



Onboarding & Induction: How to win employee loyalty from day 1

Discover how to build an onboarding and induction programme that will drive employee productivity, maximise engagement, and secure long-term retention.

Contents

Introduction	p.1
Chapter 1: The importance of onboarding	p.2
1.1 Understanding onboarding, induction and probation	p.3
1.2 The benefits of a strong onboarding program	p.5
Chapter 2: The elements of an exceptional onboarding journey	p.6
2.1 Personalisation and self-service	p.7
2.2 Onboarding best practice	p.8
2.3 Probation best practice	p.9
Chapter 3: Implementing best practice	p.10
3.1 Onboarding best practice	p.11
3.2 Induction best practice	p.12
3.3 Probation best practice	p.14
Conclusion	p.15
About the Authors	p.16
References	p.17

About Learn Amp

Learn Amp is an award-winning People Development Platform. Learning, employee engagement and performance management — all in one.

We're on a mission to make work life, work better. We make it easy to map out and deliver the best employee journey. Learn Amp combines learning, engagement and performance management tools in one seamless platform, driving better business results and higher employee retention.

Introduction

A great onboarding program is critical to developing and retaining top talent.

For too many businesses, onboarding is an afterthought. They tend to build induction programs that focus on administrative processes, and neglect more important factors like cultural integration and maximising performance.

In fact, induction is just one component of an onboarding process that starts from the moment a job offer is accepted. In this white paper, we'll take a look at the differences between induction, onboarding and probation. We'll consider how onboarding benefits both new joiners and their employers, and how a comprehensive onboarding program can boost the lifetime value of each employee.

Next, we'll move our focus to the key elements of an exceptional onboarding program, and how to integrate onboarding into your learning and development (L&D) strategy. Finally, we'll examine the ingredients of best practice in implementation of onboarding, induction and probation processes.



Lindsay Fletcher,

Director of Ten Academy, Ten Group

“Having almost doubled in size in the last year to 1000 staff it would have been so much more painful and costly without Learn Amp to help deliver a consistent on-boarding experience and create the right kind of introduction for new hires across our 20 global offices.”



1. The importance of onboarding

Companies spend huge sums on recruiting the best talent – but many then drop the ball when it comes to onboarding. Up to 20% of new hires will leave within the first 45 days,¹ but effective onboarding can make a radical difference. The importance of a strong onboarding program cannot be overstated – onboarding can increase new hire retention by 80% and boost productivity by up to 70%.² In this section, we'll look at why onboarding is so critical to business success.



1.1 Understanding onboarding and induction

If you want to hire, retain and engage top performers, you need to make sure that they receive a complete onboarding program.

Onboarding should include a best-practice induction process – but much more besides.

Before we get into the details of how to build a world-class onboarding process, let's start with the basics. What's the difference between onboarding, induction and probation?

Onboarding

We use onboarding to describe the full process of integrating a new employee into the company. Starting from the moment the employee is hired, onboarding is the journey to bring the employee into the business, culturally, strategically, socially, and professionally.

The onboarding process should be customised to each individual joiner, taking into account their experience, job role, career aspirations, and level of responsibility within the company.

A complete onboarding process should address all four key areas that impact employee performance and integration:

- Practical and logistical (technology, access to facilities, tools)
- Role-based (performance management and role-specific learning)
- Social integration (relationships with colleagues, mentoring)
- Cultural (communication, company vision and values, office dynamics)

Most companies have some form of process for new hires. However, far fewer address the main challenges facing joiners. For instance, only 29% provide guidance on familiarising new hires with the culture of the business, even though this is one of the biggest onboarding hurdles.³

Onboarding should be considered to start before Day 1 (from the moment they accept a job offer) and run until the employee is fully productive. A well-onboarded employee will reach their full productive potential up to 4 months faster, and will be up to 70% more productive, than those who received minimal or no onboarding.⁴



Induction

If onboarding is the full, long-term process of integrating a new hire into the business, then induction is the part of that process that you deal with shortly before they start, and in their first few days at work. In general, induction is practical and short-term. It's a fairly standardized process, especially if you're hiring for multiple roles at the same time.

