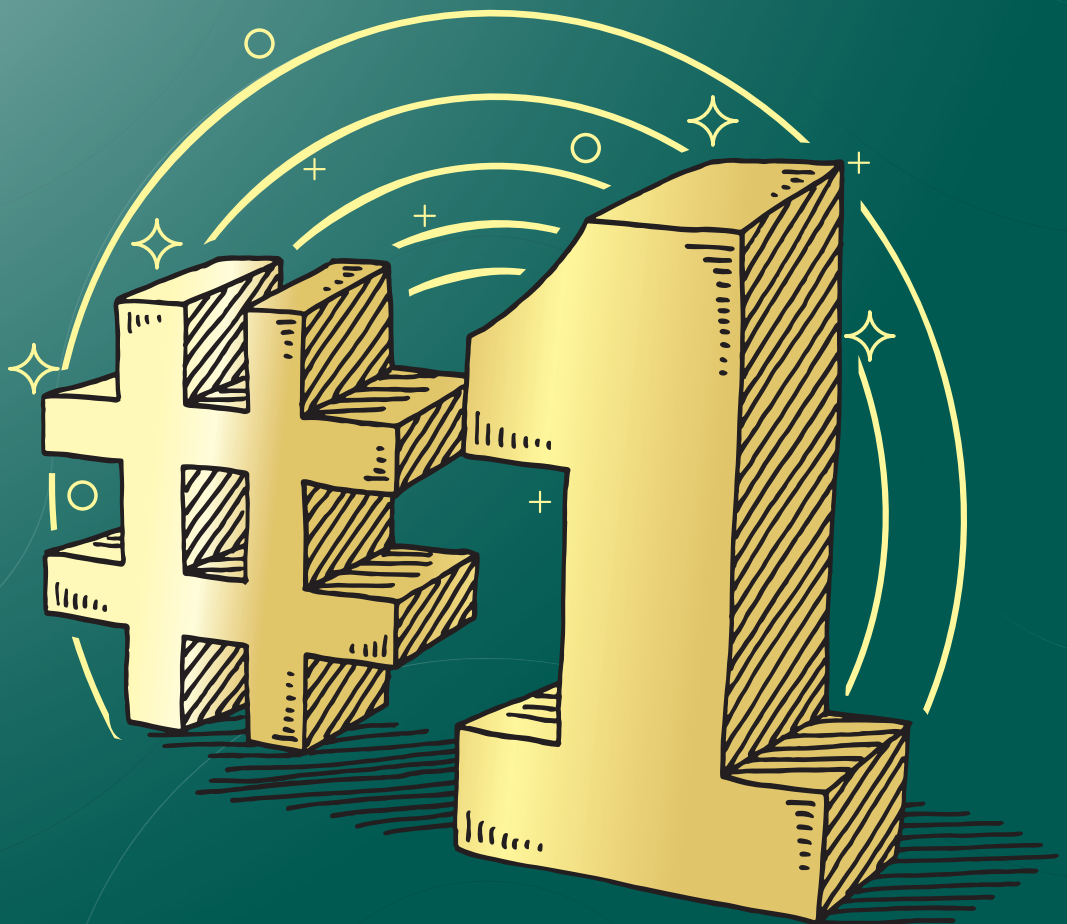




SUCCESSFUL TRAINING COMPANIES **PUT THE LEARNER FIRST**



BECOME A FRONTRUNNER -
INSIGHTS FROM 10 INDUSTRY
LEADERS AND EXPERTS BOILED
DOWN TO 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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INTRODUCTION

Making a difference through training and really helping people learn – that is what training providers love and what they have done successfully for years. It is also the added value they would like to continue to deliver, now and in the future. But does the traditional training provider still have a role to play in a rapidly changing market?

Successful training providers have a strong focus on the learner. But what does that mean and how do you use this focus successfully? It's time to take a good look at this, so that you as a training provider can remain relevant in the market and continue to help people learn and develop.

We asked ten (award-winning) training providers and learning experts to give their views on the importance of a strong focus on the learner and how to use this as a training provider. You can read their responses in the rest of this e-book, which covers:

- The most important requirements to stand out from the competition
- What having a strong focus on the learner means for your company
- Essential tips and advice from training providers and learning experts



Providing the best training in the country, which motivates employees to do things differently in the workplace and leads to inspired employees and satisfied customers – this is the underlying goal behind everything that we do.

