

3 Stages of Creating a Continuous Learning Journey for Your Learners' Long-Term Success

The professional learning journey is a continuous, lifelong cycle. Does your learning program effectively guide learners through this journey and support ongoing professional development?



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The great Benjamin Franklin once said that in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes. Yet if he stepped into a time machine to pay a visit to today's professional world, without a doubt he'd add a third certainty to that list: the need for continuous, lifelong learning.

Over the past few decades, we've witnessed a cosmic shift in what guarantees a successful career. The value of a four-year degree is steadily eroding and being replaced with an emphasis on growing (and proving) job-related skills to stay competitive. And for the associations and certifying bodies that help professionals build and boost their marketable skills, this accelerated shift presents an incredible opportunity for growth and impact.

Lifelong learning is here to stay, and the organizations who understand and embrace the entire continuous learning journey for their learners will be here to stay, too.

Here you'll discover the three continuous learning journey stages and how they can help learners find long-term success.

“By taking a skills-based approach, we can remove barriers for individuals that might not have a degree, while also increasing talent pools, and helping organizations pinpoint quality candidates for hard-to-fill job roles.”

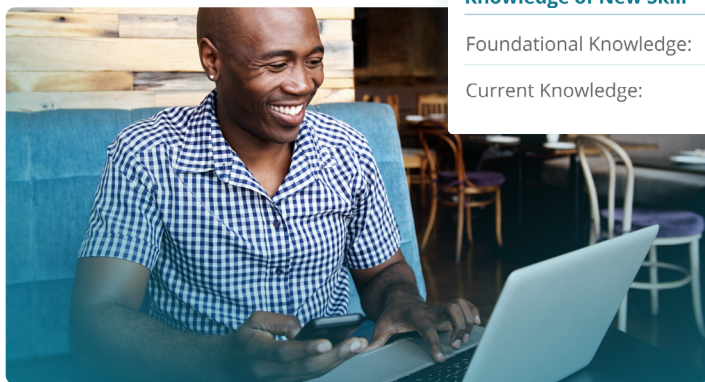
Hari Srinivasan,
Vice President of Product at LinkedIn

Source: [The Rise Of Skills-Based Hiring And What It Means For Education](#)

What Is Continuous Learning?

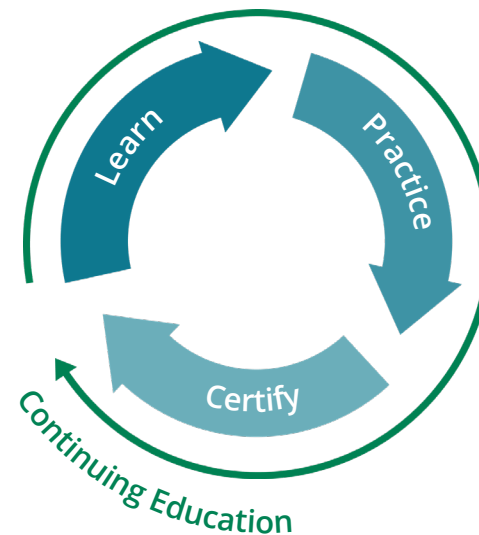
Continuous learning is the ongoing [expansion of knowledge and skill sets](#). Developing and honing new professional skills is the best way for people to advance their careers. Working professionals regularly seek opportunities to advance skills as their careers evolve and new technology and trends emerge, which means associations and credentialing bodies are well-positioned to help their learners:

- Fill skill and knowledge gaps
- Identify new learning opportunities
- Reinforce problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
- Stay ahead of the competition
- Nurture a collaborative culture of new ideas and perspectives



Continuous Learning Journey Stages

Through the continuous learning journey, learners rotate through three foundational stages as they prepare to achieve and surpass their professional milestones. These stages—Learn, Practice, and Certify—are perpetually revisited, with the 'Learn' stage evolving into Continuing Education to further enhance professional development and readiness for recertification.



Each stage is crucial in a learner's ability to absorb, retain, and apply the knowledge they've learned.

It's important for professional associations and credentialing organizations to guide learners along each stage of the continuous learning journey to set them up for long-term success—in turn enabling them to advance their careers armed with their hard-earned certifications and credentials.

Let's dive in to discover what each stage involves.

STAGE 1

Learn

Learning is about acquiring knowledge, and in the case of professional certifications, going one step further and mastering that knowledge. If learners don't actively apply or review new knowledge, they're at greater risk of forgetting it.

