The Art & Science of Learning That Sticks

How to improve employee performance and drive business results with microlearning

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What's inside

About this book

"The rate at which an organization learns may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage."

— Ray Stata

We're living during a time of extraordinary change. Nine out of 10 executives say the accelerating rate of change is creating a skills gap in their workforce.[1] As digital disruption sweeps across the business landscape, the way we work is evolving fast—and it's accelerating to boot.

Add to that the ongoing task of engaging and upskilling an increasingly decentralized, global, and contingent workforce, and it's easy to see why even the most seasoned learning professionals are wondering how to keep up.

But don't worry. We're on the case.

Over the last seven years, we've worked with organizations all over the world to help them not only overcome these new challenges, but also leverage them to get ahead. And we've done it together through the art and science of microlearning: short, focused bursts of learning delivered to employees when and where they need them most.

This guide attempts to shine a light on the process we use to create effective, engaging microlearning experiences in the hopes that you will be inspired and empowered to do the same. It's one part creative design (the art), one part instructional design (the science), and all about meeting real learner needs and solving real business problems—that's the learning that sticks.
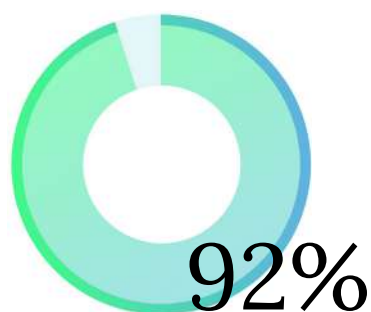
Without further ado, let's begin!

Microlearning: What it is, and why it should matter to you

First, some fundamentals.

The next big thing in workplace learning?

80%
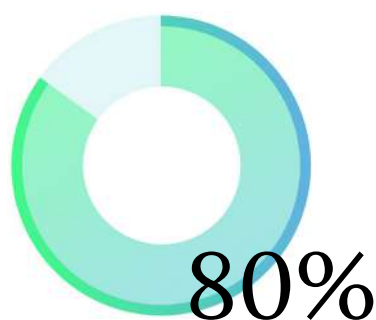
Learning professionals say microlearning is changing the knowledge acquisition process by effectively delivering it inside the workflow.[2]

92%

Anticipate their use of microlearning to increase in the next year.[3]

So what is microlearning, anyway?

In simplest terms, microlearning is learning through short, focused bursts that progressively add up to a larger learning goal. In the case of workplace learning, that goal is usually a performance or behavior—something you want someone to do on the job.

Why learn in short, focused bursts?

We're all busy these days, and it's tough for employees to fit learning into their hectic schedules. In fact, the modern employee only has 1% of their workweek (about 5 minutes a day) to devote to training and development.[4]

In addition to having less time, we live in an age of distraction. Bersin by Deloitte reports that workers now get interrupted as frequently as every 5 minutes (ironically, often by work applications and collaboration tools), and people unlock their smartphones up to nine times every hour.[5] Microlearning sympathizes with these new realities, giving people a chance to learn quickly and nimbly in today's fast-paced world of work.

Okay, so it's more convenient. But does it actually change behaviors?

Yes, microlearning is particularly conducive to changing employee behaviors because it supports the way people actually develop in real life: gradually, over time. A new manager doesn't learn to become a great manager overnight. They learn little by little, step by step, making tiny adjustments and improvements as they go. A microlearning approach can enhance that natural growth process with a steady stream of digestible, actionable learning experiences.

What does the science say about microlearning?

There's plenty of science suggesting that microlearning is highly aligned with how the brain processes and recalls information best. For instance, according to Miller's Law we can only hold roughly seven objects in our working memory at a given time—and other research suggests even less.[6] Well-designed micro-learning experiences respect these cognitive limits, giving learners small doses of know-how that are easy to understand right away, and memorable enough to be retrieved later.

So it's better for retention. But what about application?

Microlearning is all about application. It's not about learning for learning's sake. It's about giving somebody just enough learning (and, ideally, motivation) to do something differently right in the moment. It's not like longer-form trainings where there are multiple concepts or behaviors or skills being addressed. Each bit of microlearning is singularly focused, which more easily translates to imme-diate and specific action.

Got it. What does this mean for all the traditional programs I have in place?

You don't need to turn everything into microlearning. But it's a good idea to give learners microlearning both before and after a traditional macro learning event

like a workshop or lecture in order to introduce and reinforce key points covered in the session. Plus, it frees up more time during the actual event for face-to-face conversations, group practice, immediate feedback, and other benefits of in-person training.

How is microlearning different from regular performance support?

Typical performance support like job aids and cheat sheets always help. But often people need a learning experience first—an emotionally-charged moment that gives them a certain level of understanding and comfort with a given skill or behavior. That experience serves as a foundation upon which supplemental learning materials can build.

How can microlearning help me build a culture of learning?

The trend toward "micro" is already part of the larger culture in which we live. The average person checks their phone 150 times per day[7]; that's 150 small bits of information throughout the day. Microlearning harnesses this energy by replacing some of the compulsive social media checking and mindless email scrolling with effective, engaging, short learning experiences.

In this manner, microlearning can make learning a more deep-rooted and on-going part of your organization's culture. By weaving short, sticky learning moments throughout the ordinary workday, learning goes from event-based—something people do now and then—to a continuous activity your whole organization can actually feel working daily.

Future-proof your workforce with microlearning

Why bite-sized learning is the secret to thriving in today's fast-changing workplace

*If you'd like more facts, and figures for creating a compelling business case for microlearning, download our eBook, Future-Proof Your Workforce with Microlearning today.

Grovo's microlearning method (in three parts)

If you've read this far, hopefully you're on board with the idea that microlearning is an approach worth exploring at your organization. The next question many people have is how do I do it?