Coen van Hoof

Director, NCVB Bedrijfsopleidingen (see customer case)

THE QUICK SUMMARY

As a training provider, you face a difficult task. On the one hand, there are more than enough developments in the market that secure the future of training providers. These include themes such as lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling, and the 'digital' skills gap. On the other hand, there are also many threats, such as various forms of competition in the form of all-you-can-learn platforms, LinkedIn Learning, YouTube, and even AI-generated training. Professionals are getting busier and busier and have [little interest](#) in yet another training.

The role of the training provider is crucial, but the training provider can only be relevant in the future if it can make a difference for the learner and the organisation for which the learner works. Only then does a training provider have a sustainable right to exist.

And for a training provider to make a difference, the learner must always come first. Interviews with ten training providers and learning experts show that there are three things that a training provider must have in order to achieve this and to secure its right to exist in the future.

Three requirements for successful training based on a learner focus:

1. Really understand what the learner needs

Training providers always think they know what the learner needs. Where the successful training providers make the difference is how far they go in understanding that learner. In addition, according to Julie Dirksen, Learning Strategy Designer and author of the book *Design for how people learn*, the easy-to-solve learning problems will be solved by AI in the future. What remains, therefore, and where

the training provider's *raison d'être* lies, are the difficult-to-solve problems that require a deep (and above-average) understanding of the learner.

2. Help translate theory into improved performance in practice

By translating theory into practice during the training, learners are a lot more motivated, because the training has become much more relevant. It also ensures that there are performance improvements in the workplace, happy learners and satisfied customers who achieve their business goals. And that in turn ensures a sustainable customer relationship between the customer and the training provider.

3. Become a talent development partner by linking training to business goals

L&D decision makers are looking for a talent development partner, not a learning solutions provider. They are looking for a training provider that can help influence their outcomes. If you can do that, a lasting relationship is created. Moreover, success always leads to growth because satisfied (and successful) customers will tell others who are also looking for success.

The role of learning technology

Research by both Emerge Education and the World Economic Forum shows that the share of technology will increase in the coming years. Technology will offer, among other things, a solution for themes such as retraining for professions facing shortages, training professionals in 'the 100-year life' and the limited shelf life of knowledge.

Technology thus plays an important role in creating and delivering personalised and learner-centred training. And that makes technology an essential part of what the training provider has to offer.



If you get it right, and you know the group to get it right with, it will enable you to grow, to leverage growth, to find more of the people you're pitching your training to. Which then leads to a good business.

Rakesh Maharaj

Founder, ARMSA Academy

1. REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LEARNER NEEDS

This seems obvious, of course. Training providers always think they know what the learner needs. Where successful training providers make the difference is how far they go in understanding the learner. According to Julie Dirksen, the easy-to-solve learning problems will be solved by AI in the future. So what remains, and where the training provider's raison d'être lies, are the difficult-to-solve problems, which require a deep understanding of the learner.

Context

Context seems to be the key word to ensure that education makes sense. Without context, no behavioural change is possible, and without behavioural change there will be no improvement in the operating result. You must therefore continue to place yourself in the learner's situation and make a thorough analysis. Determine, for example, what prior knowledge is available, what are specific challenges in the role, what is the motivation, what obstacles are there, what do they encounter in practice, etc.

A World Economic Forum [article](#) on the major challenge of workforce retraining also identifies context as a precondition for truly helping the learner: "In the 21st century, we need personalised services that give people access to the right education and training to suit their individual needs and context."

Finding out the context of the learner and aligning the training with it is therefore essential.



You have to focus on the context of the learner. What does that context look like and how can you make learning paths more in line with that context, taking into account the learner's already existing knowledge?

Mathias Vermeulen

Manager at Winston Wolfe and author of the book 99 problemen en L&D is er (g)een van (99 problems and L&D is (not) one of them)



Competencies

To come up with the right learning solution as a training provider requires many skills and a lot of knowledge. There could be a separate e-book dedicated to this. There are, however, a number of competencies that are essential to understanding the learner and these were often mentioned in the responses from the experts, namely:

1. User Research
2. Prototyping
3. User testing

In addition to the above competencies, it is also important that you as a training provider find out what the problem is for which the training is a solution. You need to get to the core and also include the KPIs on which the learner is judged.

