our intuitive thinking recognizes and respects learners' humanity. It meets them where they are, not just intellectually but emotionally and experientially. It treats them as partners in the learning process, not just passive recipients. This is not to say that the techniques we've discussed should be used manipulatively or excessively. Like any powerful tools, they must be wielded with care and integrity. The goal is not to titillate or distract but to engage and empower. Whether you're designing technical training, a leadership development program, or an onboarding curriculum, considering how to make it personal, contrastable, tangible, memorable, visual, and emotional will only improve its effectiveness.

Marketers have long understood the power of engaging intuitive thinking. From Nike's energizing "Just Do It" ads to Subaru's emotionally resonant "Love" campaign, the world's top brands know that to drive action, you must first tap emotion.

Many L&D professionals have been stuck in an information-driven paradigm for too long. This is no longer viable in a world of increasing distraction. To cut through the noise and have a real influence, we must take some insights from marketers to recognize and respect the full complexity of the human mind and craft learning experiences that inform, inspire, and transform.

A Final Thought

As L&D professionals, we can amplify our results by embracing marketing principles that engage both intuitive and deliberative thinking. Let's harness the power of emotion, weave compelling narratives, and craft multisensory experiences that capture attention and drive lasting change. By making our

content personal, contrastable, tangible, memorable, visual, and emotional, we'll see immense rewards. Our learners will be more engaged, our organizations will see improved outcomes, and we'll grow as professionals. So, let's take a page from the marketer's playbook and design learning programs that don't just inform, but truly transform.

Activity 1-1. Emotion-Infused Onboarding Makeover

Objective

Reimagine a portion of your current onboarding program by incorporating elements that engage intuitive thinking and emotions. (Note: If you would rather work on another initiative that's currently top of mind for you, feel free to use that idea instead.)

Steps

1. **Think about your current onboarding program.** Choose a specific module or section that is particularly information heavy or uses a traditional approach.
2. **Understand the emotional connection.** Consider the emotional journey of a new employee experiencing this part of onboarding. What might they be feeling? Excited? Overwhelmed? Curious? Anxious? Write down two to three key emotions.
3. **Apply the six principles.** Using the six principles discussed in this chapter, brainstorm ways to transform your chosen onboarding section. For each principle, write down at least one idea:
 - » *Personal.* How could you connect the content to the new employee's role or goals?
 - » *Contrastable.* What before-and-after scenarios or striking comparisons could you introduce?
 - » *Tangible.* How could you make abstract concepts more concrete or hands-on?
 - » *Memorable.* What story, analogy, or unexpected element could you incorporate?
 - » *Visual.* How could you represent key information visually instead of just relying on text?
 - » *Emotional.* How could you tap into or address the emotions you identified earlier?

4. **Review your ideas.** Choose the one you think would have the best ability to engage new employees and make the information stick. Write a brief paragraph describing how you would implement this change and what influence you think it would have.

Follow-Up

As you continue your learning journey, consider gradually applying these principles to other aspects of the onboarding program. Remember, the goal is not to completely overhaul everything at once but to incrementally enhance engagement and effectiveness by tapping into intuitive thinking and emotions.

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