Your induction process should address the administrative and logistical aspects of joining the company. This might include:

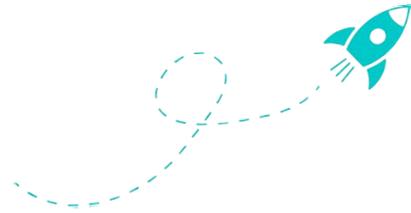
- Administrative procedures
- Compliance training
- Technical support
- A company handbook and/or culture deck
- A training session
- An information pack and orientation

However, induction goes further than that - it's your window of opportunity to prove to your employees that they've made a good decision by joining your company. Induction helps to provide a context for the employee's new role, by showing how they fit in with your overall company mission, objectives and culture.

Your induction process needs to build on the relationship that you started during the hiring process and create a seamless, positive employee experience.

Probation

Probation is a trial period for new employees, usually lasting three to six months. Probation is a legal concept – employees on probation can usually be let go or choose to leave with a shorter notice period required by employee or employer. If induction is your opportunity to convince your new employees that you're worth their time and effort, probation is the other side of the coin. It's your chance to make sure that your recruitment and onboarding process has worked correctly.

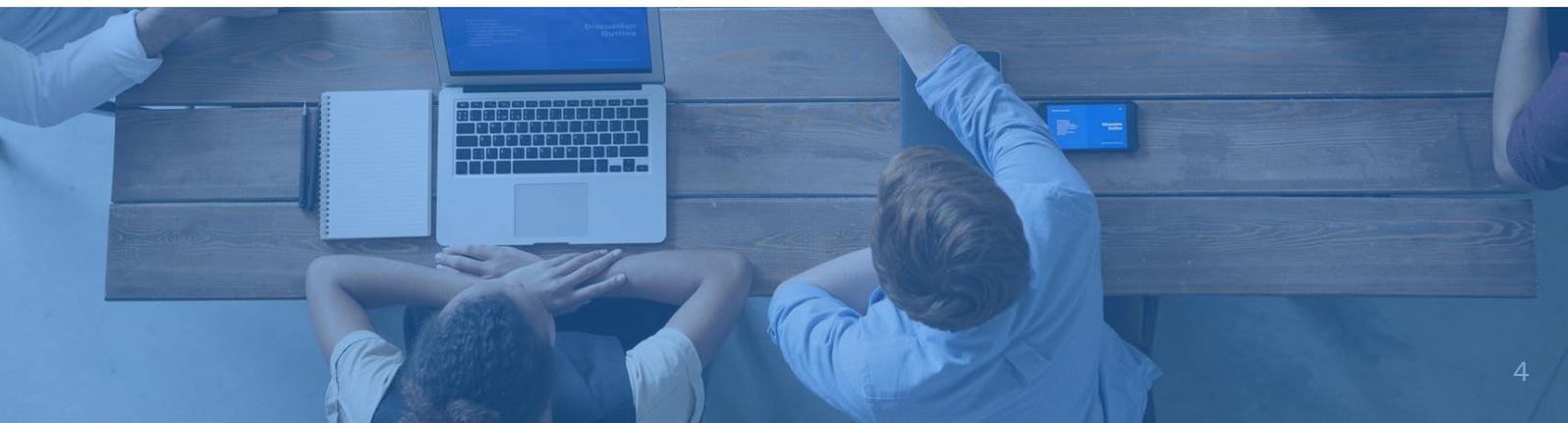


Building a strong onboarding program, which includes a solid induction process and a thorough, well-managed probationary period, will help your business reduce costs, increase employee engagement, and boost productivity and long term retention. Read on to find out how to get it right.

“If the moment that the employee accepted your offer was their “buying decision”, induction is the opportunity to confirm that they made the right choice.”

