eBook

Express Train: How to Accelerate Employee Time to Competence

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Introduction - Challenges to Employee Training: Budgets, Technological Changes and Learning Fragmentation

The importance of company learning has never been greater. With changing technologies, new necessary skill sets, and evolving economic strategies, having a fully engaged, knowledgeable and continuously learning workforce is more critical than ever in maximizing performance and company success.

While the very importance of employee learning is not really the focus of much intensive debate, there is a vast discussion surrounding the existing and new challenges facing company talent development. The current global economy has forced managers to confront tough decisions on allocating significant portions of their budget towards training new and veteran employees. Manufacturing positions have decreased considerably in recent years due to globalization and less expensive labor in the Far East. In some companies, there are simply fewer positions available, and each employee on average is asked to perform a wider variety of tasks than in the past.

Time constraints are a factor as well, related to limited budgets. Organizations want to reduce training costs, and (particularly in smaller companies) look to get employees to begin performing their everyday tasks as quickly as possible. Having slow training processes is very undesirable these days in a "time is money" world.

In addition, technology has revolutionized company focus, structures and business strategies. Much more work is being done over computers and other electronic devices, utilizing the internet, social networking, and other interactive forums which have made the world smaller and knowledge more accessible. Learning itself has become more fragmented, as traditional

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classroom settings are either being eliminated entirely or supplemented with "blending learning" methods, including eLearning, mobile learning, social learning, webinars, YouTube instructional videos, and more. BYOD (Bring Your Own [consumer] Device to the workplace) policies are becoming more prevalent, which opens up the opportunity for employees to access training materials on their tablet or smartphone, both inside and outside the office. So the learning itself has become increasing more varied and complex, making learning officers' decisions that much more challenging.

With the lightning-fast pace of technological change, it's becoming increasingly unlikely that a student graduating from university these days will stay in the same job throughout his or her career. In fact, it's more probable that perhaps the most important skill that one will have to master will be "learning how to learn" – adopting new skills as their career moves along, and adapting to new business realities. The need for "continuous learning" – by both leadership and team members alike – is imperative on everyone involved.

Yet one thing has remained the same. That is, the need of new employees entering any organization to be trained, for them to learn both the practical tasks they will be required to perform, whether in computer software or physical actions, as well as other company social norms and behavior which will be expected of them as they start their new roles.

This eBook will address the key question of how to get new employees "up to speed", i.e. how to help them to reach competence levels in which they can perform their roles efficiently and independently. As learning officers are looking to keep spending low, and allow their employees to be able to perform their duties quickly and successfully, we will look at some of the key factors in training new workers, offering tips for quick advancement and ensuring continued success after the initial training ends. Most importantly, we'll tackle how to best engage

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your new employees so that they remember the knowledge learned during training, and will be able to apply it directly to everyday tasks and critical performance skills.

Come take a ride with us on the express train, shall we?

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Chapter 2: Setting Your Goals Right: Formulating Clear, Detailed and Measurable Instructional Objectives

OK. So you have new hires coming in, and you've been assigned to develop a clear learning strategy in helping them reach competency levels as quickly as possible, while at the same time making sure they will be able to perform their jobs independently and successfully. Where do you start?

The very first thing you must do when starting the training process is determining the main objectives that you want to accomplish. Training objectives serve two main purposes. The first thing is that they define the exact knowledge which you want to transfer to learners during the training process. Secondly, they answer the "how" question successfully, of making the training sessions a success.

Put simply, training objectives are the key to a successful employee learning. If developed properly, they are both specific and measurable, and will tell instructional designers and training managers exactly what skills want their employees to be able to master, where they must improve their work, as well as how to overcome errors. Therefore, it's important for the objectives which you set to be measurable, in order to be able to determine the effectiveness of training after it would have been completed.

Think for a moment of a course or training program that you're currently or were recently involved in. Identify an important skill that you want develop during or after the course has been finished. If you are able to do this, it means that you've already started to learn how to assess a training goal.

Training objectives are in fact statements which describe the relevant things that you've acquired during the learning processes and which you can easily demonstrate when the course or program

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would have been completed. In other words, training objectives are used to identify what you know and what you'll be able to perform at the end of the course.