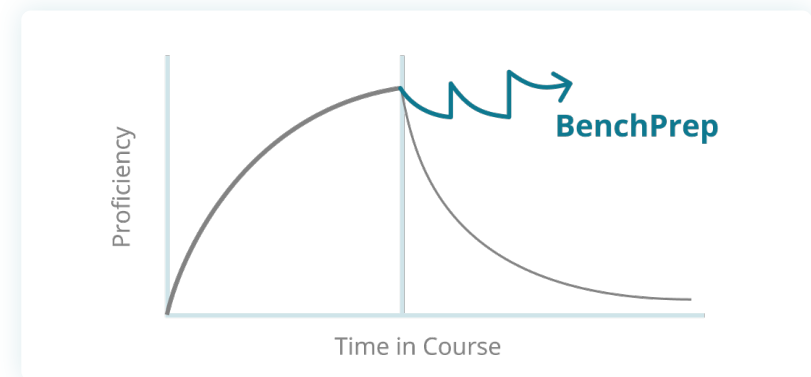
Unfortunately, according to the Ebbinghaus Forgetting curve, we forget almost 80% of what we've learned within the first month. In his book *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, German psychologist Herman Ebbinghaus sought to discover whether humans actually memorize things.

Source: [Conquer the Forgetting Curve with Microlearning Strategies That Work blog](#)



In his experiment, Ebbinghaus tried to memorize a list of meaningless three-letter words like DOK and EHD. He then tested himself over different intervals—without reviewing the list—to see how well he could remember them. After the first 20 minutes, he'd forgotten 42% of the list. Within 24 hours, 67% was gone. And a month later, he could only remember 21% of the three-letter words.

During this experiment, Ebbinghaus discovered some vital—and still used—lessons about learning and remembering. Upon reviewing his words at key points on the curve, he could drastically reduce the rate at which he'd normally forget.



There are several ways learning programs can leverage these methods to enhance their learners' ability to learn and remember crucial information. For high-stakes, critical learning strategies such as spaced learning, microlearning, omnichannel delivery, and personalized learning pathways are all methods of enhancing recall and memory of key points required to master an area of study.



Spaced Learning

One proven strategy for conquering the forgetting curve is spaced learning. Spaced learning demonstrates that repeated exposure to information over designated periods helps you retain and store more knowledge in your memory. Flashcards are a powerful tool for learning and a prime example of using repetition to memorize key phrases or terminology.

Spaced learning requires several repetitions. When designing a learning program with spaced learning in mind, you'll repeat the following process many times:

- **Introduce a concept to your learners**
- **Allow some time to pass (hours, days, months)**
- **Present that content again to reinforce the lesson**

One widely used practice involves repeating new and more difficult concepts more often while limiting repetition for older, easier topics. Of course, those old and easy topics were new and challenging at one point. But thanks to spaced repetition strategies, learners will have committed the information to their long-term memory.

DID YOU KNOW?

BenchPrep's configurable, cloud-based learning platform leverages the best research-based practices in spaced repetition to deliver maximum learner engagement. One of these practices involves sending learners notifications on their mobile devices with daily questions regarding their most recent lessons. Those questions also provide valuable feedback—whether right or wrong—explaining why the correct answer is such and where they can review the necessary information.

Source: [How Spaced Repetition Helps Learners Achieve Mastery.. blog](#)



Microlearning

Microlearning breaks long-form content into bite-sized modules, ranging up to 20 minutes at a time.

The International Journal of Educational Research Review found [microlearning makes knowledge transfer 18% more effective](#). And according to Software Advice, [58% of workers said they'd use their company's learning resources more often](#) if they were in manageable, bite-sized chunks. Finally, Ray Jimenez, author of 3-Minute Learning, found microlearning can lower development costs by 30% [while increasing development speed by 300%](#).