It is also the case that one training provider takes it further than the other. The main thing is that without a thorough analysis of what the learner needs, you can never meet the aforementioned two requirements: translating theory into practice and being a partner in talent development. An investment in researching the learner therefore ensures operational reliability in the long term. Based on the research, you can create a training that produces better results than that of your competitor.

Expert tips to help focus on the learner:

It can be a daunting task to truly understand what the learners are looking for. Here's a selection of the expert tips to help you get it done:

"The more a training matches the needs, wishes and preferences, the greater the chance of internally motivated learners."

"Beware of common pitfalls, for example, theories about learning styles and generations. As you know, they have been scientifically completely debunked."

"First make an inventory of what the learners encounter in practice. What is already going well, what is not and what difficult situations do they have to deal with in practice? Make that the starting point for your program."

"One of the most crucial parts of designing effective behavior change interventions is really understanding your learners. What capabilities do they have? What is their physical and social environment like? What do they value or care about?"

"As learning designers, we can lose ourselves completely in developing the best content, and at the same time that is a pitfall if you don't always put yourself in the shoes of the person you're doing it for."

"Test your learning interventions before you publish them, with the learner and with the expert."

"Talk to and spend time with actual users as part of the design process, preferably in their work environment."

"Iteratively design prototype solutions that can be tested with target users."

"Test solutions by observing actual learners using them."

"It's about really understanding them, not only what their current needs are but the journey they've travelled before."

2. GO FROM THEORY TO IMPROVED PERFORMANCE IN PRACTICE

By translating theory into practice during the training, learners are a lot more motivated, because the training has become much more relevant. It also ensures performance improvements in the workplace, happy learners and satisfied customers who achieve their business goals. And that in turn ensures a sustainable customer relationship between the customer and the training provider.

Make the training specific

Translating theory into practice in a training? That was not how it was done in the Middle Ages. “You learned a trade within a master-apprentice relationship. From day one, learning and doing went hand in hand,” Aylin Bilic writes in the [NRC](#) newspaper. How different things are now. Surveys of training providers show that it is precisely the translation of the theory into the practice, the workplace, that is most challenging. Working and learning have been separated, so that the application of acquired knowledge is no longer self-evident. And yet that is precisely what a training provider is meant to do. All

training providers who have contributed to this white paper indicate that the goal is to enable the learner to perform better in practice, whether that involves administering medicines or building wind farms. To help the learner make the translation from theory to practice, it is necessary to connect everything in the training to the context of the learner:

Rakesh Maharaj, founder of training provider ARMSA Academy, says: Historically, we have sent employees who are going to ‘learn’ to a special place where they come together, listen and take in certain content.



Everything you do in training and learning must connect seamlessly with that organisation, the look & feel, the core values, the ambitions, and the language. You have to develop people in their practice.

Joost Riphagen

CEO DOOR Training & Coaching

CONNECT YOUR TRAINING TO THE CONTEXT OF THE LEARNER	
DO	DON'T
✓ Start from the practice of the learners	✗ Start from your own theory
✓ In the case of a question, first explore the problem and focus on the difficult situations: what is the learner facing and what pitfalls is he falling into now?	✗ Immediately determine which training content helps with the question. "Oh, then I'll teach them my sales model!"
✓ See what is relevant for each training and be sure there is variety in what you offer.	✗ Start from a fixed basic stock of models and teach them to everyone.
✓ Tailor the cases you present to the practice and specific learning needs of the learners.	✗ Use only standard cases because they have proven their value.
✓ Sometimes say no or refer them to someone else.	✗ Always say yes to developing a training.
✓ Always start with the practice. Learners will learn much easier and be more motivated if you start with their frame of reference and show and experience practical examples. Then tailor the theory. Starting point: 'Only give need-to-know information, not nice-to-know information.'	✗ Discuss a lot of theory in your training. Always give the theory first and then practice. Starting point: 'How can they do something if they don't have the knowledge yet?'

Source: Karin de Galan School voor training (School for training)

And then you expect them to remember 100% of the training, go back to the workplace and apply what they learned there. However, have you considered that what they have learned in the classroom cannot simply be translated to the work environment because the circumstances and context are completely different there?

