

8 Things Instructional Designers Can Learn From

SEVERANCE



Welcome to Lumon Learning

In Severance, employees perform work that is **mysterious**, yet supposedly **important** with no context or autonomy—just mindless repetition. Sound familiar? Too often, corporate training feels the same: rigid, confusing, and detached from real purpose.

But learning shouldn't feel like a **soulless compliance drill**. Severance is a cautionary tale, showing exactly what NOT to do in instructional design.

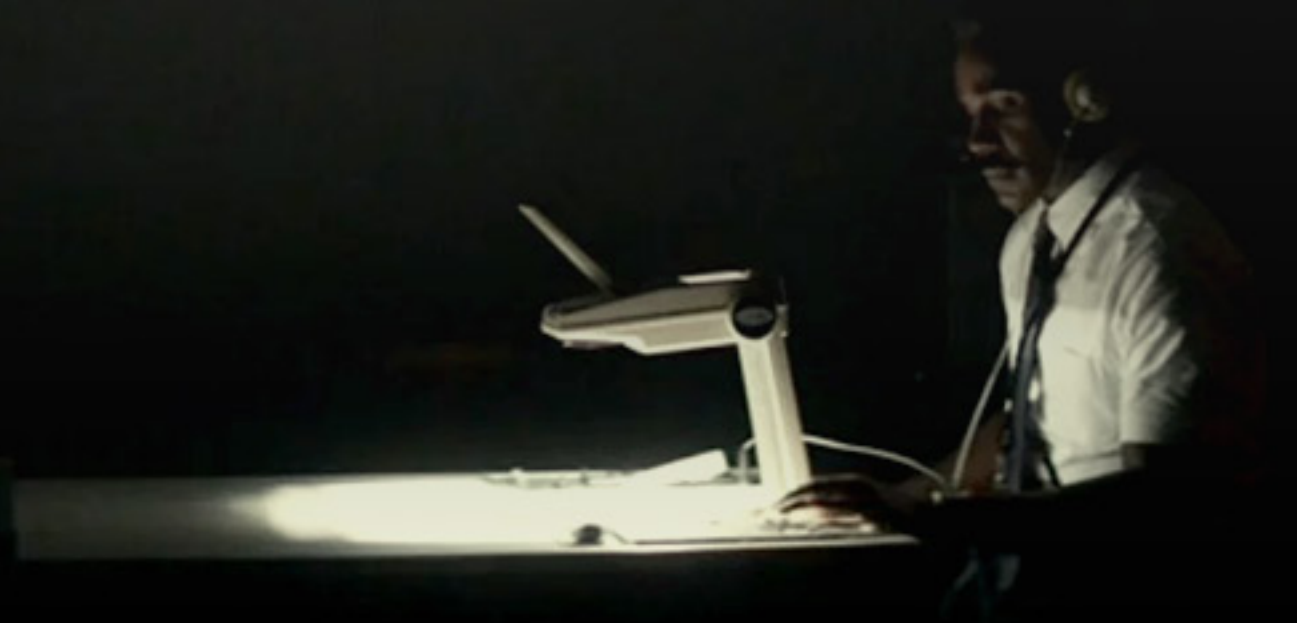
Let's break down the lessons—no memory wipes required.

1. The Breakroom

Repeating something **1,000** times doesn't mean they'll remember it.

In Severance, employees are forced to repeat the same phrase in **"The Break Room"** until they "truly mean it"—compliance training at its most horrifying. Sound familiar?

Repetition without **meaning** isn't learning. Instead of breaking learners down with mindless drills, make training **worth remembering** in the first place.