Here are some examples of clear and measurable training objectives:

- The student will read at least 5 articles on X topic and discuss them with the teacher Y by April 30
- The team member will be able to apply x before meeting Y
- The sales representative will be able to successfully handle 3 calls per every 10 minutes on average by the start of their 2nd month on the job.

A learning objective includes several parts:

1. A desired outcome, identified by a verb of action. This may involve the acquisition of skills (which you will achieve after completing the learning activity), a knowledge (what you should know and understand after finishing the learning activity), or a change in behavior and attitude.
2. The performance level must be specified and able to be measured.
3. The means of assessment must be indicated
4. A period of fulfillment for the objective must be specified.

When writing a learning objective in terms of performance, it is important to choose an action verb. Some examples of verbs that can help you build a learning objective include, "to demonstrate," "to assess," "to implement," "to prepare," "to develop" or "to produce". Avoid using verbs which cannot be measured, such as: "to understand," "to know," "to be aware of," "to perceive," etc.

If you want to use the learning objective for proving your employees' ability of acquiring knowledge, then it would be preferable to use verbs like: "to define," "to name," "to identify," "to reproduce," "to record," etc. If, instead, you want to demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge to specific skills, then it would be preferable to use verbs

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such as: "to interpret," "to demonstrate," "to prepare," "to plan," "to solve," etc.

In order to make it easier for you to set the goals, you have to answer yourself a few questions:

- **Are the goals focused on the company's performance?**
- **How do I evaluate the results of these training objectives?**
- **Is the task that I just set measurable?**
- **What evaluation criteria will I use to determine if the objective was successfully completed?**

Overall, there are many benefits of training objectives, which include helping to motivate employees to learn, as they understand the clear link between knowledge learned and the skills they will need to perform; they allow for an easy focus and analysis of results; and they demonstrate the importance of detailed planning and defining clear growth targets, helping both managers and learners to better reach their goals.

Now that we've looked at the importance of formulating clear and measurable training objectives, let's look at some ways to best motivate new workers during training.

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Chapter 3: Communication is Key: 5 Efficient Ways to Motivate Your Employees During Training

With the increasing competition on the modern business market, maintaining a passionate and engaged workforce becomes undoubtedly a matter of skill, experience, and knowledge, but above all necessity. Learning and development are turning into essential center stage problems to take care of, with mandatory skills and expertise levels being required for a success-oriented workforce.

Nurturing the proper talent and skill, and promoting improvement and growth can build a happier, stronger workforce. It's also noteworthy that during these difficult economic times, it is easier to persevere when you're motivated and not complacent. *Employee training plays an important role in empowering workers to be optimistic, driven and able to overcome the challenges they face.*

However, sometimes it can be plain difficult to motivate your employees during their training period. People are tired to listening to others on how different things can be accomplished better, and prefer to learn by trial and error, something which you, as a manager, would definitely want to avoid. Furthermore, if you're responsible for managing a large company, then training might require different complicated stages which your learners should attend to.

Thus, they can easily become bored or uninterested, and the only way in which you can solve this issue is by planning a thorough strategy. In this regard, let's present a series of 5 tips to best engage your employees and keep them motivated during the training period:

1) Personal and Team Incentives

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Maintaining an incentive program for both individual employees as well as team, beyond "but you must" is challenging but very necessary. Employees are naturally motivated to perform at acceptable minimum levels in order to keep their jobs or to avoid a pay cut, but incentives can motivate them to truly excel. Make sure you clearly define what you want to achieve, and then use rewards and recognition to go directly to those goals. Establishing ways to reward your team and to recognize merits help you get those results that you want, the results which lead to the attainment of a target. A rewards and recognition program is the most simple, and yet most effective way to achieve that target.

2) Challenge Employees with Gamification

Challenging new employees, during training or their work activities, via gamified competition is a powerful tool, but it's important to be careful. Through simulated gamification contests in training, individuals or teams will battle to show their newly attained knowledge as well as their ability to practically apply it.