That's the question we'll spend the remainder of this book answering. We'll explain the method we've used to help organizations all over the world develop bite-sized training experiences that capture attention, motivate action, and make learning stick. And we'll do it in three parts:

Part I: Set a microlearning strategy

Lay the foundation for microlearning that drives business outcomes.

Part II: Create microlearning content

Craft engaging micro-lessons that capture the attention of today's learners.

Part III: Launch a microlearning campaign

Align microlearning experiences with employee needs—and make them stick.
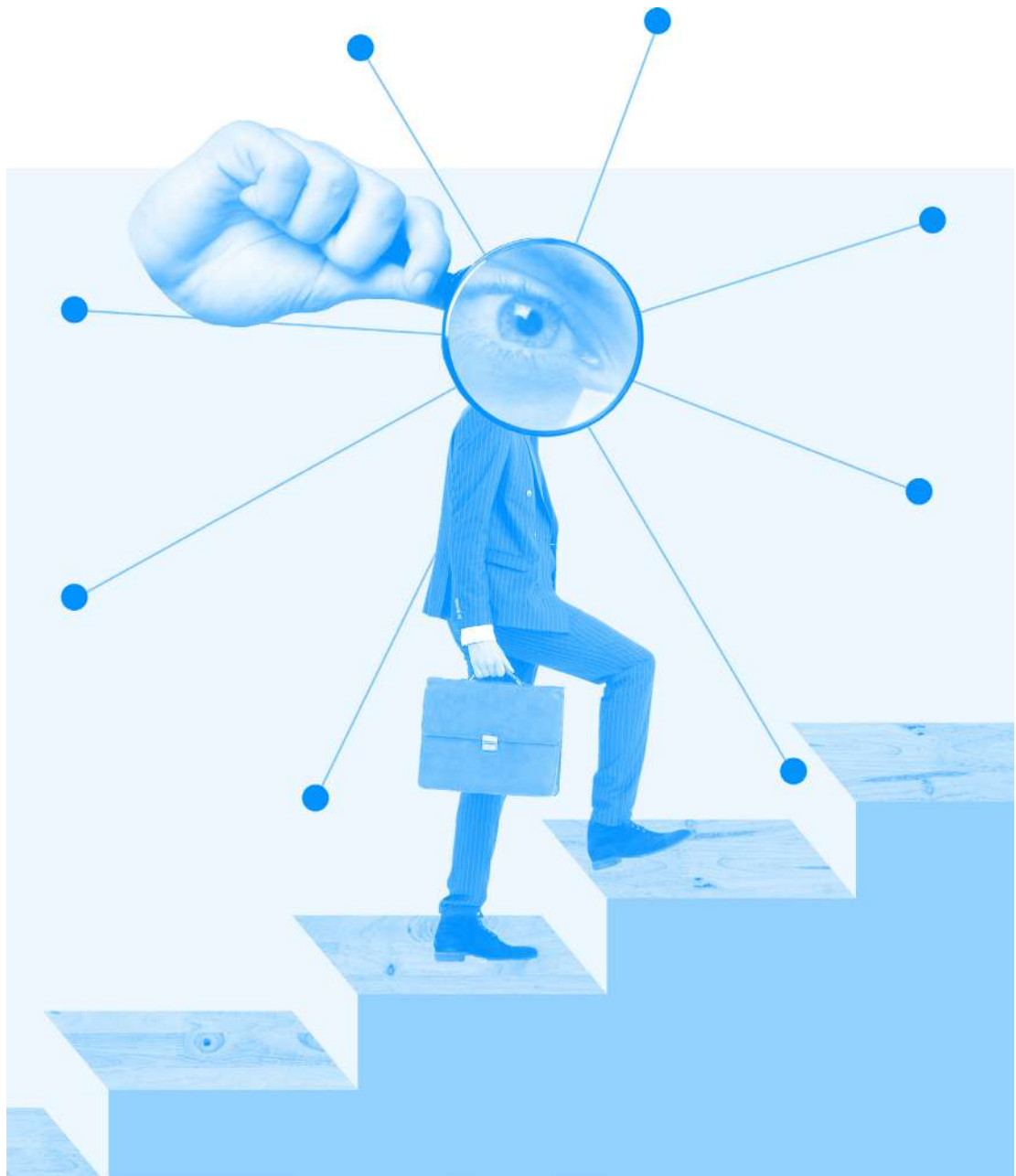
Part I: Set a microlearning strategy

A strong strategy is the backbone of any successful microlearning program. In this phase, you'll set yourself up for success by finding out precisely what your program needs to achieve, for whom, and why.

You'll learn how to:

- Investigate the business problem
- Identify target behaviors
- Interview your learners

Investigate the business problem

For many organizations today, the numbers around learning simply aren't adding up: Companies are spending over $140 billion on workplace learning[8], and yet as little as 8%[9] of organizations feel their learning programs are effective. Why?

In our experience, this disparity often arises because learning solutions get hastily designed before the business problem they're supposed to be solving has been properly investigated. That's why we spend time early on getting everybody on the right page, solving the right problem before we move forward. Here's how you can do the same.

Ask before you act

Before you can begin to develop a microlearning campaign, you must ask some fundamental questions:

- What problem is the business stakeholder hoping to solve?
- Who is this training for?
- What do they want people to do differently? Why?
- What will success look like? How will it be measured?

Get a thorough understanding of the answers to each of these questions before you get into budgets, timelines, and solutions. Not only does this approach increase the likelihood that you'll deliver a winning solution, but it also positions you as an expert with a valuable point of view, rather than an order taker whose job is to merely deliver on training requests.