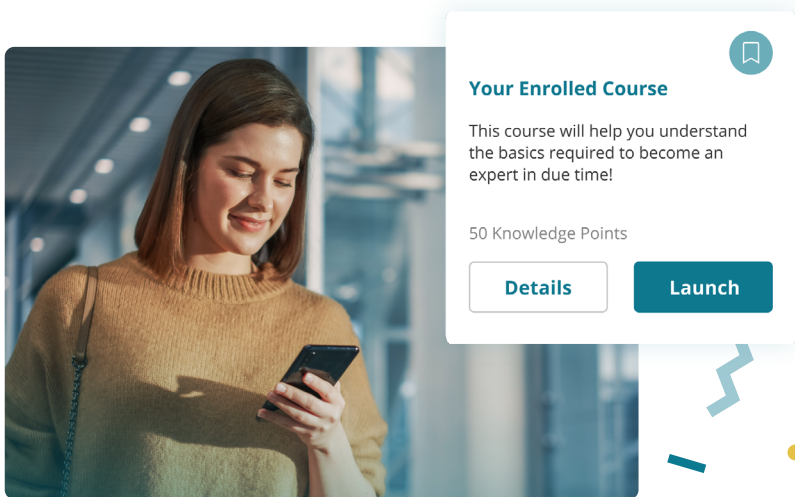
There's more to [microlearning](#) than simply chopping your long-form courses down into smaller chunks. If you have any unnecessary content, cut that first and then chunk out what remains. If everything seems essential, dial into a few [microlearning best practices](#) to assist you further.

Take a step back to define your course objectives, tie all your content to a specific objective, and then classify which information is essential to understanding each objective. Include only the most pertinent information in the course. Cut out any unnecessary fluff, and ensure your learners aren't distracted by lessons they don't need. Keeping an eye on your business goals and learner outcomes can guide you toward developing [the most effective microlearning courses](#).



Omnichannel Delivery

As global circumstances accelerated the shift to digital platforms, we learned a valuable lesson in the power of omnichannel delivery for continuous learning.



For instance, people spend far more time on their mobile devices than on their laptops or desktop computers. Therefore, mobile-friendly modules may be the only effective way to reach most learners where they are—on their phones.

According to Towards Maturity's InFocus report titled [Mobile Learning at Work](#), 47% of organizations currently use mobile devices in their training programs.

Mobile capabilities encourage learners to engage and study when they have spare time.



Personalized Learning Pathways

Imagine for a moment, a traditional in-person classroom where the instructor doesn't lead the entire class on a one-size-fits-all learning journey. Instead, the teacher hones in on each student individually, taking them on a personalized continuous learning journey that aligns with their unique strengths, skills, interests, and needs.

While this isn't practical in a physical classroom, it is possible to achieve in a learning program. Digital programs encourage learners to choose how and when they learn, thus providing a more personalized experience. Learners determine the skills they wish to strengthen rather than being lumped into the rest of the class.

Personalized learning is also more engaging. Letting learners decide where to start is often more effective than dictating it to them.

It's no secret that too many learners click through learning modules they deem irrelevant just to get them over with. On the flip side, personalized learning plans intend to keep adult learners engaged with the information that is the most important to help them achieve mastery of the subject at hand.

Remote learning isn't going away any time soon, especially in the business world. Future generations will move toward a mix of in-person and online education. Professional associations and credentialing bodies must learn to embrace this trend to deliver effective programs.

STAGE 2

Practice

Learning new content alone is not enough. Learners also need to leverage practice questions, self-assessments, and mock exams to put their new-found skills to the test. Ideally, these practice scenarios help build confidence—confidence in the material they need to know to achieve their career goals, and confidence that they'll pass the final examination with flying colors.

Psychology writer Malcolm Gladwell suggests dedicating 10,000 hours of practice toward a skill to master it. While learners likely won't have to allocate 10,000 hours toward obtaining a professional credential, they'll still need ample time and opportunity to practice the material they've learned before test day.

Source: [The 10,000-hour rule](#)



Benefits of Practice Questions

Practice questions are crucial to reinforcing the learning experiences from the Learn stage. Practice tests ease learners' stress and anxiety on exam day while providing them with valuable feedback in a mock exam atmosphere. Credentialing organizations must provide learners with as many practice opportunities as possible to set them up for success.

Practice helps learners pass their certification exams

Mock exams allow learners to self-assess and redirect their focus toward the subjects they're struggling with. Ensure you're mixing practice tests and quizzes into the continuous learning journey to help learners retain and apply what they've learned in your modules.

Practice helps learners feel prepared and confident on exam day

Learner confidence is one of the most important metrics you can track as learners move through your learning program. When taking practice exams, have learners denote how confident they are in a given answer on a scale of very confident to not confident.

While a good guess can still be a correct answer, it indicates a lack of knowledge retention. Depending on the subject matter, incorrect answers could be as costly as life or death, such as in the case of a medical certification.