It is therefore important as a training provider to really delve into the situation and context of the learner, so that you can make your training much more specific. "Otherwise, something can be very inspiring where a learner follows

the training (or on their screen), but if what has been learned cannot be transferred, then that one inspiring moment immediately vanishes." Luc van Wijnen, educational designer at NCVB Bedrijfsopleidingen.

Karin de Galan - owner of the Galan School voor training shared the handy table below with tips to make the training you offer specific to the learner's situation.

“First put the practice into the training and then put the training into practice,” explains Ger Driesen, Learning Innovation Leader at aNewSpring.

Focus on behavioural change

“Knowledge is not yet a change in behaviour”, answers Julie Dirksen, Learning Strategy Designer and author of the book Design for how people learn, when asked why a training provider should have an extreme focus on the learner.

“We all know we need to eat healthy and exercise, but that knowledge alone doesn't change our behaviour.” Training providers therefore have to really get to work to dive into the world of the learner. That is also something that Karin Linden, Senior e-Learning Publisher at Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, points out: “Transferring knowledge is important, but preparing professionals for unexpected situations is perhaps even more important.”

“There is a disconnect between ‘learning’ and ‘action’, ‘theory’ and ‘impact’”, writes Mario Barosevic, Principal at Emerge Education, in a strategic article about the education market. He writes that learning solutions are mainly provided in a top-down manner with a focus on content that does not interest the learner.

Karin de Galan said that this happens, for example, if you are not trained in the coaching profession: “Then you often start from the content that you want to convey. Then you get training courses that are overly filled with a lot of knowledge transfer. But you won't get a behavioural change that way.”

There is enough content and more and more content is constantly being added. It's about what you as a training provider can achieve with that content. Regardless of your role as a training provider, it is important to understand what problem learners are trying to solve. The training is therefore the means, not the end.



Behaviour change does not necessarily happen just because someone has completed ten informative, mandatory online modules, passed an ingeniously designed test, or met a certain number of requirements.

Jet Zantvoord

Learning Developer bij GITP



It is up to us training providers to remove the barriers and make them enthusiastic about the concept where they come first. We must convince the learner of the learning solution.

Coen van Hoof

Directeur, NCVB Bedrijfsopleidingen (see customer case)

Motivate the learners

All the interviewed training providers indicated that learning does not happen automatically and that it does not always have to be fun for the learner. Scoring a 10 on the evaluation forms is easy: make sure you have a good trainer who gives compliments, a delicious lunch and a nice location. But scoring a 10 says nothing about how much impact you have made on the learner's business goals and behavioural change. And that is much more important. However, you do need the learners' cooperation, because learners (employees) already have so much to do. Motivation is therefore crucial, especially internal motivation.

Internal motivation is important, and that only comes about if you put the learner first. The more the training matches their needs, wishes and preferences, the greater the internal motivation.

"Internal motivation is more powerful than external motivation. You learn more from a training or e-learning when you believe that it

will really help you than when you are forced to do x, y and z to get that tick next to your name", says Jet Zantvoord - Learning Developer at GITP.

And as Karin de Galan indicated earlier, learners are also more motivated if you connect with their specific practice. "The training is relevant from the first minute."

Training providers are aware that learning is often also stressful and that there are several barriers for the learners, such as the situation at home, fear of failure or work pressure. It helps enormously to know these and to deploy the right people. For example, DOOR Training en Coaching only uses trainers that it has trained itself, so that they can really inspire others and make learning contagious.

Motivation is therefore the keyword to achieve success for the learner and the company for which the learner works in many cases.