Joe Hill-Wilson, CCO

Learn Amp



1.2 Benefits of a Strong Onboarding Program

An effective onboarding programme can substantially increase Employee Lifetime Value.

Employee Lifetime Value (ELV) is the net value each employee brings to your business over the entire time that they are with you (i.e. the value of what they do minus the costs of hiring, onboarding, paying and managing them). As employees are the most valuable asset in any business, we'd argue that ELV is one of the most critical metrics for business success. Investing time, money and energy in a thorough onboarding and induction process will have a huge impact on ELV.⁵

If new hires don't receive a strong onboarding experience:

23%
leave within
12 months⁶

33%
fail to meet
expectations⁷

88%
didn't receive
strong onboarding⁸

1/5
wouldn't recommend
employer⁹

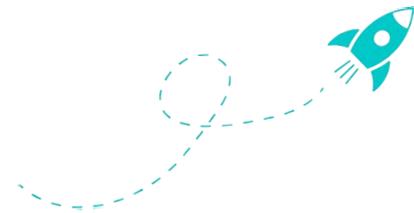
Productivity and profitability

- New hires who receive a formal onboarding reach full productivity up to 4 months faster than those without. That translates to 5-7% higher productivity – and profitability – across the whole business every year.

- New hires that have been through a comprehensive onboarding programme need less peer training and boost the overall performance of the team they join.

Increased retention

- Given that 1 in 3 new hires leave within the first three months,¹⁰ a lack of onboarding can be the equivalent of adding 30% onto your recruitment costs.
- Nearly 70% of employees who receive a great onboarding will stay over 3 years.¹¹ As they are more likely to stay longer, these employees therefore amortise your investment in their recruitment over a longer period.



Improved engagement and culture

- Onboarding increases the employee's sense of belonging by 70%, engagement by 50%, and understanding of organizational purpose by 37%.¹² Therefore, well-onboarded employees contribute to and maintain a high-performing working culture.
- They also inject teams with a new energy and enthusiasm that help keep your company at the top of its game.

A great onboarding scheme can deliver:

11%
better employee
performance¹³

4
months quicker
full productivity¹⁴

50%
greater engagement¹⁵

82%
increase in retention¹⁶

2. The elements of an exceptional onboarding experience

An outstanding onboarding experience needs to be personalised, flexible, and easily adapted to new circumstances. It should be closely aligned with your learning program, your performance management system, and your overall organisational goals. In this section, we'll break down the elements of a great onboarding experience.



2.1 Personalisation and self-service

The onboarding journey is highly personal. Your onboarding process needs to be personal too.

Some aspects of onboarding may be standardised across a hiring cohort or similar roles. However, your onboarding process must adapt to the specific needs, experience, role and preferences of each employee.

Successful onboarding involves integrating a specific employee into your organisation and building long-term loyalty. It depends on building a personal relationship between each new hire and your company.

Opportunities to personalise the onboarding experience abound:

- To create a more individualised approach, start by getting to know each new hire. Use surveys or behavioural assessment solutions to identify their learning preferences and communication style.
- Help each individual new hire feel welcome and included by mentioning them by name in group chats and meetings.
- Use automated reminders to prompt line managers to check in with each new hire daily, even if only with a quick message on Slack or Teams.
- Give each person a personalised welcome gift or ‘goodie bag’ on their first day (or even deliver it at home before they start).
- To encourage a sense of personal connection, set up a meet and greet (or its online equivalent).

- Invite each new hire to record a video introducing themselves, and then share it via your learning platform – and ask their team mates to do the same.

- Provide each recruit with an onboarding “buddy” to help them get to know their way around the team dynamics and company culture.

Top performers want to help themselves.

A key component of a personalised onboarding journey is self-service. Nothing is more frustrating than wading through irrelevant, one-size-fits-all onboarding content. Instead, allow your new hires to manage their own onboarding experience. They will get up to speed much more quickly as a result.

