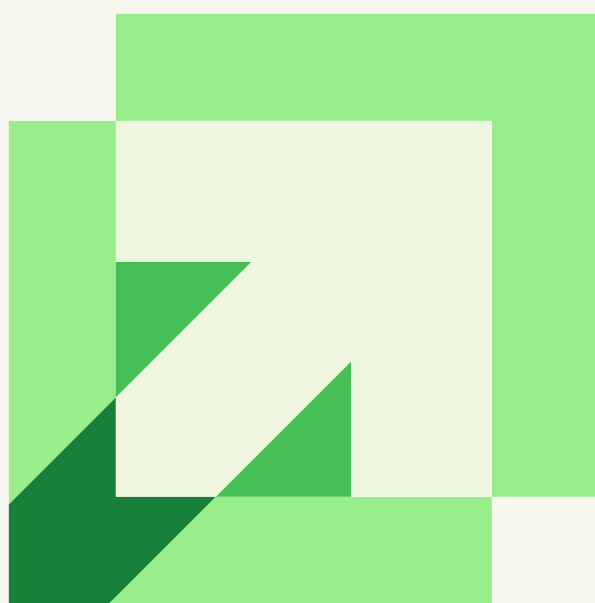




G.R.O.W.T.H.TM

*A Practical Framework for
Building Better Learning Journeys*

INTRODUCTION

Modern learners are not looking for isolated courses or one-time training events. They are trying to solve problems, build capabilities, and grow in their roles over time. What they need are clear paths forward—learning experiences that guide them from curiosity to competence.

That shift has changed the role of learning design.

Today's most effective learning programs are not built as collections of content. They are designed as journeys. Each step builds on the last. Each experience reinforces progress. And every interaction moves the learner closer to meaningful outcomes.

But designing learning this way requires a different mindset.

It requires thinking beyond courses and modules and instead focusing on how people grow: how they discover new ideas, test them in real situations, reflect on what works, and gradually build confidence through practice.

The **GROWTH™** Framework was developed to support that kind of design.

It provides a simple structure for building learning journeys that connect individual development with real-world performance. Grounded in principles from user experience design, behavioral science, and modern learning ecosystems, the framework helps learning teams move from content production to capability development.

At its core, **GROWTH™** focuses on a simple question:

How do we design learning that helps people progress?

The pages that follow outline a practical model for answering that question—one that can be applied across customer education, employee development, and professional learning environments.



WHAT IS A LEARNING JOURNEY?

A learning journey is more than a training course.

A traditional course is designed as a single event. It delivers information during a defined period of time, often focused on transferring knowledge or demonstrating a specific skill. While courses can be valuable, they rarely reflect how people actually learn and grow in the real world.

Learning journeys take a broader view.

Instead of focusing on a single instructional moment, a learning journey maps the progression of development over time. It considers where learners begin, what challenges they encounter along the way, and how different experiences help them build confidence and capability as they move forward.

This progression rarely happens through one format or platform alone. A meaningful learning journey may include structured instruction, guided practice, collaboration with peers, reflection, and opportunities to apply new skills in real situations. Each of these moments contributes to a larger path of development.

Because of this, learning journeys emphasize continuity rather than isolated learning events. They connect experiences across systems, environments, and stages of growth so that learning feels purposeful and relevant rather than fragmented.

Designing learning in this way also shifts the focus of instructional design. Rather than asking only what content needs to be delivered, designers begin to consider the experiences learners need in order to develop real capability. The emphasis moves from delivering information to supporting progress.

When learning is approached as a journey, the goal is not simply course completion. The goal is to help people move from uncertainty to confidence as they develop skills that matter in their work and in their professional growth.

Understanding this progression is the first step in designing learning experiences that truly support development over time.



WHY YOU NEED A FRAMEWORK

Designing a meaningful learning journey requires more than producing content. It requires a clear understanding of who the learner is, what challenges they face, and how different experiences can guide them toward real capability over time.

Without a structure to guide these decisions, learning design often becomes reactive. Teams move from request to request, building individual courses or modules without a clear connection to larger outcomes. Even when the content is well produced, the overall experience can feel fragmented, leaving learners with information but little sense of progression.

A framework helps bring clarity to that process.

It provides a shared way of thinking about how learning should be designed, delivered, and improved. Rather than starting from scratch with every project, designers can rely on a structured approach that helps them ask better questions, organize experiences intentionally, and connect learning activities to real goals.

This structure is especially important in complex learning environments where multiple teams, platforms, and stakeholders are involved. A framework creates alignment by giving everyone a common language for how learning programs should work and what success looks like.