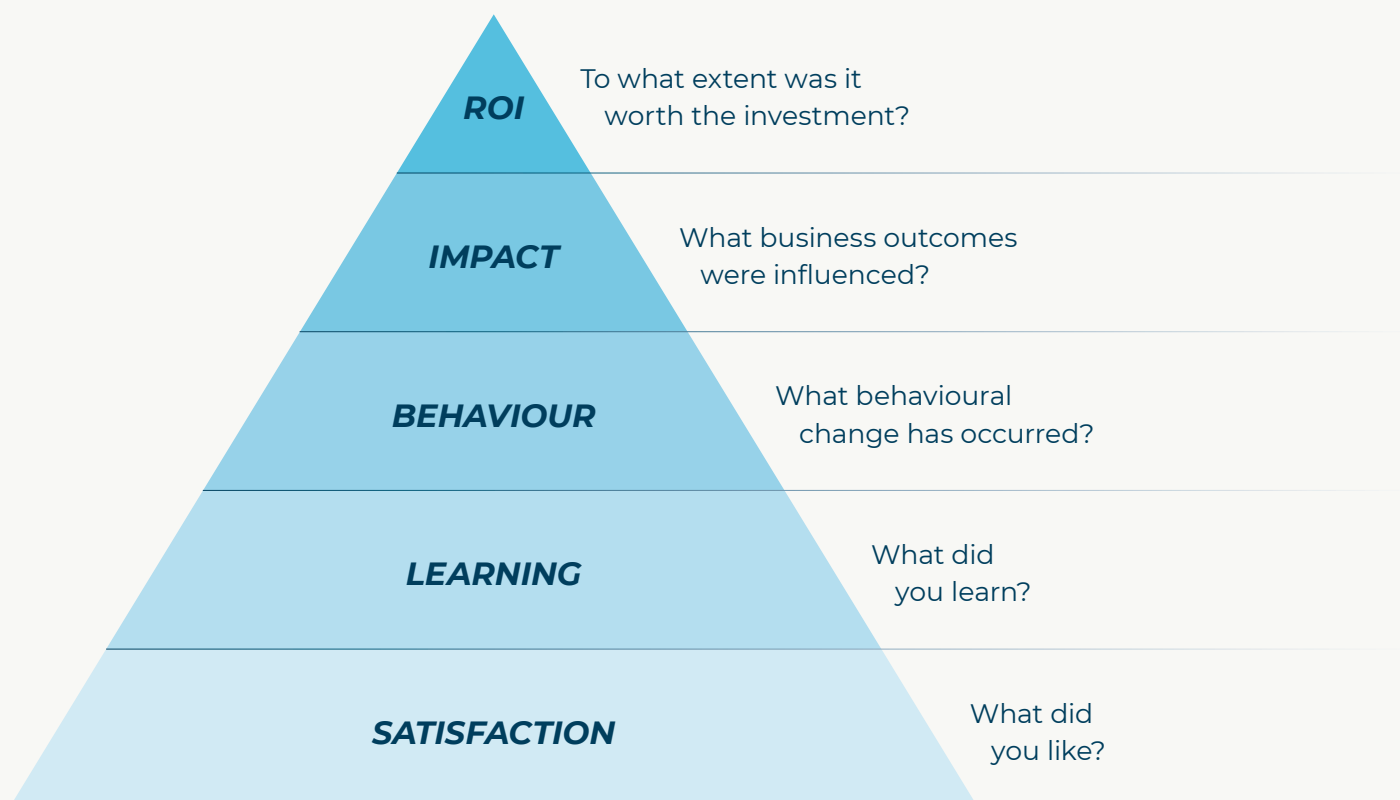
3. BECOME A TALENT DEVELOPMENT PARTNER INSTEAD OF A TRAINING PROVIDER

L&D decision makers are looking for a talent development partner, not a learning solutions provider. They are looking for a training provider who can help influence the bottom line. If you can do that, a lasting relationship is created. Moreover, success always leads to growth, because satisfied (and successful) customers will tell others who are also looking for success.

Impact on the operating result

What training providers and learning experts have in common is that they express a genuine desire to make an impact on business objectives and help with customer challenges.

Thus, they don't see themselves as just a supplier of training, but as a partner in developing people. And that's exactly what the L&D decision makers on the other side of the table need.



During Learning Live Networks, a recurring meeting of the Learning and Performance Institute, we see time and again that L&D decision makers are mainly looking for the training providers who act as partners – who collaborate with regard to the growth and challenges of the organisation.

It is no surprise to see that the Kirkpatrick/Philips model is mentioned several times in conversations with training providers. The model makes it clear that an evaluation form says little about the impact on the operating result. More is needed.

It is therefore no coincidence that satisfaction is not the most important thing for successful training providers. Satisfaction alone will not have the impact on the operating result that the customer is so desperately looking for. Thus, if you, as a training provider, are mainly guided by the evaluation forms from the learners, you will miss the boat. There are four more levels above that!