- Use a next generation People Development Platform like Learn Amp to establish learning pathways for each role. This can be further personalised by assigning specific content based on your initial assessment of the individual’s learning priorities.
- You can set up checkpoints and milestones to help the new hire track their own progress while also making sure that everyone has access to the information they need.
- Induction tasks can easily be handled in a self-service format. For instance, record explanatory videos and step-by-step instructions for using technology, finding their way around, understanding the company structure and so on.
- Invite new joiners to complete learning tasks. For instance, new sales hires could watch a sales demo video, then record one themselves to review with their line manager. This not only helps them get comfortable with the technology they’ll need for their work - it also helps them to hit the ground running.

2.2 Performance and Measurement

The onboarding program is your opportunity to drive performance.

Instead of treating recruitment and onboarding as two separate processes, they should be part of a continuous relationship between the company and the employee.

For example, you can require candidates to create a role-relevant task as part of their application process. Review the task with the successful candidate, breaking down what they did well, and the areas where they'd like to improve. Transpose these action areas into their personal development pathway in your learning platform so that your new hire starts Day 1 with several learning tasks already identified and assigned. A sophisticated learning platform will then allow line managers to review these personal objectives and automatically schedule a digital check-in with new hires each week to track their progress.

Don't separate onboarding from learning and performance.

It's tempting to treat new hires as separate from established employees. After all, you don't want to overwhelm them with the pressure to perform, when they've only just joined the company. However, we'd argue that this is short-sighted.

For starters, if you don't track new recruits' performance and help them set goals and objectives, you risk squandering the energy and optimism that new joiners can bring to the company. Worse, you risk losing them all together. After all, as we've seen, if you don't track, measure and review the performance of new hires, you risk having to let 20% of them go before they've really got started.

The key to avoiding these performance issues is to tie learning to performance. There are several ways to implement this:

- Onboarding should include educating new hires on the competency framework you've identified for your business, including the behaviours most likely to result in long-term success. As well as understanding the framework itself, each new hire should have learning objectives that relate to the competencies most relevant for their role.
- New hires should have individual Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) - or similar performance metrics - that are clearly aligned with team and company goals. These should be challenging without being overwhelming, with a focus on tasks and projects that will give them a sense of how their role fits into the bigger organisational structure.
- It's also valuable to develop performance benchmarks for new hires, so that you can easily assess how people compare with others at the same stage of development. This creates more objectivity around performance evaluation and gives managers a clear idea of what they should realistically expect from a new hire.
- Introduce specific OKRs for line managers with new recruits in their teams, to measure each manager's commitment to engaging and developing new hires.
- Line managers should also be required to review their new hires' progress towards their performance benchmarks frequently, to make sure that new hires remain engaged and on track.



2.3 Flexibility and Alignment

Onboarding needs to adapt to your current reality.

In recent months, the COVID-19 pandemic has created difficulties for many organisations. Now more than ever, businesses need to build processes that can adapt to changing circumstances. For many companies, onboarding processes rely on face-to-face training and resource-intensive induction days – so this may be the right time to rethink.

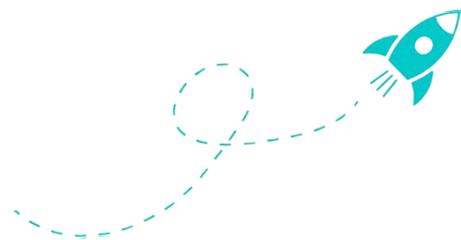
An exceptional onboarding program is one that can adjust to your recruitment needs, that can flex to handle large cohorts and single inductions, and that is not impacted by seasonality, hiring cycles, urgency, or holidays.

Today's onboarding programs need to be available for a remote-only or flexible workforce. Remote onboarding can be challenging, especially for companies that only switched to remote work recently. It becomes harder to spot new hires who are struggling, or who don't have the resources or training they need to progress. Here are a few ways to address the issue:

- Closely involve line managers in the onboarding process.
- Assign every new hire a “social buddy” from their peer group who will check in online.
- Make sure that all L&D programs can adapt to either a blended or online modality.
- Build connections for the new hires by organising online social events or cross-team exercises.