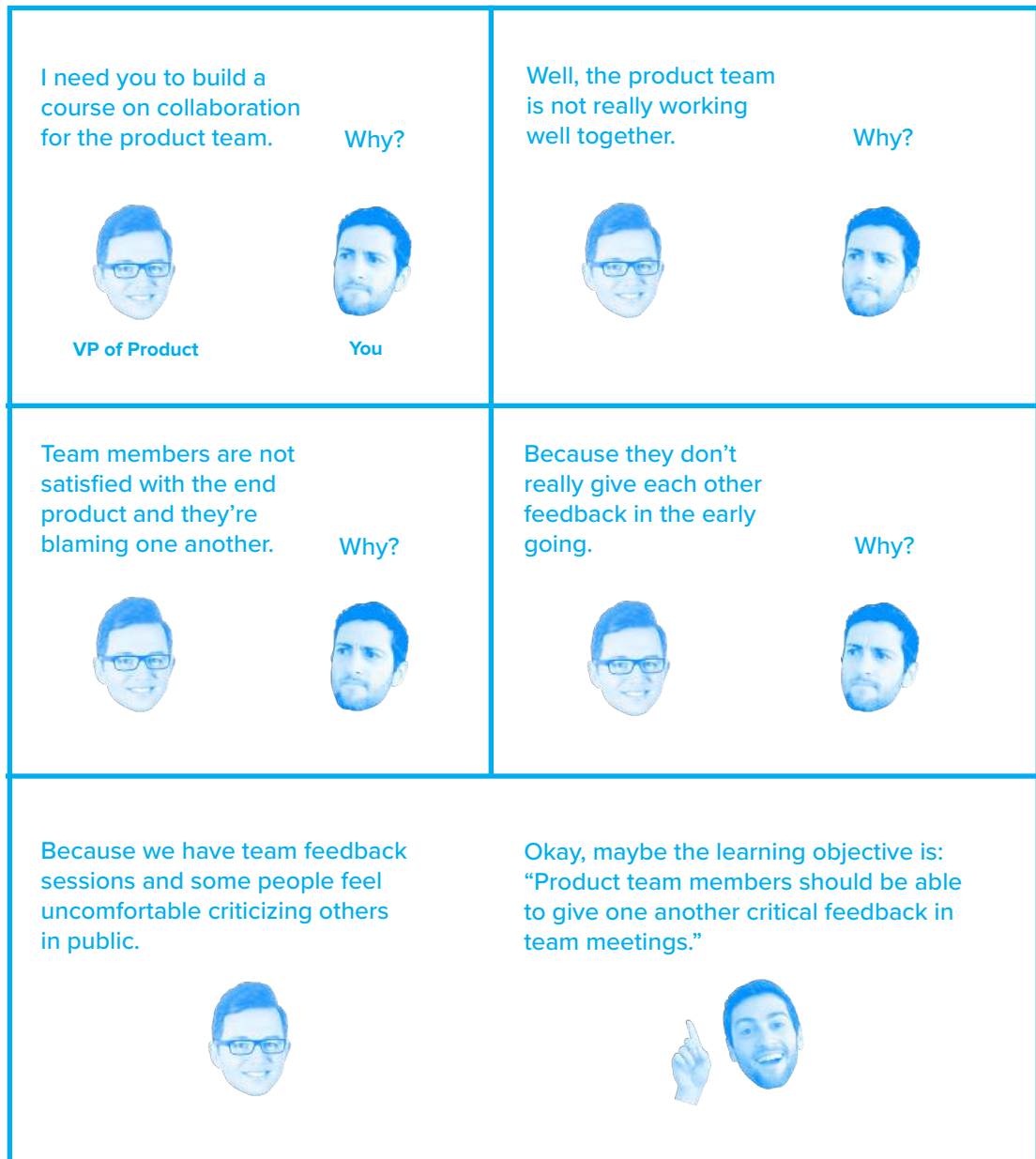*" To be a professional means a lot more than simply doing whatever the client wants. You wouldn't hire an interior designer only to inform them that you've already chosen all the colour schemes and furnishings."*

— Clive Shepherd, Founder, The More Than Blended Learning Company

Why? Why? Why?

"Why?" is the most powerful question in your arsenal. It's the basis of the 5 Whys technique first used by Toyota and now part of Six Sigma and lean management. When you get a training request, continue to ask "Why?" until you get to the root cause of the problem. It works like this:

I need you to build a course on collaboration for the product team.   Why?

VP of Product   **You**

Well, the product team is not really working well together.   Why?

Team members are not satisfied with the end product and they're blaming one another.   Why?

Because they don't really give each other feedback in the early going.   Why?

Because we have team feedback sessions and some people feel uncomfortable criticizing others in public.

Okay, maybe the learning objective is: "Product team members should be able to give one another critical feedback in team meetings."

Obviously the process is a lot less robotic than that, but you get the point. Having this conversation helps you avoid the all-too-common trap of creating learning resources that don't get used or fail to drive a previously agreed-upon business result.

So many learning departments try to tackle everything at once and get super overwhelmed. They create resources that aren't tied to specific needs and end up missing simple opportunities to make training more effective—all because they don't focus on the right problems up front.

— Lindsay White, Senior Customer Success Manager, Grovo

Action item

Next time you're approached with a training request, don't fulfill it immediately. Sit down with the stakeholders to investigate the business problem using the 5 Whys technique.

Identify target behaviors

Effective workplace learning isn't just about increasing what people know. It's about changing what they do—in other words, their behaviors. But this is challenging—nearly half of organizations report that their biggest employee learning challenge is getting people to apply what they learn on the job.[15]

> " *Changing the behavior of people is the most important challenge for businesses trying to compete in a turbulent world.*"
>
> — John Kotter, Professor of Leadership, Harvard Business School

How can we do better?