Everyone indicates that the learner, the professional who works somewhere, ensures business results. Thus, if you want to improve the operating result, and that's what the customer wants, one of the levers you can use is 'talent development'.

Rakesh from ARMSA Academy even proposes to stop using the word 'training' and instead talk about 'supporting the improvement of the professional's performance', because that is what is needed.

Hester Mager, director and owner of Tele'Train, indicated during an aNewSpring strategy session that companies are increasingly only measuring ROI financially. Although much can be traced back to this, implementing awareness of the company vision and mission is also a good result. Or, for example, employee satisfaction.

Successful training providers are therefore really looking for a connection with practice, to help the employee and the customer achieve ambitious goals.



We believe that developing and helping people is very important to achieving the business objective.

Joost Riphagen

Directeur, DOOR Training & Coaching





Being able to say no

What also contributes to the role of partner in talent development is knowing when training is not appropriate or when another solution is better able to influence that business result. Within aNewSpring, we have already paid attention to this before. Ger Driesen wrote the blog '[If training is the solution, then what is the problem](#)' and Corjan Bast followed with the blog '[Professionals don't want training, they want the result of the training](#)'.

Knowing what the problem is and being able to see that training is not always the solution ensures that you as a training provider become a reliable knowledge partner. This is evident from many of the reactions in the various conversations:

"You have to move away from the idea that every problem has to be solved with a learning action."

- Mathias Vermeulen

"We sometimes choose to say 'no' when it doesn't fit well enough."

- Coen van Hoof

"Most of the learning takes place in the workplace, not in the training situation. And that is perhaps the most important learning for the training provider himself."

- Karin Linden

"We tend to lose ourselves in our own enthusiasm (for training). And when we do that, we ignore the customer's needs and opt too quickly for our own solution. And that, paradoxically, is precisely what marketing is telling us not to do."

- Rakesh Maharaj

4. THE ROLE OF LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

The fact that technology makes a difference and helps learners to learn better and smarter has already been proven by many training providers. And the technical possibilities are expanded every year. Technology is playing an increasingly important role in the aforementioned themes, such as retraining for professions facing shortages, training professionals in 'the 100-year life' and the limited shelf life of knowledge.

Learning technology is becoming increasingly important

One training provider uses digital file sharing technology while another offers a full adaptive learning path - the fact is that every training provider uses some form of technology. And that is no surprise. According to The World Economic Forum, the share of technology in the provision of training will only increase in the coming years. They describe technology as an essential part:

What is needed for personalised and learner-oriented training in solving the skills gap through reskilling and upskilling

1. A seamless user experience - offline, online and blended - from start to finish.
2. Reinforcement of fundamental elements such as technology, data, talent and insights on how value is created for the learner, the company and all involved.
3. Delivery of (learning) experiences, opportunities and value so that the learning experience becomes interactive, fun, immersive and personalised.

[Emerge Education](#) also expects training to become more personalised and for learners to learn when it suits them.

This picture is also in line with Donald Taylor's [Global Sentiment Survey](#) where 'Personalisation' is in the top 10 every year.

Technology for the learner and the training provider

The technology behind YouTube is capable of serving you interesting videos every time. You can use the same technology in the training environment to captivate and support the learner. You can also make a training personalised by only focussing on the parts that the learner has not yet mastered, and technology makes that a lot easier. Every year new forms of learning technology are added and the applications are getting better and better.

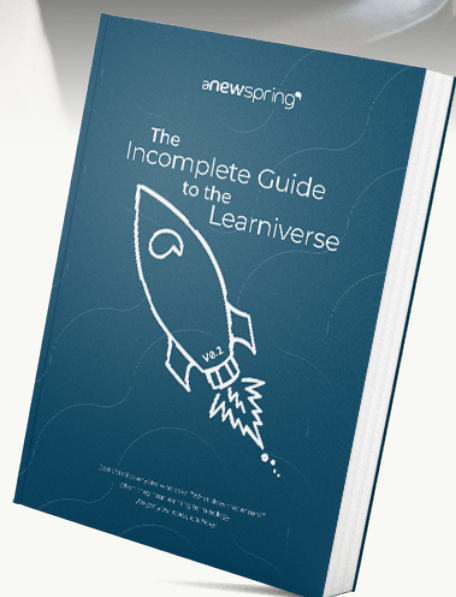
But the technology does not only help the learner; there are also many advantages for the training provider.

