

Make Learning and Development a Talent Magnet - SHRM

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the growing strategic importance of learning and development (L&D) as a tool for talent attraction, engagement, and retention across the employee life cycle. The central argument, advanced by Jay Jones, SHRM's talent and employee experience lead via the Honest HR podcast, is that organizations embedding L&D from pre-hire through advancement gain a competitive edge in a tight labor market. Key evidence drawn from SHRM's own reports includes: 72% of workers rating career advancement as very or extremely important against only 43% satisfaction with employer offerings; 76% of organizations reporting difficulty finding qualified candidates; and 86% of employees expressing willingness to reskill, yet 56% lacking access to employer-provided educational assistance. The article concludes that generic or strategically unaligned L&D programs fail to deliver meaningful outcomes, and that tailored, life-cycle-integrated learning — connected to business strategy, leadership alignment, and individual employee needs — is the distinguishing factor between programs that retain talent and those that do not.

Key Insights

1. A significant gap exists between employee desire for career advancement (72% rating it as very or extremely important) and satisfaction with what employers currently provide (43%), representing a retention risk and an L&D opportunity.
2. 86% of employees globally express willingness to reskill, but 56% report lacking access to employer-provided educational assistance, indicating a supply-side failure rather than a demand-side problem.
3. L&D is framed as a pre-hire employer brand asset, not merely a post-hire development tool — careers pages, job posts, and social media are identified as early signals of an organization's learning culture.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations can differentiate their employer brand by explicitly communicating learning paths, certification support, and real employee growth stories in recruitment materials — not just post-hire.
- Tailoring L&D programs to specific team and individual needs, rather than deploying blanket training, is positioned as the differentiating factor between programs that close skills gaps and those that do not.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article draws on SHRM's own proprietary research (What Global Workers Want report; 2024 Talent Trends report), lending it modest empirical grounding. The statistics cited are specific and directionally coherent. **Limitations:** The article is a repackaged summary of a podcast episode featuring a SHRM internal spokesperson, creating an inherent conflict of interest — SHRM has a commercial interest in promoting L&D as a strategic priority given its certification and training product lines. No external or peer-reviewed sources are cited. The advice offered is general and lacks organizational context, industry segmentation, or firm-size nuance. Causal claims (e.g., L&D drives retention) are asserted without controlled evidence. The classification of this content as practitioner guidance rather than research means the findings are illustrative, not conclusive.

Organizational Practice

The article describes practices including embedding L&D into recruitment marketing (careers pages, job postings, social media), offering self-directed learning, peer mentorship, certifications, and on-the-job experiences, aligning L&D with business strategy and leadership, and using tools such as LinkedIn Learning to support workforce reskilling.

Strategic Implications

The data cited points to a widening gap between employee expectations around career development and current employer delivery, which maps onto elevated voluntary attrition risk. Organizations that treat L&D as an employer brand signal — not only an internal development mechanism — may find differentiation in competitive hiring markets. The 56% access gap for educational assistance suggests that reskilling readiness exists in the workforce but is constrained by organizational investment decisions, which has implications for how PMS frameworks incorporate development planning and manager accountability for employee growth.

Validation Status: passed