Many learning initiatives are designed to help learners form declarative memories—facts. They might try to get learners to memorize, for instance, a company's mission and values, a series of management best practices, or the most secure way to lock up their desk at the end of the workday.

Declarative memory: Memory for facts and events like…	Procedural memory: Memory for skills, habits, and behaviors…
…the color of your first bike	…how to actually ride it

But what if we designed training to form procedural memories instead—memories which enabled employees do the right thing at the right time without even thinking about it, just like riding a bike? Building those memories bit by bit is possible with microlearning—but first we need to identify the target behaviors we want learners to perform and work backwards from there.

Focus on acts, not facts

For any given business problem, focus on one or more specific behaviors you could build in employees that would contribute to solving the problem—rather than pieces of knowledge you want to transfer:

Business problem	Example of target behavior
Stagnant innovation	Use design thinking to solve problems
Inexperienced managers	Give direct reports clear feedback
Poor organizational diversity	Un-bias the interview process
Low employee engagement	Play to their strengths every day
Losing big deals to competitors	Deliver captivating presentations

As you can see, these are big, sometimes complex behaviors. That's okay. Later we'll talk about how you can slice them up into micro behaviors around which to design micro-lessons.

The point is to shift your mindset around what effective workplace learning is—it's not information transfer, it's transformation! By taking a behaviorally-based approach from the get-go, you're that much closer to ultimately getting people to apply what they learn in training on the job.

By now, you know what you want employees to do and why. Next, you'll find out what's stopping them from doing it.

Action item

With your business problem clarified, list 1-5 specific employee behaviors you could design training around that would help solve the problem.

Interview your learners

Product designers talk with users to understand their motivations, perceptions, and actions before they begin designing products. Yet in the world of training and development, learners often aren't involved in the learning design process. Is it any wonder only 38% of employees say they have access to effective learning at work?[10] For the final piece of your microlearning strategy, interview your learners to uncover where they most need help.

What should you ask?

The goal is to find out why learners succeed or fail at a target behavior. Let's say the behavior is **give effective feedback**. You might begin with these questions:

- When do you struggle to give feedback?
- When is giving feedback easy?
- Have you ever wanted to give feedback, but didn't? Why?
- How does it feel to give someone feedback?
- What would encourage you to give feedback more often?

In asking these questions, you'll surface learner pain points that you could never get from a business stakeholder or subject matter expert. These pain points are priceless assets in ensuring the microlearning you ultimately design is useful and gets used.
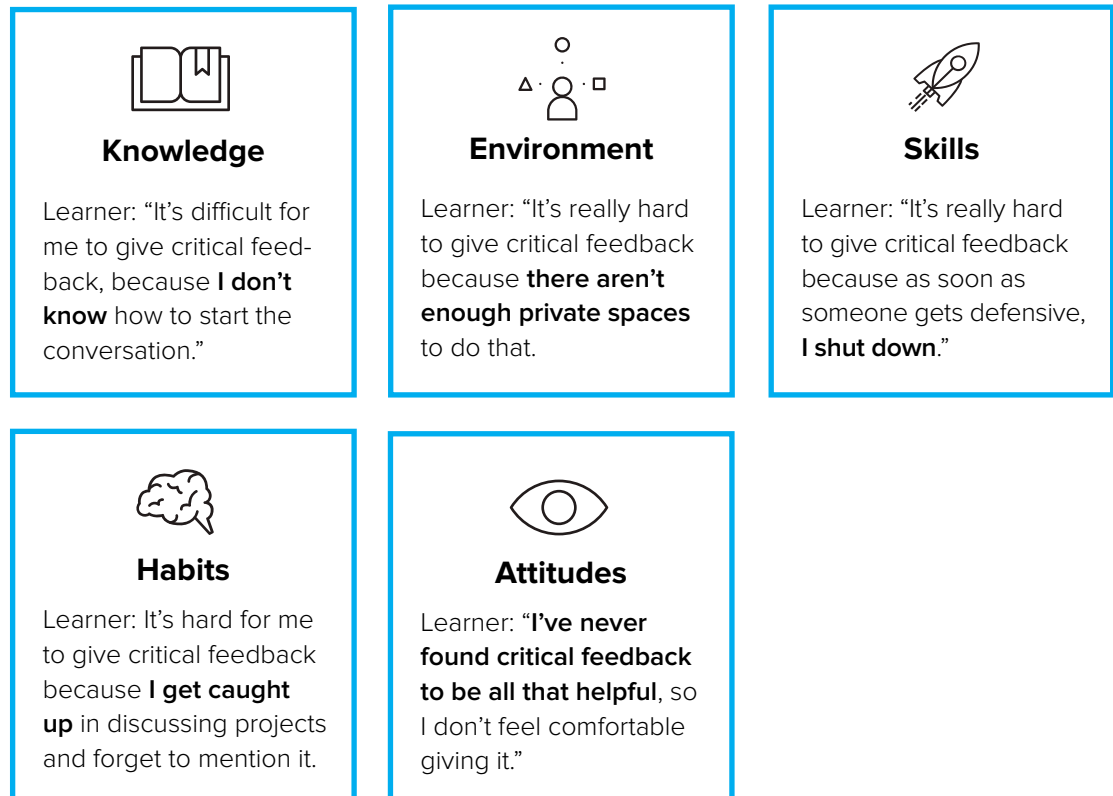
> "*During the discovery process, we're always digging, looking for stories, examples, common misconceptions, mistakes. Thinking you know what learners need without actually finding out—that's how you get irrelevant content.*
>
> — Brittany Jordan, Senior Instructional Designer at Grovo

Plotting a clear path forward for learners

Next, bucket their answers into the five gaps that typically prevent someone from performing a certain behavior: **knowledge, skills, habits, attitudes, or environment:**

Knowledge

Learner: "It's difficult for me to give critical feedback, because **I don't know** how to start the conversation."