Prizes and recognition may be given, be they abstract or concrete, to the learners who show the best utilization of their new skills, or who perform at the highest levels in their jobs in regular working scenarios.

The things to be wary of is to not build unhealthy competition between the groups or individuals by making the "game" too real or personal. A simple way to prevent this is to grant a minimal reward to all learners, and to not make the best performers' prize too extravagant by comparison. This is a delicate balance, but works quite well.

3) Mellow Dynamics

Corporate training environments are often overlooked as a venue for designing the framework in order to maximize engagement. During training or in a regular work environment, the overly formal culture in which most businesses operate may have certain pros on

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the surface, but it has its share of detriments too. While some formality is important, there is some room to let loose a bit and be down to earth and social. This goes for training new employees as well, as this is often a good place to introduce them to their fellow new colleagues, or veteran workers as well. Friendships, laughter and a loose, but real social dynamic supplements the rest of the engagement strategy both in training and after. It, at least to a partial extent, reduces stress and greatly enhances new employee enthusiasm in them knowing a little bit more of a relaxed existence, while productive still, can be enjoyed in the work or training place.

4) Convey to Employees "What in it for Them?"

On this and the next tip, it cannot be overstressed the importance of communication between trainers and learners. It's critical to make a clear connection between what the training session(s) will be covering, and why and how the information that they will learn has a direct relationship to their daily tasks. During the training, tell employees what you want them to do and why. By involving them in the process you'll win more support and dedication from their side. Communicating with them will give a sense of importance, which will benefit both you and the program that you wish to apply. It goes beyond simply mastering tasks A, B and C. Impart to the new employee how the knowledge they are learning is valuable in the long term as well, both on a personal level for their professional growth and on a business level, due to the fact that their performance will directly contribute to business productivity and success.

5) Training Can Be Made Fun

Try to make the training as engaging as possible, and – this should not be seen as an evil word in business – FUN. Remember that sometimes, less is more. Keep training sessions short. Treat employees well, and they, in return, are more probable to perform at

a higher level. Don't force the sit the entire time – get them involved, moving around, and feeding off of each other.

Throughout the training process, communicate with new workers - listen to their perspectives into how they are progressing, what they are having difficulties understanding, and their thoughts on their experience throughout the training. One useful technique other direct conversation might be asking them to fill out questionnaires in which they can relate their levels of understanding and feedback at each interval.

These are some tips to make employees more motivated during the training. Yet let's look deeper in the number 4 above. How can we best make a clear arrow between training and work activities?

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Chapter 4: Training Made Practical: Linking Learning to Performance

One of the most important things to consider when planning a fast and efficient training is how to make the knowledge imparted directly applicable to practical skills and necessary performance tasks. A clear correlation should be made from knowledge taught and skill learned. This plays a major role in determining how fast new employees can be brought up to competency levels.

Background or abstract information can be easily forgotten in employees' eyes after the training would have ended. In this regard, last decade, the Corporate Executive Board released a report which detailed the role managers have in employee development. **According to the report, employee performance rose by 25% when the supervisors focused effectively on employee learning and development.** As a consequence, managers who continue to remain focused on employee learning, will see their employees 40% more likely to remain in the organization, 30% more committed to the work they perform, and 38% more satisfied with their current job positions.

Yet the training must be made practical and easy to apply to daily work assignments. Several training professional and companies have learned the hard way that designing specific and high-quality training programs is basically impossible without having context at their core. In the end, it's important to recognize that the focus should not be on learning, but rather on performance improvement.

With that said, the following points should guide the relationship between knowledge taught and performance:

- **Explain to the new employees why the new skills and information are directly needed for them to perform their roles.**
- **Be sure to get their feedback in ensuring that the new employees understand that link clearly.**

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- **Choose a training instructor that is open to adjusting their usual training to meet the specific needs of each new employee, so that the information will be applicable to each worker.**

Once the connection between the training process and the actual work is fully understood, the speed at which the employee should be able to absorb the new information should accelerate, and the quicker they will be able to reach competency levels.

