

Reimagining Apprenticeships Beyond the Skilled Trades

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Learning Designs, Inc. (LDI) is a pioneering training consultancy founded by Mary Carter, whose career journey exemplifies adaptive learning and impactful leadership. Initially rooted in traditional education, Carter's shift to corporate training at General Motors and eventually into entrepreneurship was driven by a passion for systemic change and a belief in the power of outside influence. Today, Learning Designs serves a diverse portfolio of clients in industries including automotive, IT, energy, and workforce development.

LDI's mission is to design training programs that **equip people with real-world skills, close workforce gaps, and create opportunities for learners to succeed while earning an income.** Its vision is to redefine apprenticeships by extending them beyond traditional trades into professional fields where structured skill development has been overlooked.

Benefits of the Training Program

LDI's apprenticeship programs are built on a **"learn while you earn"** philosophy, ensuring that workers gain skills and certifications without sacrificing financial stability. Key benefits include:

- **Bridging the Skills Gap:** Many organizations struggle to find workers with mid-level technical and professional skills. Apprenticeships offer a way to build talent pipelines rather than wait for candidates to appear.
- **Reducing Turnover:** Apprenticeship programs build loyalty. When employees see a structured path for growth, they're less likely to leave within the critical first year.
- **Boosting Productivity:** Learners acquire knowledge in structured phases—learn, practice, apply—which means they contribute to operations sooner and more effectively.
- **Strengthening Employer Branding:** Companies that sponsor apprenticeships signal a commitment to professional growth, making them more attractive to candidates.
- **Expanding Access:** By opening apprenticeships in fields like IT and healthcare support, employers reach populations who might otherwise be locked out of higher-paying jobs.

- **Driving Strategic Alignment:** Apprenticeships ensure that learning objectives connect to business KPIs such as sales performance, service quality, and retention

This model not only benefits individual learners but also creates systemic improvements for employers, industries, and entire regions.

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Who They Train and What They Need to Know and Do

Learning Designs apprenticeship programs are carefully tailored to meet the needs of different learner types—ranging from individual workers at the start of their careers to entire organizations responsible for shaping talent pipelines. Each group requires distinct knowledge, skills, and training methods.

Entry-Level Workers

These apprentices are individuals beginning careers in areas such as IT support, healthcare administration, or customer service. They need to understand the fundamentals of their roles—systems, intake procedures, or service protocols—and demonstrate professional interaction skills. Training focuses on self-paced digital modules to build core knowledge, supplemented with hands-on labs, job shadowing, and guided coaching to help them apply technical processes and reach baseline competency quickly.

Incumbent Employees

For workers already employed, apprenticeships serve as a structured pathway for upskilling into supervisory or specialized roles. They must expand their knowledge of advanced technical processes, compliance requirements, and organizational systems. Beyond technical mastery, they are expected to mentor new hires and handle complex cases. Programs for this group emphasize role-based certifications, project-based learning, and skill assessments that validate readiness for career advancement.

Mid-Level Managers

Apprenticeships at the management level focus on preparing future leaders. These learners need to grasp leadership frameworks, coaching and conflict resolution techniques, and performance management metrics. What they must do is lead teams effectively, coach staff, and align their departments with organizational KPIs. Training typically includes workshops, leadership simulations, and one-on-one mentoring, blending theory with real-world practice.

Industry-Specific Cohorts

Sponsored by workforce boards or industry associations, these groups often include energy technicians, healthcare staff, or other sector-focused roles. Their training requires knowledge of regulations, safety standards, and specialized technologies. They must demonstrate the ability to execute industry-specific tasks safely and accurately. To

achieve this, Learning Designs employs blended learning approaches that integrate compliance modules, certification preparation, and supervisor validation.

Employers and Partner Organizations

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Apprenticeship training is designed not only for individuals but also for the organizations that employ them. Employers need to understand how apprenticeships align with business outcomes, and they must provide structured on-the-job learning, monitor progress, and incentivize completion. Training for organizations includes orientation for mentors, use of dashboards to track learners, and consultation on incentive models that connect development to strategic goals.

By designing programs that address the specific needs of each learner type, Learning Designs ensures apprenticeships deliver value across the spectrum—from individual growth to organizational performance.

Challenges

LDI's work to expand apprenticeships into professional roles has not been without obstacles:

1. **Perception Barriers** – Apprenticeships are still commonly associated with electricians or pipefitters. Convincing stakeholders they apply to IT, healthcare or career counseling requires persistent advocacy.
2. **Varied Skill Levels:** Apprentices enter with wide differences in prior knowledge and experience, requiring pre-assessments and differentiated learning paths.
3. **Employer Engagement:** Companies sometimes view training as a cost rather than an investment, echoing the same hesitancy highlighted in Jeff Walter's insights.
4. **Learner Motivation:** Unlike employees compelled to train for compliance, apprentices in external networks require incentives and recognition.
5. **Access & Equity:** Ensuring underrepresented groups could participate required partnerships with workforce boards and funding agencies.
6. **Consistency Across Locations:** Training outcomes had to be standardized, even when delivered across multiple regions and industries.
7. **Proof of Impact** – While lower turnover and higher performance are evident, establishing direct causality between training and outcomes is challenging.

Best Practices

Learning Designs' apprenticeship programs are grounded in best practices that ensure learners move beyond one-off training events and instead develop lasting skills. While

many apprenticeship models in non-trade fields are still experimental, Learning Designs has refined an approach that is structured, replicable, and responsive to both learners and employers.

The first best practice is **clear role definition and structured learning paths**. Rather than treating apprenticeships as loosely connected experiences, Learning Designs works with employers to define what success looks like in each role—whether that’s an IT support apprentice, a healthcare intake specialist, or a frontline supervisor. Each role comes with a mapped learning path that blends self-paced coursework, instructor-led sessions, and on-the-job practice. This ensures consistency across organizations and cohorts.