It also supports better decision-making throughout the design process. When priorities compete and resources are limited, a framework helps teams focus on what matters most for learner progress and organizational outcomes.

In practice, this means using a structured approach to ensure learning efforts remain connected to larger goals. Designers can align learning initiatives with business priorities, create experiences that support meaningful skill development, and continuously evaluate whether those experiences are making a difference.

A framework does not replace creativity or professional judgment. Instead, it provides the foundation that allows those strengths to be applied consistently, helping learning teams design experiences that are thoughtful, coherent, and capable of producing lasting impact.



GROWTHTM

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FOUNDATIONS OF THE GROWTH™ FRAMEWORK

The **GROWTH™** Framework draws from several well-established disciplines that inform modern learning design.

User Experience Design

Learning journeys borrow heavily from journey mapping and experience design, which focus on understanding user needs and designing meaningful interactions across time.

Behavioral Science

Research on motivation and habit formation shows that progress, feedback, and visible milestones help sustain engagement and reinforce behavior change.

Experiential Learning

Learning becomes meaningful when people apply ideas in real situations, reflect on outcomes, and gradually build confidence through practice.

Agile Development

Modern learning ecosystems benefit from iterative design. Launching early versions, gathering feedback, and refining experiences leads to stronger long-term outcomes.

Together, these disciplines shaped the structure of the **GROWTH™** Framework and its focus on designing learning as a progression rather than a single event.





G

Goal Setting: Define the destination

Clarify the real outcome you want learners to reach so every experience has a clear purpose.

R

Research & Empathize: Understand your learners

Study your learners' context, challenges, and motivations so the journey reflects real needs.

O

Outline the Experience: Map moments that matter

Design the key learning moments that move people from understanding to capability.

W

Work in Layers: Start small and expand

Develop the journey in stages so it can evolve, expand, and improve over time.

T

Test & Adapt: Improve through iteration

Use feedback and data to refine the experience and strengthen the learning path.

H

Highlight Progress: Reinforce & reflect

Make progress visible so learners stay motivated and recognize their growth.



GOAL SETTING

Learning journeys should begin with a clear understanding of what success looks like. Before designing content or mapping activities, it's important to define the outcome the learning experience is meant to produce. What business challenge are you addressing, and what should people be able to do differently once the journey is complete?

When goals are clearly defined, learning design becomes more intentional. Experiences, activities, and resources can all align with a specific behavioral shift or performance outcome, ensuring the journey supports real progress rather than simply delivering information.

Goal setting establishes the foundation for everything that follows by anchoring the learning journey in meaningful outcomes and giving both designers and learners a clear sense of direction.

	Ask: "What behavior should change after this?"
	Align with KPIs (e.g., sales conversion, safety incident reduction).
	Translate business needs into measurable learning outcomes.

Reflection Question: What specific behaviors or outcomes do I want to see after the learning journey is complete? How will I know this program worked—and who else needs to agree with that definition of success?



RESEARCH & EMPATHY

Effective learning journeys begin with understanding the people they are designed for. Before mapping experiences or developing content, it is important to explore the learner's environment, responsibilities, and daily challenges.

Learning does not happen in isolation. People bring prior knowledge, pressures, motivations, and constraints into every learning experience. Without understanding these realities, even well-designed programs can miss the mark.

Research and empathy ensure the journey reflects real needs. By listening carefully and observing how learners work, designers can build experiences that feel relevant, practical, and worth engaging with.

	Interview 3-5 actual learners.
	Use empathy mapping: What do they feel, fear, and face daily?
	Audit existing learning content for pain points and drop-off moments.

Reflection Question: What does a typical day look like for my learner before this training exists? Where might they feel uncertainty, friction, or disengagement—and what stories are hiding in their silence?



OUTLINE THE EXPERIENCE

Once the destination and learner context are clear, the next step is mapping the journey itself. This means identifying the sequence of experiences that guide learners from initial exposure to confident application.

A thoughtful outline helps reveal the moments that matter most. Instruction, practice, collaboration, and reflection can be arranged intentionally so that each step builds upon the last.

By outlining the journey before building content, designers create a clear path that supports progress rather than a collection of disconnected learning activities.

 START	Pre-learning (<i>invites, nudges, orientation</i>).
	During learning (<i>modules, coaching, group work</i>).
	Post-learning (<i>reinforcement, performance check-ins</i>).

Reflection Question: What does the full journey feel like from the learner's point of view—before, during, and after the training? Are we building a linear path to completion, or a meaningful experience that builds confidence at every step?