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Chapter 5: How to Make Employee Training Truly Memorable: Work, Fun and Games

Let's look at a basic question that many training strategists have looked at for years. That is, aside for designing the actual information to be transferred during the training, how can we best get employees to remember what they learn? In other words, after making sure that what we are teaching is fully relevant to their daily tasks (as we discussed in the previous chapter), how can training become more memorable?

One of the ways which we briefly introduced earlier, but we will now go into more in depth, is making training less dry and more FUN. And yes, that can include utilizing games. A good example on how a more interactive and entertaining learning experience can be created is found on video games. These games usually feature a very simple and basic instructions page, and instead of forcing you to revise a manual for hours, they drop you straight on a tutorial level where you are able to learn everything on an experience-based situation. They provide you with only the information that's essential for reaching the next level. Once you reach the next level, some of them choose to show you some more advanced information, which again, you are able to experiment freely. Thus, in maximum 15 minutes, you've have already gained the necessary knowledge in order to play the game properly.

In absence of such learning strategy, video gamers would have to refer to the manual once every few minutes in order to master the control, case in which they'd have spent a lot more time and eventually got disturbed by the whole situation. That's why interactive instructions were created, in order to provide people with a more effective way of learning.

One very good example of this situation is the Microsoft's "Ribbon Hero 2" creation. This is in fact a small add-in for the MS Office 2007 and 2010 suites, in which player gains control of the legendary "Clippy", the once annoying office help assistant. He has to travel in

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time, solving different office-related tasks, and with every new task solved, experience points are given and new levels are becoming unlocked. This is a very creative way of encouraging users to discover Microsoft's Office features; features that perhaps they would have never tried out if it wasn't for this game.

The same concept can also be applied to training of new workers. The key is to create a game-related aspect that is more engaging rather than authoritative. **This concept is known as gamification**, and the idea is to improve user experience in some way or another. There are many ways in which you can make the training process more enjoyable for your employees, but it's only up to you to decide which one are best suitable for your company.

At an individual level, you can provide your employees with free coffee, donuts, or other nice amenities, as they reach key performance levels. Group rewards can also be an effective way of engaging your employees and attracting their work interest. For instance, a pizza after work or a free lunch can be a great way for people to socialize with one another and strengthen their relationships, fact which will only benefit your company. And what's even better, they will feel good and thankful to you for all these things.

Let look quickly at a couple concrete examples of how gamification can be used in training. Badges are a popular way of recognizing employees who reach certain levels of achievement.   As learners are able to begin to perform certain skills being taught, they can earn these badges. Badges can be displayed so that other learners can view them, using statistics, and they are an example of a good and competitive, but non-dramatic, way to incentivize learners to reach competency levels quickly.

Another example of gamification is the use of "missions". A learner is assigned a mission, which are simple and common tasks that can be performed during the training process. As missions are completed, new levels are reached, and the standing of a learner as

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an expert on the team of new employees will be higher. This earns them higher regard and higher respect from others, and gives them a strong and empowered identity within the service.

These are only a few examples of gamification in training. As a result of all these, especially in companies that practice gamification on work place domains too (see Google, Adobe, or Apple office working experience), the first impressions for employees which undergo training are much more enjoyable and less terrifying than they used to be. Additionally, your workers will develop a sense of creativity and risk-taking as they undergo the learning process, fact which is going to be very beneficial for your company on the long run.

Yet it's not only about fun and games. Let's take a look at how technology is revolutionizing employee training, and allowing you to reduce training times and accelerate time to competence.

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Chapter 6: The Role of Technology in Training Employees the Right Way

The technology revolution, like in every field, has an enormous impact on employee training. Technology's impact on training and learning is truly amazing - and is transforming the established norms and methods in more ways than one. **With web-based learning, internet applications, cloud technology, social networking forums, blogs and online videos being the order of the day, people have more access to information in a wider variety of channels than ever before.** In addition, new devices for employee learning, using smartphones and tablets, are empowering employees to learn faster and in non-traditional formats, both inside and outside of the office, are having a profound influence over how companies are designing their training of new employees and overall learning strategies.