Practice experiences are what learners want, demand, and crave the most

Your learners want to put their knowledge to the test before exam day. Whether they grew up playing sports or studying hard in school, they know the value of practice.



Practice Test Strategies

Employ these practice test strategies to maximize learner outcomes:

Use mixed-format practice tests

Mixed-format refers to tests with various question types, from multiple choice to fill-in-the-blank. [Research shows](#) that mixed-format tests are the most effective for preparing learners for the final exam, even if the exam is in only one format.

Leverage distributed practice

Several short tests conducted over time, specifically after the learner diverts their attention elsewhere, require mental processing and recall, leading to deeper learning and retention.

Provide feedback

Feedback is crucial to achieving your learning outcomes. This is especially true for the window immediately following the practice test, as researchers found that [delaying feedback was not as helpful as instant feedback](#).

Spaced repetition vs. cramming

Spaced repetition involves breaking practice tests into shorter sessions over a longer period. You're more likely to remember information that has been spaced out and repeated.

The opposite is massed practice, which involves fewer, longer sessions. Cramming the night before an exam would be an example of massed practice. It might help learners remember lessons in the short term, but they won't retain them long term.



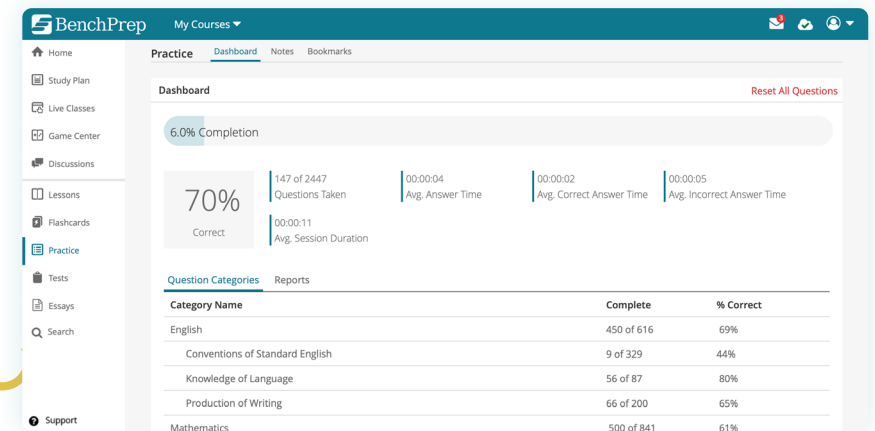
Additional Benefits of Practicing

Learners that feel prepared are significantly less likely to drop out of a course. And by providing online practice tests modeled after the real exam, you'll also be able to [boost learner confidence](#).

Furthermore, the benefits of practice tests don't end with the learner. [Real-time data](#) tells you how your learners interact with and perform on their practice tests. You can easily identify trends among your learner base and see where you can make changes in the lessons to help convey information more effectively.

Practice tests help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, adding another layer of personalization to the entire certification program.

[Self-assessment](#) is the final critical piece of practice and has the learner go back to review their test. When learners have to grade their work, they can identify where they went wrong and which parts of the lesson they misunderstood. Stumbling upon your own mistakes is the best way to correct them.



Why Investing in the 'Practice' Stage is Essential for Continuous Learning Success

Think back to Gladwell's 10,000-hour sentiment and imagine reading a book called *How to Play Baseball* before being thrown into a major league game. You probably wouldn't last very long. But if you had adequate time to practice, you might stand a chance. You might not feel like they set you up to fail.

Put yourself in a frustrated learner's shoes. Imagine if the certification training program you're paying for isn't giving you ample opportunity to practice and apply the lessons you're learning. Unfortunately, too many business leaders and educators believe an intellectual understanding is all a learner needs and discount the importance of practice.

Why wouldn't you offer your learners practice opportunities? Doing so provides them many advantages. Don't look for ways to cut corners around practice. Instead, invest in filling gaps with more practice opportunities.



Doing so enables organizations to:

- Build certifications around products, services, or intellectual property (IP)
- Support their learners' career goals
- Achieve revenue growth by taking a slice of the external training pie

STAGE 3

Certify

Once learners migrate through the Learn and Practice stages, they will be ready to take (and pass!) the certification exam.

The certification and credentialing industry must be amped and ready to pick up speed as we adapt to the new skills-based economy. The global professional learning market is expected to [increase by 8.11% over the next five years](#), leading to a market volume of \$8.91 billion by 2029. Now is the perfect time to [capitalize on a wide-open market](#).