Environment

Learner: "It's really hard to give critical feedback because **there aren't enough private spaces** to do that.

Skills

Learner: "It's really hard to give critical feedback because as soon as someone gets defensive, **I shut down**."

Habits

Learner: It's hard for me to give critical feedback because **I get caught up** in discussing projects and forget to mention it.

Attitudes

Learner: "**I've never found critical feedback to be all that helpful**, so I don't feel comfortable giving it."

This exercise will help guide your decision-making during the microlearning content creation process. For instance:

- To close an **attitude gap**, you might use a story to reframe how the learner views the target behavior.
- To close a **skill gap**, you might include an extra helping of practice exercises to develop proficiency.
- To close a **habit gap**, you might identify a trigger to help break the old habit and form the new one.

The insights and pain points that surface during your learner interviews can make or break your microlearning efforts. Be sure to gather them before you move on to content creation.

Action item

Interview at least one prospective learner to discover why they fail or succeed at the target behavior. Record and bucket the responses into knowledge, environment, skills, habit, or attitude gaps.

Case study: *InterContinental Hotels Group*

Translating business challenges into behavioral outcomes

When we talk about wanting to change employee behaviors with microlearning, some of our clients raise an eyebrow. It can sound unusual— creepy even. But it's not about controlling people like some mad-scientist-people-puppeteer. It's about designing learning that gives people what they need most in the heat of a busy workday: a direct path to action.

Take InterContinental Hotels Group, for instance, who wanted our help in training their call center reps on the company's new brand voice. We worked with them to design a series of microlearning lessons where each lesson focused on a discrete tip or trick reps could use to project the qualities of the new voice—in other words, behaviors.

For example, instead of simply telling reps to sound warm and friendly on the phone, we trained them to smile on calls, explaining that customers can hear it and feel it on the other side. Instead of simply telling them to be patient with customers, we trained them to breathe regularly, so they'd sound less tense and make customers more comfortable.

Did it work? It sure did. Not only did IHG employees respond positively to this type of behavior-based microlearning training with higher engagement and better scores than past training efforts, but the L&D team won an award for their customer service training later that year. On top of that, reps are making customers feel more valued and resolving issues faster, which means the business is more efficient at retaining happy customers.

> *With Grovo, the impact on engagement is amazing. We see people making time to learn. It's changed the way we think about getting our people trained."*
>
> Chris Zoloth, Director Customer Experience Optimization, IHG

Part II: Creating microlearning content

How do you create microlearning content that cuts through the noise, engages learners, and leads to meaningful behavioral change? In this stage, we'll share some tricks of the trade to help you outline, design and produce multimedia microlearning experiences that get results.

You'll learn how to:

- Scope a microlearning track
- Design micro-lessons
- Produce multimedia materials

Scope a microlearning track

The first step to creating engaging, effective microlearning content is to scope out a microlearning track. A microlearning track is a collection of short, punchy lessons that together will help a learner perform a specific behavior.

Think of it as the scaffolding that goes up before you build the building. It's important to define what needs to be included in this track before you dive headfirst into the world of content, so you don't indulge the temptation to include more information than is necessary for your learners to perform. Here's how to do it.

Break behaviors into micro-behaviors

Use the insights gained from your learner interviews to break your target employee behavior down into component parts—micro-behaviors, if you will—that can each be learned and practiced independently of one another. Here's an example:

Business problem: Embrace a remote workforce without sacrificing productivity. **Target behavior:** Be as productive in a remote environment as in the office	
Learner pain point	**Desired micro-behavior**
"How can I prove that I'm participating and still accountable?"	Update tasks in Basecamp at the end of each workday.
"I want to work remotely, but how do I handle distractions at home?"	Set up a remote workspace that feels like an office.
"I'm worried about managing my time when I work remotely."	Use the Pomodoro technique to sustain focus throughout the day.

Plan to design a discrete micro-lesson for each micro-behavior. This way, learners get a useful learning experience whether they consume one or more lessons at a time.

Next, do your research

Next, gather source material for how you might train someone on each micro-behavior. Our content team conducts extensive research for each microlearning track through:

- Studying pre-existing training materials or collateral
- Conducting independent research, online and off
- Interviewing Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and top performers

Because you've already spoken to learners about their gaps, your research and questions should be sharp and specific. Ruthlessly discard things that don't pertain to the relevant micro-behaviors you want your learners to develop. Keep asking yourself:

- What's important to the learner?
- Is this point just theory, or is it essential for action?
- Does this information drive toward the desired behavioral outcome?

Sift, simplify, and synthesize until you have only the most salient points. As you research, you are likely to go back and refine your list of micro-behaviors. That's ok. Getting the micro-behaviors down before you flesh out the actual lesson content is a great way to focus your approach and make sure learners aren't overloaded by the end result.

"One of the great things about microlearning is it forces you to make choices. In The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, Marie Kondo talks about de-cluttering your life by keeping only the most essential items. Scoping microlearning is much the same way."