Another hallmark of their programs is the **use of certifications to validate learning**. Apprentices aren’t simply completing modules or attending workshops; they are working toward recognized certifications that establish a baseline of competency. For employers, this provides confidence that apprentices have demonstrated knowledge and skills, not just attendance. For learners, certifications offer tangible credentials they can carry into their careers.

Coaching and mentorship play a central role as well. Learning Designs recognizes that many skills—especially in customer-facing or management roles—cannot be fully mastered in a classroom. By pairing apprentices with experienced mentors, programs create opportunities for real-time feedback, shadowing, and practice. This accelerates skill development and makes training directly relevant to day-to-day responsibilities.

To ensure training stays relevant, Learning Designs also invests in **continuous feedback and program updates**. Apprentices and mentors provide input throughout the process, and instructional designers refresh materials to reflect new technologies, updated compliance standards, or employer-specific needs. This feedback loop keeps programs practical and aligned with current workplace realities.

Learning Designs emphasizes **progress tracking and completion rates** as core measures of success. Program administrators monitor certification achievement, skill demonstration, and learner engagement, ensuring that apprentices are advancing through milestones as expected. This creates accountability and provides employers with visibility into learner progress.

Finally, Learning Designs supports **employer engagement** as a best practice. Apprenticeships succeed when organizations see them as more than a compliance exercise. Learning Designs involves employers in orientation, mentor preparation, and progress tracking so that training feels embedded in the culture of the workplace rather than bolted on. This shared ownership between learner, mentor, and organization is one of the strongest predictors of program sustainability.

In short, the best practices that define Learning Designs’ approach—structured pathways, certification, mentorship, feedback-driven updates, progress tracking, and employer engagement—ensure that apprenticeship programs outside of the trades are both credible and impactful.

Position on the Training Program Roadmap

When mapped to the *LatitudeLearning Training Program Roadmap*, Learning Designs' strengths clearly align with **Stage 2: Knowledge Acquisition** and **Stage 3: Skill Development**. They excel at creating structured, role-based certifications and reinforcing them with mentorship and hands-on practice. Their emphasis on feedback and continuous content updates also strengthens these stages. At the same time, their programs are still building toward **Stage 4: Individual Performance** and **Stage 5: Organizational Performance**, where training outcomes are tied directly to business KPIs such as retention, productivity, or customer satisfaction. By solidifying their already strong foundation, Learning Designs is well-positioned to evolve toward deeper performance integration in the future.

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Operational Execution

Learning Designs' apprenticeship programs stand out not because of flashy technology or heavy reliance on data dashboards, but because of their disciplined, human-centered execution. Each element of the program is designed to balance structure with flexibility, ensuring that apprenticeships are practical, sustainable, and meaningful for learners and employers alike.

Organize Learners – Apprentices are grouped into cohorts that reflect job roles and employer needs. Learning Designs ensures that each apprentice has a clear pathway and, importantly, a mentor or supervisor who provides ongoing coaching. This mentor-apprentice relationship is central to how learners translate classroom lessons into workplace performance.

Structure Training Content – Apprenticeship programs are broken into phases that build logically from foundational knowledge to applied skills. Learning Designs distributes competencies in a sequence that makes sense for the learner, balancing online modules, in-person instruction, and workplace practice so progress feels steady and achievable.

Deliver the Learner Experience – Training is always delivered through a blended approach. Apprentices gain knowledge through eLearning and structured coursework, but the core of the experience is practice—shadowing, supervised tasks, and feedback from mentors. This design keeps the program rooted in real work rather than abstract theory.

Manage Training Content – Content is refreshed as industries evolve. For example, in IT and healthcare administration, Learning Designs works closely with employers and subject matter experts to ensure curricula reflect current systems, compliance requirements, and customer expectations. Updates are incorporated as part of the normal program cycle, so apprentices are never learning outdated processes.

Control Learner Access – While Learning Designs uses learning platforms to deliver and organize content, access is simple and role-based. Learners see what's relevant to their

position and stage in the program, and mentors receive supporting resources to guide apprentices effectively.

Assign and Track Training – Apprenticeship coordinators and mentors monitor progress through certifications and skill demonstrations rather than relying solely on LMS completions. Tracking is pragmatic: ensuring learners complete modules, demonstrate skills, and receive feedback at set milestones. This gives employers confidence that apprentices are moving forward as expected.

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Reward and Incentivize Learners – Recognition is built into the program. Apprentices gain not only credentials but also visible acknowledgment from supervisors and peers. For many, the reward is advancement—greater responsibility, new roles, or the confidence that comes with certification. Some programs also include wage progression or stipends tied to milestones, reinforcing commitment and motivation.

Continuously Improves the Training Program – Feedback loops are integral. Apprentices share their experiences, mentors highlight challenges, and employers provide input on workplace outcomes. Learning Designs uses this feedback to refine content, adjust pacing, and ensure the program continues to reflect the realities of the workplace.

Measure Success and Effectiveness – At present, Learning Designs emphasizes completion, certification achievement, and learner readiness as primary indicators of success. While they are building toward deeper integration with performance metrics, their current strength lies in ensuring apprentices leave programs with validated skills and employers see immediate gains in preparedness and retention.

Conclusion

Learning Designs Inc. has proven that **apprenticeships are not confined to traditional trades**. By extending structured, competency-based training into professional careers, the company has created pathways that blend income, education, and skill development.

LDI ensures that knowledge acquisition translates into skill application. The result is lower turnover, higher performance, and stronger organizations equipped to meet today's workforce challenges.

In redefining apprenticeships for the modern economy, Learning Designs has built a model that delivers value not only to learners and employers but also to entire communities.

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