[Industry-leading learning companies](#) have already made significant headway in a growing market. Such companies see the increasing evidence suggesting strong interest in skills-based, digital credentials, especially among [diverse adult learners and lower-income backgrounds](#). And since four-year degrees have recently taken a back seat to job-specific skills training, learners enrolled in such programs will have a leg up on the competition.

Certification Exam ⌚ Total: 01:05 Done

Question 100 of 163

How does BenchPrep prepare learners with the skill, knowledge, and confidence required to pass difficult entrance licensing exams?

A

B

C

D



[According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), over 46% of civilian workers were required to have a credential, nearly 6% had a certification requirement, and over 19% required a professional license. The demand for **alternative professional credentials** far outweighs that for higher-education degrees.

In addition, 87% of executives believe people with alternative credentials bring value to the workplace. They also believe alternative certifications are crucial to professional development, and those who earn said credentials gain more credibility. **In their minds, credentialed professionals are better performers.**

Source: [The Rise Of Alternative Credentials In Hiring ebook](#)



Building Trust and Reputation

When professionals are approached for the first time regarding a new career opportunity, their credentials and certifications provide an extra layer of trust and expertise. One unique strategy we have seen work well is called ‘stapling’, where professionals staple a certification to a degree or staple a certification to a job.



Standing Out in the Crowd

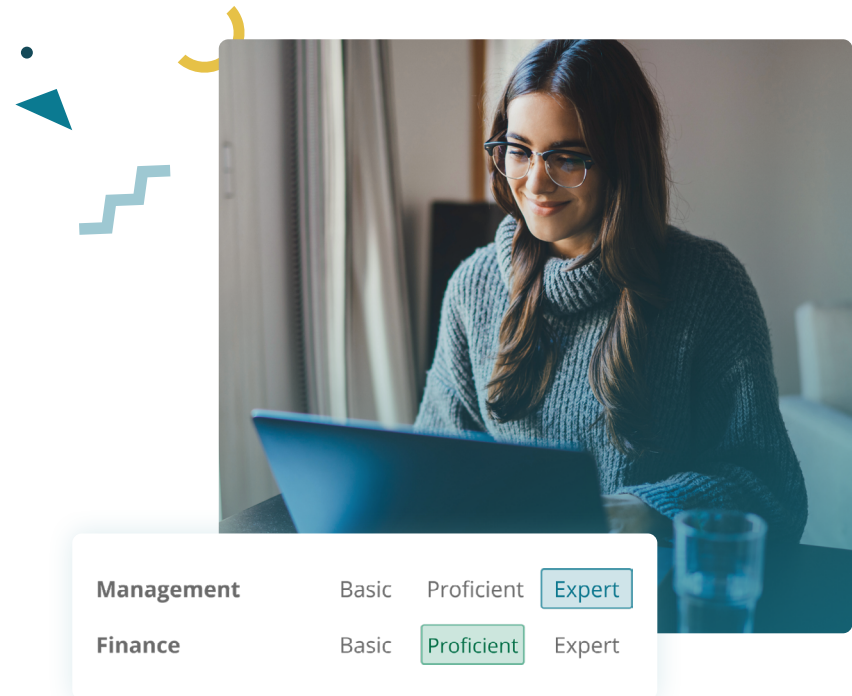
Verified credentials and certifications have become a form of currency, especially for professionals looking to stand out in a highly competitive workforce.

Even if their field doesn’t require special certifications, learners who take the time to earn one will remain one step ahead of the competition. If you were a hiring manager looking at two identical learners, but only one earned a professional certification in their field, who would you choose?



Increased Earnings Potential

Professionals can easily use their certifications as a bargaining chip to negotiate higher salaries and career advancement. On the flip side, employers can rest assured knowing their credentialed employees will bring in more revenue for the company—a win-win for everyone involved.



Management	Basic	Proficient	Expert
Finance	Basic	Proficient	Expert

Certifications Save Time and Money

The transferability of industry-recognized certifications is highly valuable, especially as professionals switch jobs at a rapid pace. The time-to-value ratio of such programs is also impossible to ignore. Professionals would rather spend a few months in a certification course than several years seeking a degree.

Now is the time for **organizations offering high-stakes certifications** to double down and grow their programs in this skills-based economy.



What's Next?