— John Marshall, Content Development Manager at Grovo

Pitch your outline

Once you've done the research you should have a constellation of material around each micro-lesson. Title each lesson in a way that answers the question in every learner's mind: what's in it for me? Be clear ("How to run inclusive meetings"), colorful ("Every prototype tells a story"), curiosity-inducing ("The greatest gift you can give your direct report"), or even better—all of the above:
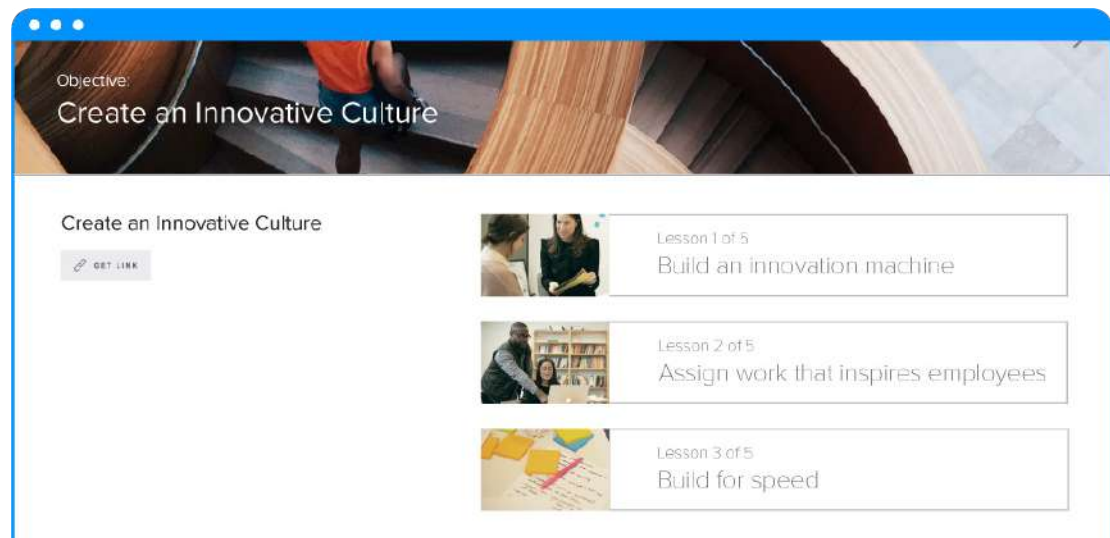
Bring your proposed lesson list to stakeholders; they'll have feedback for sure: "This matters, this doesn't, these two lessons could be combined..." If you have to course correct, now's the time to find out. And crucially, you're getting buy-in—in learning and development you can never have too much of that! Once you get approval to move forward, you're onto the next step: designing the lessons you've scoped.

> ## *Action item*
> **Scope your proposed microlearning track: break down one of the target behaviors you've identified into 3-10 micro-lessons, each addressing a micro-behavior.**

Design micro-lessons

In many ways, micro lessons need to work harder than traditional learning formats like lectures or workshops. They need to capture attention, motivate action, and make learning stick—all within a few minutes, right in the workflow. That's a tall order.

What we've learned in our experiments over the years is that most great micro lessons contain a few essential elements that make them effective—and, like any good story or presentation, if you structure those elements well your odds of making an impact dramatically increase. Let's take a look at each of those elements now.

Element #1: The aha moment

We strive to produce a eureka effect in the first few seconds of every micro lesson that gets learners to feel why the behavior they're about to learn is important. Here are a few ways you can do that.

- **Tell a story.** Stories are some of the best teaching devices known to man. Our brains prioritize and process them more easily than facts alone. Plus, they can trigger emotions that aid in learning. As molecular biologist John Medina put it in his book Brain Rules, "When the brain detects an emotionally charged event, the amygdala releases dopamine into the system. Because dopamine greatly aids memory and information processing, you could say it creates a Post It note that reads, 'Remember this.'" So try to find a story that illustrates or sets up the teaching point you want to make.

- **Prompt learners to reflect.** The learner is always subconsciously asking, "What's in it for me?" One way to get them personally invested in your micro lesson is by opening up with a provocative or challenging question, such as "Do you play to your strengths every day at work?" or "How well do you know your direct reports?" or even big open-ended questions like, "What is your purpose?" Prompting your learners to reflect on their own lives at the outset of a lesson is a fantastic way to increase engagement.

- **Take a surprising angle.** People want to feel heard. If you can gently acknowledge a learner pain point in the opening seconds of your lesson, you'll be rewarded with an attentive audience. For instance, in one lesson

we produced on meeting culture we opened up with a picture of a dramatically overbooked calendar with the cheeky caption: "Meetings, am I right?" This showed we understood the frustration many learners felt being inundated by meetings—and opened the door for us to teach them how to get around this problem later in the lesson. You can do the same.

Researchers at Tufts University found that learning associated with aha moments—sudden insights or discoveries—led to better long-term recall.[11]

Element #2 Clear examples and how-to

Now that your learners are inspired, show them how to perform the behavior. Often, a simple step-by-step how-to breakdown does the trick.

Other behaviors might be better taught through demonstration. Giving both an example of how to do something right as well as how to do it wrong can help learners understand the material more deeply—and faster. Examples also offer a great opportunity to feature top performers on whom learners can model their behavior.

Element #3: Realistic practice

After how-tos and examples, get learners to practice. Prompt them with a scenario that gets them to picture themselves in a realistic context.

Assessments based on realistic practice are always preferable to rote memorization. The best learning experiences are proximal to the real thing. If you can't provide immediate feedback to learners during practice, include a performance rubric so that learners can gauge their performance for themselves.

Element #4: A strong call to action

Finally, end with a strong call to action. It should be something learners can do quickly and easily like: *Send an email to a colleague praising them for something they did this past week or Set up a recurring 1:1 meeting with your direct reports.*

This brings the micro-behavior into the real world, where learners can directly apply what they've learned and immediately begin growing as a result. Taking action after learning is often the hardest part, so give people a little push to help them get started.

With that, you've brought your learner full circle

You've drawn them in with an emotional hook. You've shared useful examples, how-to instruction, and practice exercises for performing a valuable behavior. And you've left them with a small action they can begin doing right away to improve their results. This sequence leaves your learners feeling good and performing better than before they engaged with your micro-lesson—increasing the odds they'll be back for more soon.