Flexibility in your onboarding content delivery is key for today's workforce. For instance:

- Support collaborative learning during the onboarding process. Set up a discussion forum where new hires can ask questions at any time.
- Incorporate user-created content into the onboarding process, to make sure that the information you're providing to new hires reflects the current reality.
- Allow people time to set their own pace to work through materials and select the content that is most relevant to them.
- By applying this “flipped learning” approach, most of your new hires' learning takes place within your online platform, with flexible options to provide support via the platform if you suddenly need to switch to a fully remote working situation.
- To emphasise your company culture, make sure that all learning materials shared with new hires, even user-created content, reflect your company brand and values
- Flexibility is important – but so is keeping everyone on the same page. Don't let your onboarding process become so flexible that you miss passing on crucial information.



3. Implementing best practice

We've established that onboarding is a key part of the employee experience. We've considered the benefits that onboarding brings, for both the employer and the employees, and we've looked at the elements that a contemporary onboarding program needs to include. But what does that look like in practice?

In this section, we'll break down the questions a business should reflect on before creating or transforming their onboarding processes, the key steps to implementation, and the secrets to best practice onboarding, induction and probation programs.



3.1 Onboarding best practice

There are several questions to consider as you begin upgrading your onboarding program.

- How can you ensure that your onboarding programme can remain relevant to each individual, based on their level of experience, skills, and career aspirations?
- How can you make onboarding a part of a long-term development trajectory?
- Do you have the technology in place to make the connection between learning, performance and development?
- How will you balance personalisation and standardisation?

Too many companies fail to optimise onboarding by neglecting key components and necessary resources. Here are a few onboarding must-haves:

- A structured programme of mentoring, coaching and support is critical for employees in their first year. Manager mentorship ensures that employees have adequate development and learning opportunities, and increases employee engagement.
- Frequent assessment of a new hire's learning objectives and performance KPIs will promote employee motivation. This can also tie into personal development pathways which set out progression opportunities and the means to achieve progression.

• For high-flying new hires, you could consider onboarding them for a “tour of duty” with a finite timeline, rather than seeking commitment for a long-term role. This approach has been used to great effect at LinkedIn. CEO Reid Hoffman explains:

“ If [employees] signed up for a tour of duty of between two to four years and made an important contribution to some part of the business, the company and I would help advance their careers... The company got an engaged employee [and] the employee transformed [their] career by enhancing [their] portfolio of skills and experiences.”

- Cultural integration is a top priority for a strong onboarding program. When you're planning your onboarding process, schedule regular social events for new and established employees to get to know each other.
- Use your learning platform to put the new hire in contact with internal Subject Matter Experts to give a more rounded sense of community support, rather than always relying on their manager or teammates for help.
- Use pulse surveys and polls to check how well-integrated employees feel. As a quick shorthand, listen out for when employees start using “we” to describe the company, rather than speaking in generics.

To engage the employee past onboarding, each individual needs a development plan that delivers, both for their career aspirations and for what the business requires of the role. Onboarding is your opportunity to build this plan, in collaboration with each new hire, and then begin the process of monitoring and optimising their progress.



3.2 Induction best practice

Induction isn't just about the admin. This is your chance to make a great first impression.

Too many businesses think of induction as a process that happens on the first day. However, this is missing a great opportunity to build a relationship with your new hire before they start – and also risks them being lured away by a competitor before they even join you! Start induction with a “pre-boarding” program before the employee starts:

- Introduce them to their new team and give them access to your employee portal from the moment they have accepted their job offer or signed contracts, so they can start putting faces to names.
- Ask all members of their team to create short “about me” style videos and upload them to your learning platform to give the new hire a sense of their new colleagues.
- Provide them with access to your learning platform and other tools they'll use on the job (careful to ringfence anything that shouldn't be available until after day one). Assign some short, straightforward tasks to make sure they are up to speed with your in-house technology, such as uploading their own short introductory video, or creating a profile in your learning platform.