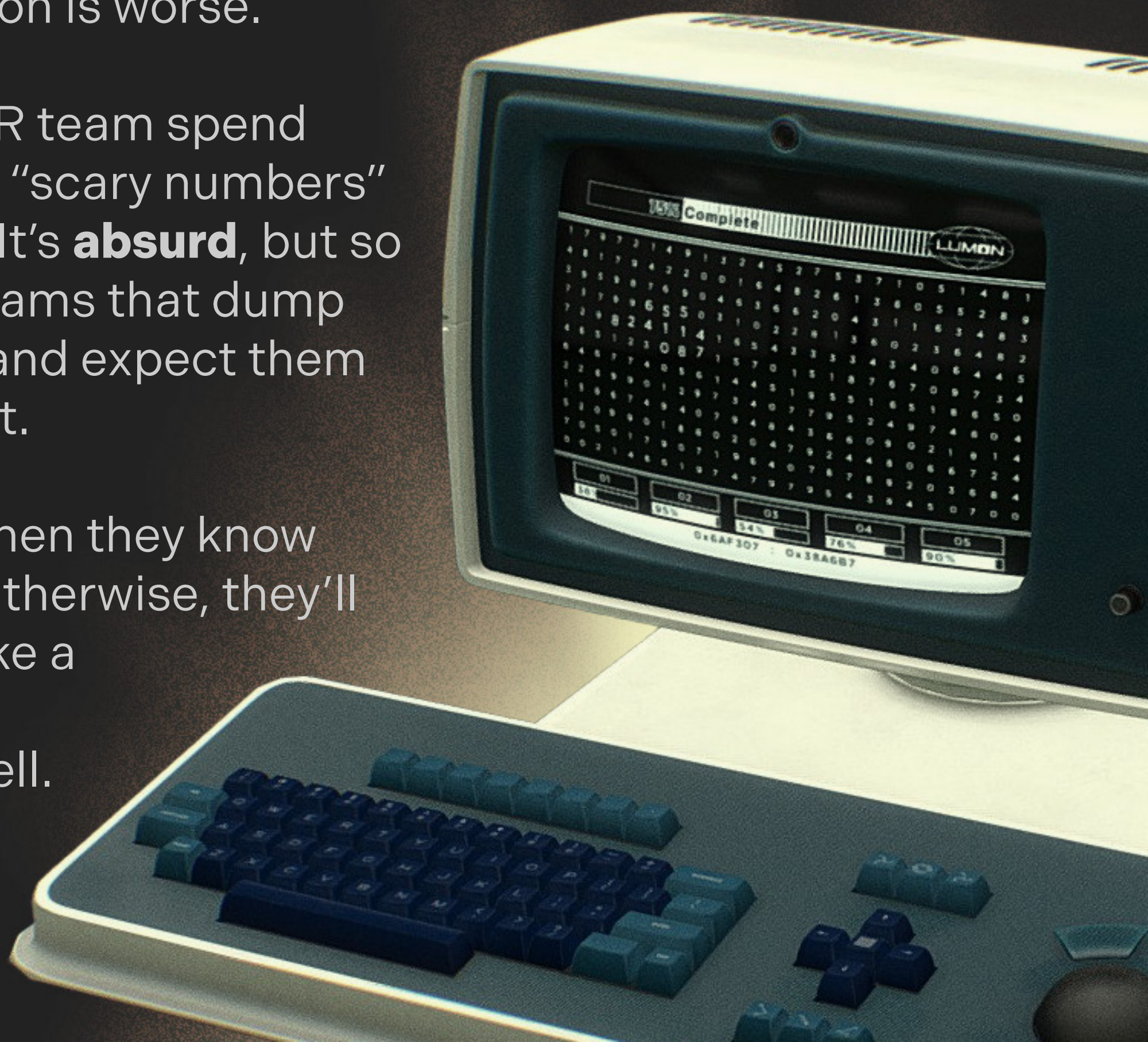
2. Data ≠ Clarity

The work is **mysterious** and **important**.

Training without context is bad—training that demands action without explanation is worse.

Mark and the MDR team spend their days sorting “scary numbers” with no clue why. It’s **absurd**, but so are training programs that dump data on learners and expect them to just figure it out.

People engage when they know **why it matters**. Otherwise, they’ll check out—just like a Lumon employee eyeing the stairwell.



3. Forced Fun is Out

Gamification **isn't** a magic fix.

Ah yes, gamification—the cure for boring training. Except... it's not.

Milchick's dance party didn't fool anyone, and neither will badges or leaderboards in a poorly designed course. Learners won't breakdance for arbitrary points—but a waffle bar? Coveted AF.

People engage when the incentive is real. If you want gamification to work, tie it to something meaningful—whether that's career growth, hands-on application, or, let's be honest, actual waffles.