WORK IN LAYERS

Effective learning journeys rarely appear fully formed from the start. They evolve through thoughtful development, beginning with core experiences and expanding over time.

Working in layers allows teams to focus on what matters most first. Instead of attempting to build an entire ecosystem at once, designers can launch meaningful experiences early and refine them based on real learner behavior.

This approach encourages progress without unnecessary complexity, allowing learning programs to grow in depth and sophistication as insights accumulate.

	Start with an MVP: 1 week of content + 1 activity.
	Test the flow before you build out the full path.
	Use scenario-based learning to mimic real-world tasks.

Reflection Question: What's the simplest version of this experience I can launch to test the core learning flow? Am I prioritizing polish, or progress—and do I really need to wait until it's perfect to make it useful?

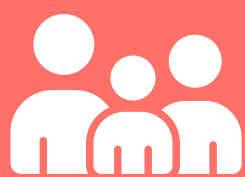


TEST & ADAPT

Learning journeys improve through observation and iteration. Even well-designed experiences benefit from feedback once they reach real learners in real environments.

Testing allows designers to see how learners actually interact with the experience. Patterns of engagement, confusion, and success provide valuable signals about what is working and what needs adjustment.

By continuously refining the journey, teams can strengthen the learning experience over time and ensure it remains aligned with learner needs and organizational goals.



Run a “pilot cohort” and observe completion + confusion rates.



Use A/B testing for emails or assessments.



Collect voice-of-the-learner feedback with 1-minute pulse surveys.

Reflection Question: Where am I leaving room for feedback, confusion, and change? Am I designing for certainty—or am I listening closely enough to grow alongside the learner?



HIGHLIGHT PROGRESS

Progress is one of the most powerful motivators in any learning journey. When learners can see how their skills are developing, they are more likely to stay engaged and continue moving forward.

Highlighting progress helps reinforce the behaviors and capabilities the journey is designed to build. Milestones, reflection points, and visible achievements all contribute to a stronger sense of accomplishment.

These moments of recognition transform learning from a task to complete into a path of growth that learners can clearly see and appreciate.



Use learning journals or team retros.



Visualize progress with badges, trackers, or skill trees.



Add “pause and reflect” prompts at key moments in the journey.

Reflection Question: How will learners know they’re growing—not just in scores, but in self-belief? What rituals or touchpoints can I build in to help them pause, look back, and say, “I’ve come a long way”?



GROWTH IN ACTION: REDESIGNING RETAIL ONBOARDING

A national retail chain with more than 400 locations was experiencing a troubling trend: nearly one in three new hires was leaving within the first 90 days. Store managers reported that new associates often felt overwhelmed during their first week, unsure how to navigate basic tasks like operating the POS system, recommending products, or handling customer questions.

The company had invested in training, but the experience wasn't working.

New hires were asked to complete a long onboarding course during their first few days on the job. The course covered everything from company policies to product knowledge, but it was delivered as a single, information-heavy experience. Associates struggled to retain what they learned, and managers had little visibility into whether the training was actually helping employees succeed on the floor.

The learning team recognized that the problem wasn't the content—it was the structure of the experience.

Instead of treating onboarding as a one-time training event, they decided to redesign it as a learning journey. Using the **GROWTH™** Framework, the team built a structured 30-day onboarding plan that supported new hires from their first interaction with the company through their first month on the job.

The new approach focused on gradual skill development, real-world practice, and consistent reinforcement from managers and peers. Rather than overwhelming new associates with information upfront, the journey introduced the right knowledge at the moment it was needed.

Let's look at how they redesigned the experience.



30-DAY ONBOARDING PLAN

G	The L&D team aligned with HR to reduce 90-day turnover and improve first-week sales. They defined clear learner outcomes like confidently using the POS system and recommending top-selling products by the end of week one.
R	They interviewed recent hires and store managers to map the learner journey. Key pain points included confusion on Day 1, lack of structure, and inconsistent coaching. These insights shaped every part of the redesign.
O	The team mapped a 30-day onboarding journey, including pre-start welcome messages, day-one checklists, and weekly skill-building modules tied to real store tasks. They emphasized emotional touchpoints to ease anxiety early.
W	Instead of launching a full program, they piloted a lightweight version in one store using PDFs, WhatsApp messages, and floor-based coaching. This let them test flow and engagement without a big rollout.
T	Weekly feedback was gathered from new hires and store managers. They refined instructions, clarified expectations, and improved the pacing based on real-time insights from the pilot group.
H	Learners received weekly encouragement messages and badges for completing key milestones. Managers facilitated short end-of-week reflections to reinforce growth and build confidence.