So, with "on the job" training and workplace learning modules making their inroads into the corporate sector, employees entering the workforce these days are no longer entirely dependent on the education imparted in their schools and universities. Professional development, ongoing learning processes and workplace training has been transformed through technology and continues to take larger strides in the right direction.

Technology is fast changing the concept of "face time training "-- which is being replaced with an absence of "employee connection" with the supervisors and trainers. Let's look at some of the ways learning officers can utilize technology in training new employees:

- **Bringing world class consumer experiences to the business world**

Apart from increasing employee engagement and enhancing the levels of competitive advantage, training through cloud technology drives in more customer satisfaction, business agility, knowledge sharing and higher bottom line figures. The increase in connection

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and collaboration of remote working employees through well-equipped systems addresses the critical needs of the business and the HR department in particular. This helps in bringing in world class consumer experiences for the business.

- **Aligning employee functions and integrating into their workflow**

If you are still wondering whether technology is driving changes in training modes or whether these changes are influenced by technology, then take a pause and observe the shrinking global village. Whether it is about working on the same projects, handling customer issues in real time, managing remote networks and locations or simply getting trained on common platforms, technology is empowering employees and connecting people like never before.

- **Innovative and cost effective solutions becoming a reality**

Undoubtedly, modern organizations are scaling greater heights of success with their virtual workforce. The jaw dropping statistics linked with the adoption of mobile technology and cloud computing in training, reveal a broad based device perspective in the usage of smart phones, tablets and other power packed consumer devices. The company centric benefits of connecting their headquarters with remote employees are plenty and include productivity gain, cost effective savings and access to global skills and talents.

- **Self-service and interactive learning environment**

With modern employees wanting to drive their own training experiences through guided sessions and training modules, small nuggets of information are being delivered through technology to the learners—in their hour of need. Granular training assets are being stored in the cloud and are accessible resources for those looking for enhancements in their skills and job requirements. The

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world of training has surely changed with apps, mashups, portals and a self-service culture for learning.

With "faceless" work force structures and interconnectivity across boundaries becoming simpler and more innovative with every passing day, the revolution for opportunities and growth is definitely underway. Technology has brought out greater efficiency and cost effectiveness along with providing businesses with more agility and smarter solutions. It has also brought about a change in the thinking, working and training patterns of the employees and management alike - and will continue to do so in the future.

The evolution of a powerful range of training methods ranging from on-demand content strategies to LMS (learning management systems) platforms, are being thoroughly complemented by self-guidance technologies of the likes of WalkMe. **WalkMe empowers training managers to enable employees, as they work, to successfully complete even the most complex tasks.** By using a series of interactive tip balloons overlaid on the software they are using, employee tasks are broken down into short, step-by-step guided instructions. As a result, both during the initial training process and beyond, trainers can empower their employees so that they no longer need to focus on the technical aspects of operating the software, freeing them to become more productive and avoid mistakes.

As these technologies help in reinforcing the training process over a long period of time, employees are further benefited with higher levers of proficiency and productivity. They form the edifice for the practical application of training and learning - even as employees are getting "plugged in" to the benefits of online technology and have started working from just anywhere in the world.

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Chapter 7 & Conclusion: A Successful Exit: 7 Tips Toward Training Success

In this final chapter, we'll conclude with a review of what we have looked at in previous chapters, and give training managers some tips of ensuring training success, long after the training is over.

Any learning officer will tell you that one of the biggest challenges they face is to get the employees to retain the knowledge they accumulated during training, and besides that, to apply this knowledge in their everyday work and tasks. There are no simple solutions to this problem, but we'll offer you six tips which should help you get closer to reaching this objective:

1. Properly Evaluate Training

The first thing any manager or senior leader should ask himself at the end of the initial training is if the objectives have been met or not, and in which proportion the employees gained experience out of it. Remember we spoke about training objectives earlier, which serve two big purposes. The first one is that they define the exact knowledge that is transferred during training, and the second is that they measure the success on a metrics-based situation. In other words, they help you to understand what worked and what not, and for this reason they need to be both specific and measurable. Did the workers learn to apply the knowledge to a direct skill or task? Are they able to complete a specific action independently? These are only a few questions you will need to answer.