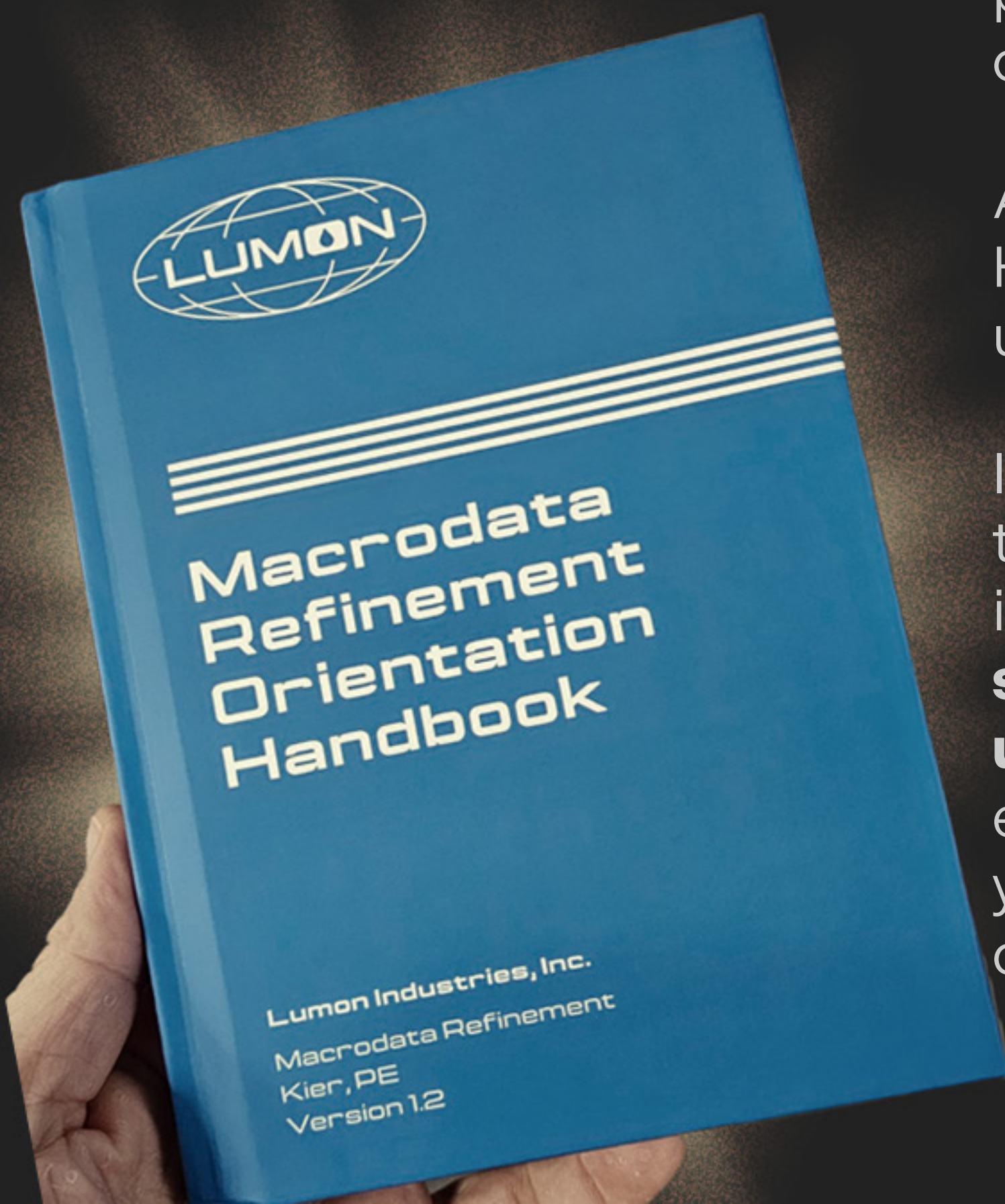
4. Enough Handbooks

Dumping info on people isn't the same as **teaching** them.

Buried deep in every corporate LMS is The Handbook—100 pages of everything... that no one reads.

At Lumon, the Employee Handbook is sacred, yet no one understands it. Sound familiar?

Instead of making learners dig through endless PDFs, keep information **accessible, searchable, and useful**—because if Helly R. can't escape Lumon's basement, your learners won't escape that document either.



5. Paths Not Prisons

If people are constantly trying to escape training, it's probably bad.

If your learners are desperate to escape, you've got a **problem**.

Helly R. spends half the season trying to flee Lumon—just like learners mindlessly clicking “Next” to finish a course. The issue? **No control**. When training feels **rigid** and **passive**, people disengage.

Instead of trapping learners in a linear experience, give them **freedom**. Let them **explore**, **make choices**, and **take ownership** of their learning. When people feel in control, they stay engaged—not just endure the process.