Key Result: Redesigning onboarding as a learning journey increased 90-day retention by 18% and accelerated early employee productivity.



TACTICAL KIT

Tools to go further with GROWTH™



HOW TO USE AN EMPATHY MAP

Understanding learners requires more than demographic data or course feedback. To design meaningful learning journeys, you need insight into how learners actually experience their work, their training, and the challenges they face along the way.

An empathy map helps uncover those perspectives. By examining what learners say, think, do, and feel, designers can identify motivations, frustrations, and behaviors that traditional research often misses.

These insights help learning teams move beyond assumptions and design experiences that genuinely support the people they serve.

What are they saying?	Pull direct quotes from interviews or open-ended surveys. Look for repeated frustrations or requests.
What are they thinking?	Capture internal dialogue—hopes, doubts, questions they might not voice out loud.
What are they doing?	Document learner behaviors: how they approach training, where they get stuck, or what tools they prefer.
What are they feeling?	Identify emotional highs/lows in the learning journey: confusion, anxiety, or confidence.
Positives	What excites them about growing in this area? Is it career advancement, recognition, or self-improvement?
Negatives	Where does friction show up? Look for unclear expectations, overwhelming interfaces, or lack of support.

Pro tip: Do this collaboratively with your team and SME. It shifts focus from “what we want to teach” to “what they actually need to learn.”



LEARNER EMPATHY MAP TEMPLATE

What are they saying?

What are they thinking?



What are they feeling?

What are they doing?

Positives

What motivates me to learn?

Negatives

What demotivates me to learn?



GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

Business Context

Clarify what this initiative is really about

- What problem are we trying to solve? *(example: inconsistent sales demos)*
- What outcome matters to the business? *(example: higher win rates, faster onboarding)*
- Who owns success? *(example: VP Sales, Enablement Manager)*

Stakeholders

- ☐ L&D
- ☐ HR
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Management
- ☐ Other_____

Desired Behavior Change

Shift the focus from “what we teach” to “what they do”

- After this learning experience, what will learners be able to do that they can’t do now? *(example: confidently lead a live product demo)*
- How will we know that’s happening? *(example: demo quality score, peer feedback, manager observation)*

Success Metrics

Business Metrics

- ☐ Revenue
- ☐ Retention
- ☐ Productivity
- ☐ NPS / CSAT
- ☐ Other_____

Learning Metrics

- ☐ Enrollment
- ☐ Completion
- ☐ Assessment Score
- ☐ Behavior Change
- ☐ OTJ Performance

Potential Risks

Document any potential blockers to success

- What could prevent learners from applying what they learn?
- What system, culture, or leadership gaps do we need to address?

Alignment Notes

Use this space to capture any additional agreements or next steps from the meeting



LEARNER FEEDBACK FORM

Overall Feedback

How would you rate this learning experience overall?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Very Poor

What Worked Well?

What part of this experience helped you the most?

What Didn't Work Well?

What part(s) could be improved? Where did you feel stuck or confused?

Confidence & Application

I feel confident in my ability to apply what I've learned.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Pro Tip: Use this form with pilot cohorts — or as a “pulse check” in live journeys, not just after the end!



DESIGN LEARNING THAT DRIVES REAL PERFORMANCE

Many learning programs start with good intentions but struggle to produce lasting results. Courses are launched, completion rates are tracked, and content libraries grow larger every year. Yet learners often finish training without gaining the confidence or skills needed to perform differently in their work.

The GROWTH™ Framework offers a practical way to rethink how learning experiences are designed. Instead of focusing on isolated courses, it helps learning teams build structured journeys that move people from curiosity to real capability. Built on patterns observed across successful programs, it provides a repeatable approach to designing learning that evolves over time and produces measurable progress.

Inside you'll learn how to:

- Define clear outcomes so learning experiences begin with a meaningful destination
- Understand the real context, motivations, and challenges of your learners
- Map the key moments that move people from understanding to application
- Develop learning journeys in layers that grow and improve over time
- Use feedback and data to continuously refine learning experiences
- Reinforce progress so learners stay motivated and recognize their development

About the Author

Justin Seeley has built customer education programs for some of the most recognizable platforms in tech, including Twitter Flight School and Walmart Marketplace Learn. He's also created more than 100 online courses reaching millions of learners worldwide.

Today he works as an eLearning Evangelist at Adobe and speaks regularly about the future of learning, customer education, and what it actually takes to build programs that scale.