2. Getting Employee Feedback

One simple and very rewarding way in which you can analyze the proportion in which the training worked or not is to get direct feedback from your learners. This can be done directly and individually, either immediately after the training's completion or periodically by evaluating the knowledge they gained through practical tasks. Alternatively, you may send out surveys in which to

ask the learners about their satisfaction with the training they received.

It's also important to get in touch with your employees from time to time and hear their thoughts over their work process. Feedback is an essential instrument for assessing your initial training results and to provide a continuous learning process, so make sure to use it as much as possible.

3. Get Workers to Apply the Learned Skills Quickly

By getting your workers involved in a performance task as soon as possible you have plenty of advantages to gain. First off, you're reinforcing the message that what they learned throughout the training is not just something general or theoretical, but rather something that they can use in their everyday tasks. Too many times managers are faced with the "What's in it for me?" question. An immediate application of the knowledge gained will help answer the question fast and conveniently.

Additionally, you might not want to wait much during training and practical work for the simple reason that learners can forget the things they learned very quickly.

Finally, by assessing their knowledge fast you're getting an early statistic of your training's success. If something did not work properly, then it should be dealt with right away.

4. Closely Monitor Employee Performance During the Development Process

In addition to having formed a training success assessment through immediate application and direct feedback, it's also important to monitor the skills developed carefully and continuously during employee's development process. The results might not show up immediately, as it happens in many organizations, so it's often better to monitor the impact training has over a longer period rather than a short-term period.

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It's also important to integrate statistics and metrics in your analysis process. For instance, have a look at the speed improvement percentage over training, if the mistakes have diminished or decreased, and how many of them are calling the help desk for assistance. Finally, it's important to develop the communication process with your workers, since only then you'll witness how the performance levels improved over a certain period of time.

5. Make Use of Technology

Besides the training sessions itself, there are various technological tools which can come into your aid. Managers should promote their worker's learning process over the internet, by participating on social media sites, blogs and forums. In addition, self-guidance technologies like WalkMe can help guide users through live instructional demonstrations, which are of great importance in dealing with the complex tasks. WalkMe and the similar technologies enable the learner to reinforce the initial training they received through constant learning, something which otherwise can be very hard to do in person.

Finally, it's also important for the learning process to continue at both work and home, through mobile technological devices such as tablets or smartphones. If a company invests in these technologies, it will only benefit the workers' long-term learning process.

6. Managers Should Serve as Models

Another way in which you can make the employee learning process continue after the initial training is through the power of example. Thus, employees should be positively reinforced over regular periods to learn and try new things that were previously unfamiliar for them. This will mostly benefit the younger employees, who are eager to try new things and seek a real-world example of success.

7. Remember That Training is Not an End But a Beginning

In the whole pre-training stage, in determining objectives and designing the training the course, it's so important to remember

that training is ONLY THE START of what you hope will be consistent knowledge and performance growth for your employees. Know that – long after the initial training sessions are over – there are a number of ways to encourage your employees to constantly learn new skills and upgrade existing ones. The learning never stops (even if initial costs on training are actually reduced). Some methods to encourage long-term learning like social learning online, days away from the office at conferences or other settings to enhance skills, or mLearning are gaining increasing adoption these days. The key is looking at the training as a facilitator of knowledge and skills that will continue in different ways after the initial orientation sessions. Remember that **training is ONLY THE START** of what you hope will be consistent knowledge and performance growth for your employees.

About the Author

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About WalkMe

WalkMe™ helps customer support managers to increase self-service adoption, reduce incoming support requests, and lower service costs. Leveraging the *WalkMe*™ interactive self-guidance technology, support managers can insure their customers have a simple, smooth & burden-free online experience, eliminating customer confusion and frustration.

Through a series of interactive tip balloons overlaid on the screen, tasks are broken down into short, step-by-step guided instructions, which help customers act, react and progress during their online experience. As a result, customer support managers can empower their customers to self-task successfully even through the most complex processes. Moreover, *WalkMe*™ reduces your customers' frustration of waiting for assistance, shortens the time it takes for support personnel to handle an incoming request and strengthens your company's support reputation.

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