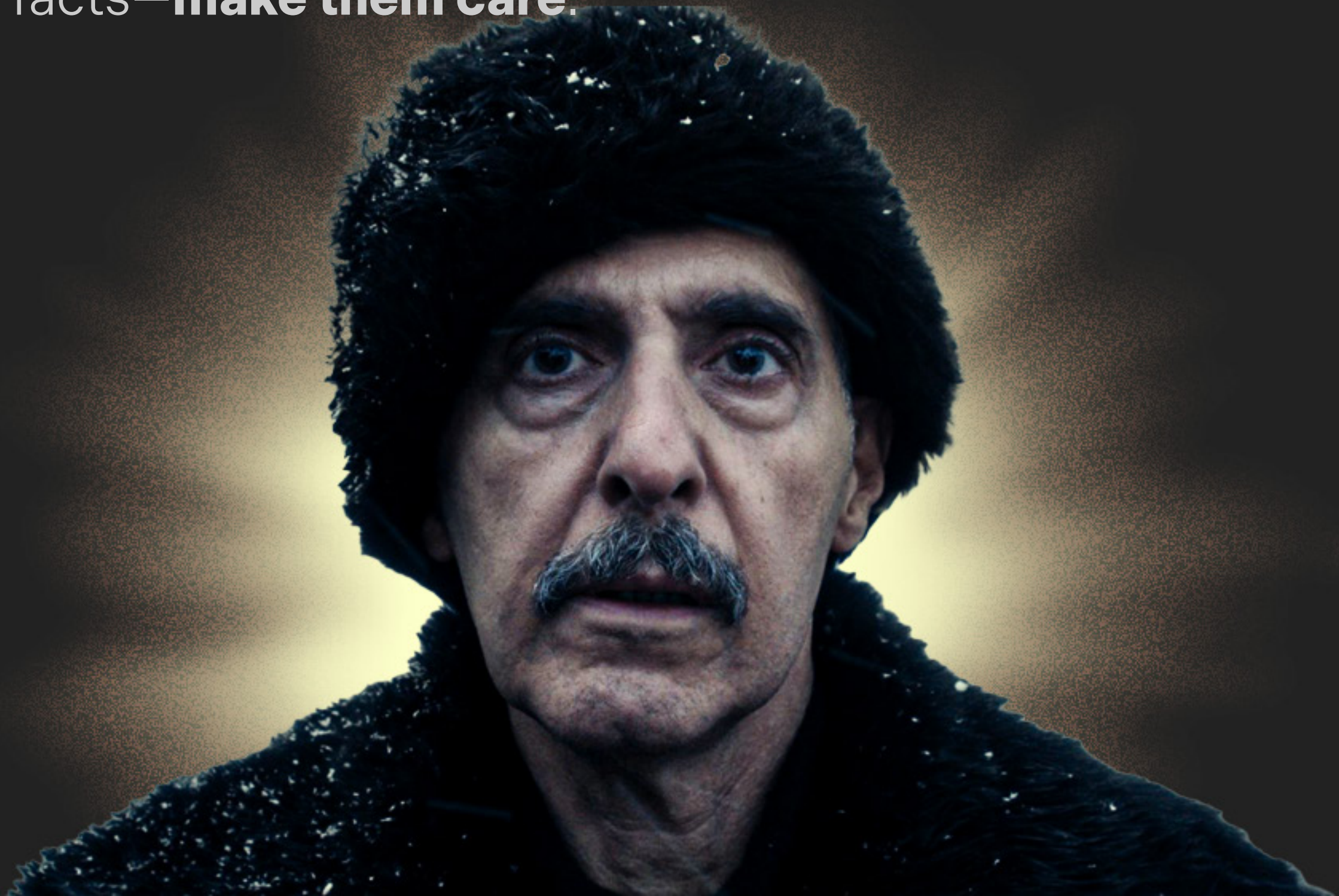


6. Emotions Are Good

Emotion makes learning stick.

Irving doesn't remember his past, but he **feels it**.

That's how memory works—**facts fade**, but **emotions stick**. Great learning isn't just about information; it's about **connection**. Dry, mechanical training won't leave a mark, but **storytelling** and **relevance** will. If you want learners to remember, don't just feed them facts—**make them care**.



7. Humanize Feedback

Learners need real guidance.

Ms. Casey delivers “wellness sessions” with the warmth of a AI chatbot—calm, scripted, and completely detached from emotion. Learners in bad training programs know this feeling all too well.

People don’t improve from **lifeless**, one-size-fits-all feedback. They need **human connection**, **real encouragement**, and **constructive insights** that help them grow.

If your training just spits out “Nice work!” or “Try again,” you might as well have Ms. Casey reading from a script. Make feedback **personal**, **actionable**, and **engaging**—because learning isn’t just about knowledge, it’s about growth.



8. Be Transparent

Learning shouldn't be hoarded.

Dylan thought he was the best-trained at Lumon—until he realized key knowledge was hidden from him. The Overtime Contingency proved **critical information was off-limits**.

Too many companies **gatekeep knowledge**, limiting access by role or seniority. But real learning cultures **share freely**, empowering employees instead of controlling them.

Stop hoarding information. Make learning **open and continuous**—no one should have to stage a rebellion just to get the full story.



Final Thoughts

Don't create a Lumon Learning Culture.

Lumon's training is rigid, cryptic, and forced—just like bad corporate learning.

Great training isn't about control; it's about engagement, autonomy, and real value. Give learners context and choice, and they'll actually learn—not just complete a course.

What's the worst training you've endured? Drop it in the comments—I won't make you repeat it 1,000 times.

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