Plan inductions carefully in advance.

A lack of planning may cause information overload or organisational chaos. To avoid this, here are a few tips:

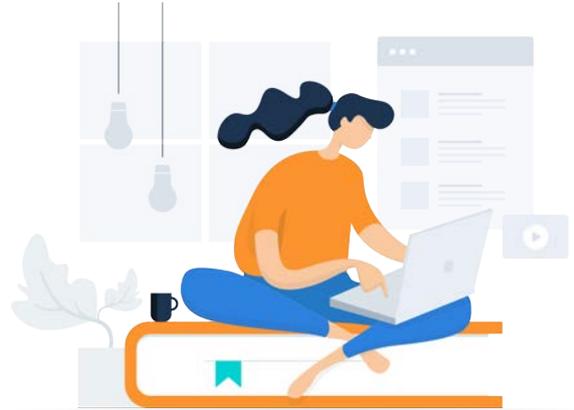
- Use checklists and a structured learning pathway so that new employees can track their progress.
- Plan the induction process so that new joiners are able to manage their time easily, and make sure that those involved in the induction process (tech support, management, HR, etc.) have plenty of warning and the time available to provide the best possible employee experience.
- If you're hiring a number of people, make one person responsible for the induction process for each cohort to avoid confusion.
- Much of induction should be standardised, but some aspects do need to be personalised. Break down which parts can be automated and which elements will be better presented face to face (or via video conference.)
- Examine which medium is best suited for each component of the induction experience – whether that's a group meeting, a one to one, a video, or a micro-learning unit.
- In particular, make sure that you have a clear idea of the information you need, the information they need, the people they need to meet, their physical environment, and their digital environment.



Here's an ideal version of what an induction process could look like.

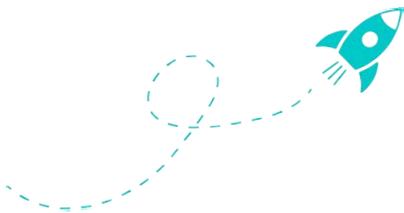
Before they start:

- As soon as the new hire accepts your offer, they receive a welcome video from the CEO or divisional head.
- They then receive an email with their key points of contact and a checklist of immediate next actions. If they'll be working in an office, you should also include a map of local lunch places and answers to frequently asked questions about office facilities.
- They also receive a phone call from their onboarding "buddy" to welcome them to the team.
- Once they've returned their required documentation, you follow up with access to your learning platform, and direct them to key content on your business, the vision, mission, values and strategy.
- You might also want to offer a paid "acclimatisation" day to meet the team and spend time getting to know the company.



During the first week:

- On Day 1, ensure their "buddy" is there to greet them, either in person or online.
- Provide a welcome pack with some personal touches, plus essential items such as a security pass, laptop, and so on.
- Assign online tasks focusing on the probationary period, performance, and compliance.
- Couple this with work shadowing sessions, a review of their personal development plan, and a short initial project.
- Organise a social event, either in person or online, to make them feel welcome.



3.3 Probation best practice

Too many employees fail their probation. Here's how to improve the odds.

A worrying 1 in 5 employees fail their probationary period. Poor performance is the most frequent reason given. However, that seems to suggest that the failure can be blamed entirely on the new hires themselves, whereas the truth is more complicated.

For one thing, a 20% failure rate would suggest that there are issues with the current recruitment and onboarding processes. Optimising your recruitment strategy to incorporate behavioural screening, role-specific competency assessments, and testing for values fit should reduce the number of failed probations.



The other area to look at is employee management during the early days of employment. On-going performance reviews and feedback should help to nip “performance issues” in the bud – before you are forced to fire an employee you spent significant time and money on hiring.

Probation can be a highly effective way to keep team performance high. By allowing both you and your new hires to evaluate the relationship early on, you make sure that only employees who are both committed and high-performing remain in the company.