> ## *Action item*
> **Design a micro-lesson from your proposed track using the following framework: aha moment, examples and how-to, practice, and call to action.**

Produce multimedia materials

In designing your micro-lesson, you've created what amounts to a skeleton: a solid structure for your content that's well-organized and instructionally sound. Now it's time to use your creativity to bring that skeleton to life through the production of multimedia materials.

Why multimedia?

In the early days, our microlearning lessons were exclusively short video clips. However, as we continued to explore the applications of our microlearning philosophy we made a macro discovery: by stringing together short bits of different multimedia formats—text, images, video, audio, PDFs—we could make our lessons even more engaging and sticky.

Each tiny piece of multimedia is separate and thus more digestible. Furthermore, lots of variety makes content more interesting—and more effective: research shows that content that takes advantage of both the auditory and visual channels in our working memory can increase the overall amount of information the brain can process.[12]

Choosing multimedia formats

As you begin exploring how to best produce multimedia materials for your micro lesson, you'll have to make choices: Should I use a video clip here or an audio clip? Is this point better made with text alone or would an image help? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but here are some guiding principles on the different media formats and their functions that may help.

VIDEO: The full multimedia monty

Video is arguably the richest of all digital multimedia formats. You use your eyes to see, your ears to listen, and the whole experience moves you forward in time on an exciting multi-sensory journey...right? Well, ideally. But we've all encountered long-winded online training videos that fail to capture our attention quickly enough—and so we end up tuning out.

Avoid that fate by keeping your videos short and focused. We generally try to stick to under two minutes in length. Because videos are so sensory-rich and immersive, they're perfect for featuring:

- **Storytelling:** Watching a host tell you a story is often more engaging than reading a long block of text; we use videos for many of our opening aha moments

- **Scenarios:** Video is a perfect "show don't tell" medium, where you can demonstrate desired (or undesired) employee behaviors more effectively than in images or writing

- **Subject matter experts:** People like watching people, so it's always good to feature SMEs—internal or external—on camera to make a strong emotional connection

Importantly, don't put everything you want someone to take away from a lesson in a video. It can be hard for learners to catch the finer points of everything that's thrown at them as the video whips by. When you really want someone to absorb a single point or detail, you'll want to use…

TEXT: The format for focus

Plain text is often the best format for making a message crystal clear to your learners. But remember, this is microlearning—so keep your text short and pithy. We often use text cards to:

- Ask a thought-provoking question
- Share a surprising statistic or fact
- Prompt learners to reflect on an experience
- Set up or summarize teaching points
- Give learners a strong call to action

Two more important virtues of plain text: 1) Your learner can read and re-read a point as many times as they like to make sure it sticks and 2) Plain text invites the learner to interpret the words for themselves, rather than having someone else's delivery color the message. Unlike…

AUDIO: The intimate connection

Audio is one of the most intimate and emotionally engaging formats in the digital realm. As we listen, our brains build image after image, helping us make stronger connections with the content. In producing audio content for our micro-lessons—from podcast-style clips to people-focused skits—we follow three simple guidelines:

- **Encourage conversations** so your audio feels human and relatable, not stiff and scripted
- **Keep recordings natural** instead of adding lots of complicated effects that may distract learners
- **Use real life examples** that learners can visualize taking place in their own day-to-day lives

As an added bonus, recording phone conversations with SMEs is a great way to get them to contribute to your lessons when they can't be with you in person. We record conversations using Skype (recording is an additional cost, but it's not too expensive). For all of the wonderful qualities of audio, we still can't forget about…

IMAGES: The instant enhancer

As we said earlier, sometimes plain text is all it takes to make a point. But often adding the right image can help make that point faster—tens of thousands of times faster, in fact. It's been reported than our brains process images 60,000 faster than text. To enhance our micro lessons, we use images to feature:

- **People:** It always helps to put a face with a name. Whether you're referencing your company CEO in an onboarding training, a groundbreaking artist in a design thinking training, or anyone in between, include a photo for that extra human touch.

- **Places:** Does your micro lesson reference a specific physical location (either within or outside your workplace)? A time period other than the here and now? A particular environment? Use an image to put your learners right where you want them to be.

- **Things:** Where is the line between a "professional" workspace and one with "personality"? What's "business casual" attire versus "way-too-casual" attire? Images help learners see what you're teaching, rather than having to read between the lines.

Get the picture? Speaking of pictures, we can't forget....

GIFs: The newest language in digital learning

GIFs, the animated image file format, have been around since 1987. But over the last several years the GIF has transformed from a chuckle-worthy relic (think Dancing Baby) into a new kind of digital language all its own. In your micro-lesson, GIFs can help support a point, demonstrate a process, or simply evoke a smile or a laugh from your learner. And smiling during training? Never a bad thing. But images—animated or otherwise—are really only learning enhancers, which is why you need...

PDFs: The bridge back to work

All of the above formats combine to create a kaleidoscopic burst of learning inside of your learner. But then what? How do you keep the learning fresh once the learner returns to daily work? Enter the PDF. We often include downloadable, printable PDFs in our micro lessons that learners can keep at their desks to quickly reference what they've learned. PDFs can be:

- Checklists
- Job Aids
- Cheat Sheets

In fact, we've included a PDF checklist at the very end of this book so that when you're putting this microlearning method into practice, no step of the method goes un-stepped.v

Bringing it all together

By now, you might be wondering how you can create microlearning experiences that seamlessly blend all of these multimedia formats together. That's precisely what our card-based microlearning platform is designed to enable you to do.

Click the image below to see how various multimedia formats can be combined in a single micro-lesson on Grovo's microlearning platform.

Action item

Challenge yourself to produce a 3-10 minute micro lesson that incorporates all five types of digital multimedia: text, images, GIFs, video, and audio (the tools and resources on the next page will help!).