The Role of Continuing Education in the Lifelong Learning Journey

Once learners take the final steps toward achieving their professional certifications, taking and passing their certification exams, they then loop back into the Learn stage as they seek to sharpen skills or develop new ones with continuing education opportunities.

Organizations are making great strides in looking to bridge the skills gap between themselves and professionals by offering continuing education pathways, additional certification training, credentialing, and more.



It's also imperative that organizations highlight credentials during the hiring process. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), most applicant tracking systems (ATS) used by hiring managers don't account for credential information. In fact, [SHRM Foundation President Wendi Safstrom](#) found only a small percentage of HR professionals use ATS screening systems that recognize alternative credentials.

According to McKinsey, 87% of global companies either “have a skills gap, or expect to within a few years.” Organizations across every sector struggle to find talent with the most in-demand skills. These businesses must discover more efficient solutions to meet the growing need.

Source: [Mind the \[Skills\] Gap article](#)

Supporting the Continuous Learning Journey with the Right LMS

As the landscape of education shifts away from traditional four-year degrees towards licenses, certifications, and credentials, organizations must embrace the holistic value of a continuous learning journey to effectively bridge the current skills gap.

It is crucial for associations and credentialing bodies to support the entire learning journey, from pre-assessment learning such as certification training and exam preparation, to post-assessment and [continuing education phases](#).

By nurturing the entire spectrum of the lifelong learning journey, associations help learners master critical and in-demand skills.

Navigating this comprehensive educational pathway requires more than just intent—it demands the right partnership. BenchPrep distinguishes itself among the multitude of learning management systems by providing a seamless bridge across all stages of the learning journey. Our [platform revolutionizes learning with a unified digital ecosystem](#) that integrates certification training with ongoing education, thus fostering a continuous and cohesive learner engagement experience.

BenchPrep's strategic approach to diversifying learning programs enables associations and credentialing organizations to expand their market presence and enhance revenue, while simultaneously boosting learner engagement and satisfaction through a comprehensive and integrated platform.

In a world where continuous professional development is key to success, choosing the right learning management system is more than a necessity—it's a strategic advantage. BenchPrep's holistic platform is designed to support your organization's journey towards creating lifelong learners, ensuring that every step is an opportunity for growth and excellence. Equip your learners with the tools they need to succeed today and transform tomorrow.



About BenchPrep

BenchPrep is an award-winning learning platform with a mission to transform traditional learning. Specializing in certification training, exam preparation and continuing education, we offer an interactive and personalized learning experience. We enable associations and credentialing bodies to grow their education programs and better support their learners throughout the lifelong learning journey.

BenchPrep is more than just a technology provider; we collaborate closely with organizations, helping to design and implement interactive online courses, and providing comprehensive project support alongside a versatile self-service admin portal for streamlined course management.

Many of the world's leading associations and credentialing bodies trust BenchPrep to power their online study programs, including AAMC, ASCM, CFA Institute, CompTIA, GMAC, HRCI, ISACA, NCBE, and more. More than 10 million learners have used BenchPrep to attain academic and professional success. Visit www.benchprep.com to learn more.



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2020 SHIA CODiE WINNER

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Ready to see how BenchPrep can drive success for both your business
and your learners? [Book a Demo Today](#)

Additional Resources

We hope you find this eBook useful and encourage you to explore more great BenchPrep thinking and content on our [blog](#) or in the many case studies, guides, infographics, webinars, and videos you can find on our [Digital Learning Resources](#) hub.



[From Bits & Bytes to Insights: A 5-Step Guide to Refining LMS Data into Actionable Business Intelligence](#)



[4 LMS Superpowers Every Association Needs](#)



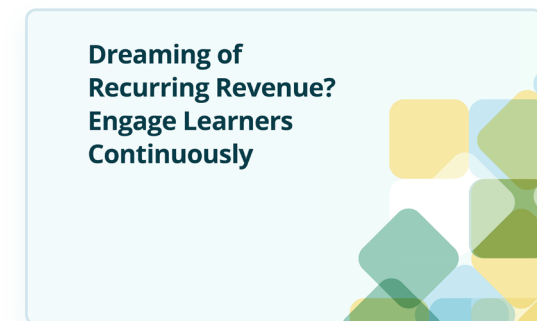
[How to Reduce Dropout Rates for Your Certification Candidates](#)



[CLO Secrets Revealed: 5 Learning Leaders Share Secrets to Transforms Your Certificaiton Program](#)



[3 Keys to a High-Performing Certification Exam Prep Training Program](#)



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