Smart reuse of (digital) content, for example, makes it possible to quickly and easily create new training courses for new target groups. And what a training looks like can be adjusted per customer in almost all platforms. Technology can also help with knowledge absorption, leaving more time to really practice in a classroom setting.



Technology will therefore play an increasingly important role. This makes choosing the right technology essential. We previously wrote about the big puzzle that is learning technology in the e-book [The incomplete guide to the learniverse](#).

This showed that there is a lot to choose from and that a training provider must really know what is needed and what is not. Because the same that applies to training also applies to learning technology: if learning technology is the solution, what is the problem?



5. THE ROLE OF ANEWSRING

Technology is not the goal; it is a means. It's a resource that can be used by a training provider at the right time and in the right context to help a learner learn. That's what aNewSpring stands for.

Making technology that really helps people with learning, with that mission aNewSpring started in 2003 and this mission is still on the wall in Rotterdam where our head office is located.

We don't see technology as an end in itself, but as a means and a resource that can be deployed at the right time and in the right context. The training provider that uses our learning platform must therefore strive to uncover the information to make this possible.

Hence the exploration with training providers and learning experts about the focus on the learner from which this e-book is the result.

Now we can conclude with an exhaustive list of features explaining what our learning platform can help with, such as:

- A nice and proven UX/UI that helps with learning regardless of age
- An excellent learner experience on any type of device, so that the learner decides how to learn and where to learn

- The MemoTrainer™ that helps learners store knowledge in long-term memory, so that they can use it in practice
- Our learning journey principle in which all learning activities and assignments can always be found in one place, which ensures peace and clarity
- Adaptivity so that each learner gets their own learning path
- Possibilities for learning together (social learning)

And we can [give examples of training providers](#) who already use all these features.

But we would prefer that you take a look yourself at www.anewspring.com and combine our platform with the knowledge that has been shared, so that you also apply this e-book in your practice. This can be done independently or together with our Customer Success team, because the best solutions are created through collaboration.

Four tips from Ger for choosing the right learning technology

Tip 1:

Once again, if learning technology is the solution, what is the problem? Are you very aware of the problem you want to solve?

Tip 2:

Take a good look at what the provider promises and how they think they can deliver: too good to be true is usually too good to be true.

Tip 3:

Consciously choose between a 'one trick pony' and a complete circus. One trick ponies can do 1 trick (often very well) but nothing more, which can be very attractive in the short term. In the longer term, you probably want to be able to work with all kinds of variants of blended and online learning.

Tip 4:

Do not only choose based on product features, but also include the team of people who are behind the product. This will be the team you can turn to when things get tricky/difficult. Think of it this way: the people are the platform.



WITH MANY THANKS TO...

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Professional Facilitator . Speaker
. Learning Designer at Learning
in the White Space

Linked in



Ger Driesen

Learning Innovation Leader
at aNewSpring

Linked in



Hester Mager

Director / owner at Tele'Train

Linked in



Jet Zantvoord

Learning Developer at GTP

Linked in



Joost Riphagen

CEO of DOOR
Training & Coaching

Linked in



Julie Dirksen

Learning Strategy Designer
and author of the book
Design for how people learn

Linked in



Karin de Galan

Owner of the Karin de Galan
school voor training and
NOBTRA trainer of the year
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Linked in



Karin Linden

Senior e-learning publisher at
Bohn Stafleu van Loghum

Linked in



Luc Wijnen

Educational developer at
NCVB Bedrijfsopleidingen

Linked in



Mathias Vermeulen

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Rakesh Maharaj

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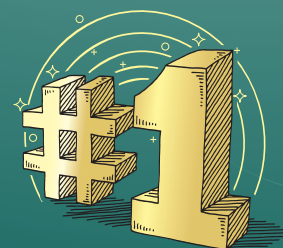
Linked in



Corjan Bast

Branding and
lead gen expert.
Author of this e-book

Linked in



aNewSpring

aNewSpring
Westblaak 180
3012 KN Rotterdam

anewspring.com