In fact, companies like Zappos consider probation to be so important, they pay employees to quit. Their reasoning is simple. They offer employees \$1000 at the end of their probation period, to whittle out anyone who doesn't really want to be there. Employees who refuse the offer are clearly engaged and committed to stay with the company for the long-haul. Zappos' training manager Rachael Brown explains,

“When we do it, it's not just, “Hey, here's \$1,000. Take it to quit.” We really talk about their experience. Now that they've been at Zappos for a little while, they understand our culture.”¹⁷

This is an important point to note – when it comes to probation, communication is the key to making it work. Effective probation periods rely on open dialogue between the employer and the employee, to be a mutual and collaborative process. Make sure that you've communicated your expectations in advance. Also check that these expectations are standardised – especially when it comes to what constitutes a deal breaker. For instance, punctuality may be a huge priority for one manager, and a non-issue for another. Reach agreement on a list of performance “red flags” at the organisational level, and make sure that these are communicated as part of the onboarding process.

Secondly, define a process for providing structured, consistent feedback during the probationary period.

Feedback on the new hire should be provided by their line manager, and also by their colleagues. All this feedback should be shared promptly with the new hire to nip any issues in the bud quickly. Performance feedback must be carefully documented using a standardised process to ensure that you are being fair and objective to all new hires. Being honest early on will give your new recruit a chance to improve if they need to.

Conclusion



Getting onboarding, induction and probation right can be complex. But it's worth the investment.

Strong onboarding programmes increase productivity, boost engagement and build loyalty.

To create a great employee experience for new hires, onboarding programmes need to be both personalised and standardised. They require a flexible learning platform that allows joiners to self-serve their own onboarding content.



They must allow for remote work and adapt to changing circumstances and market shifts. Companies need to work with new hires to build customised development pathways, linking learning and performance to track progress and promote peak performance.

With the right process in place, onboarding can be transformed from an administrative headache to a significant long-term competitive advantage.

"Learn Amp has enabled us to deliver a significantly improved onboarding experience. Within weeks, our new hires are now confidently managing customers. Investing in Learn Amp to develop staff and increase productivity has been a major milestone for our business."

Jazz, CMO
Sub TV

About the Authors

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We're on a mission to make work life work better. We make it easy to map out and deliver the best employee journey. Learn Amp combines learning, engagement and performance management tools in one seamless platform, driving better business results and higher employee retention.



DUNCAN CHEATLE

Aside from founding Learn Amp, Duncan has spent over 20 years championing UK enterprise through The Supper Club. Established in 2003, The Supper Club is now home to around 500 of Britain's most innovative, high growth entrepreneurs.

Duncan sits on the Chartered Management Institute's Board of Companions, was a co-founder of Start Up Britain (launched by the Prime Minister in March 2011) and was a non-exec of the Start Up Loans Company for its first year. He has also sat on a variety of Advisory Boards including the Centre for Entrepreneurs and the Sheffield University Management School.



JOE HILL-WILSON

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He has been a judge for the UK Customer Experience Awards and regularly writes and speaks about the link between customer experience and employee experience.

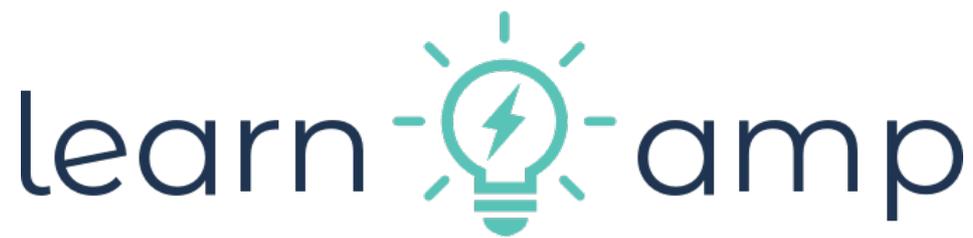
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