12 useful multimedia tools & resources for microlearning content creation.

It pays to make sure your multimedia materials are high quality. Learning materials themselves require cognitive effort to process, and poorly designed materials in poorly designed interfaces cut into the processing of the material itself.[13]

Here are a few super-useful creativity tools and resources, both free and paid, that can help you produce beautiful, punchy microlearning materials. Our very own content team uses them every day. We hope they get your creative juices flowing!

Video	Images	Extra
Quicktime *(Free)* Free video player with editing, video and screen capturing ability. Record yourself right from your own laptop.	**Pexels** *(Free)* Hip and extremely high-quality photos you can edit or modify however you like, no questions asked.	**BrainyQuote** *(Free)* The world's largest quotation site—find inspiring words of wisdom to motivate your learners.
Camtasia *(Paid)* Screencasting software to demonstrate what learners will see when they put your training into action.	**Stocksnap.io** *(Free)* Hundreds of images added weekly, easily filtered by popularity to find what you need faster.	**Giphy** *(Free)* Quickly find the perfect GIF to bring your lesson to life—or make your own with the mobile app.
Videvo *(Free)* Totally free HD stock video footage and motion picture graphics, browsable by topic keyword.	**Burst** *(Free)* Photo library focused on specific industries or products—edit images however you like.	
Pond5 *(Paid)* Huge searchable database of royalty-free sound, images, and video footage—one of the best.	**Shutterstock** *(Paid)* Some of the finest image and video libraries the production world has to offer.	
AudioBlocks *(Paid)* Great audio database for royalty-free music, sound effects, and audio loops.	**Unsplash** *(Free)* Gorgeous stock photography, perfect for upping the emotional impact of your lessons.	

Part III: Launch a microlearning campaign

In this phase, you'll plan exactly how and when to deliver your microlearning content for maximum impact. You'll think like a marketer, and engage learners with the know-how they need, right when they need it—again and again, until it sticks.

You'll learn how to:

- Find the point of learning need
- Launch with fanfare
- Make learning stick

Find the point of learning need

At any given time people are not that motivated to learn. So rather than struggle to motivate people, we can cheat—and be there when they're already motivated. You can do this by delivering learning at the point of need—the moment when a learner needs to apply a skill or behavior in real life. That's when your learners are happy to take all the help they can get. Here are two ways you can do that:

Find an existing point of need

Meet John, who's just been promoted to manager. He's overwhelmed, nervous, excited, and eager to perform well. Now is the time to get John started on a daily microlearning campaign that steadily shapes his actions and builds a habit of continual improvement—not 6 months later, as many organizations do, when his bad habits have settled in and his enthusiasm for the job has waned.

How many of these existing points of need in the employee lifecycle are you capitalizing on today?	
Onboarding	Transitioning between teams
Promotions	New boss
First-time manager	Change in business strategy
Performance reviews	Upcoming pitches or presentations

Manufacture a point of need from scratch

Behavioral science tells us there are a handful of key motivators which influence our actions: hope vs. fear, pain vs. pleasure, social acceptance vs. social rejection.[14] You can leverage these motivators to spur your learners to act, effectively creating a point of need from scratch:

- You can make training **mandatory**, which plays on fear and social rejection.
- You can provide **recognition**, which plays on pleasure and social acceptance.
- You can give someone an amazing **purpose or mission**, which plays on hope.

These are just a few examples, but there are endless ways to tap into a primal emotion to motivate learners and facilitate behavior change. Finding it is the fun part.

Action item

Identify a point of need to which you could tie your microlearning campaign—either one that appears naturally in the employee lifecycle, or one that can be manufactured.

Launch with fanfare

The trailer comes out before the movie hits the theaters. The book gets reviewed before it hits the shelves. The billboard announces the gadget before it hits the shelves. These promotional activities let us know what's coming, why we should care, and inspire us to participate.

Similarly, successful microlearning requires more than simply making content available—it's about launching your campaigns in creative ways that convince learners of your program's merits and inspire them to engage.

So how do you do that?

Let's take a look at a few approaches we've seen generate great results.

Create a teaser trailer. Make a short video to hype your microlearning initiative. Talk about the benefits, preview some content, and tell the story behind the initiative. Share it on every company communication channel from email to chat to your intranet portal.

We created a teaser trailer for our the internal management training curriculum we launched last year. Watch it [here](#).

Hang inspiring posters around the office. You want to be wherever your learners are—and that's not always online. Posters are a great way to get your message out of the digital world and into the real world. Include a link that directs people to where they can get more information online.

Send out an email drip. Send a series of 3-5 emails out to learners in the weeks leading up to launch day. Tell them what's coming and why it matters. Encourage them to ask questions. A well-crafted email drip will not only increase participation, but also build rapport with your learners, too.

These ideas are all about one thing: generating engagement in order to generate results. It's simple math—the more people you can get through the door and interacting with your microlearning efforts, the greater impact you can have across your entire organization.

> *Action item*
> **Create one teaser email written to intrigue your learners and inform them of the benefits of engaging with your micro lessons.**

Make learning stick

By its very nature, microlearning is often stickier than longer training formats like lectures or workshops for a simple reason: it's short. It takes time for our brain's working memory to move learning into our short-term memory and ultimately into our long-term memory where it can influence our actions automatically. Good microlearning respects those cognitive limits.

But beyond that, there are ways to enhance the already-sticky properties of microlearning using two time-tested learning best practices: spacing and repetition.

Remembering is hard. Forgetting is easy

In the late 19th century, Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered that without spaced reinforcement, people can forget all of what they've learned within days if not minutes of having learned it. This rapid and exponential decline in memory is part of the reason traditional, one-off training events are ineffective.
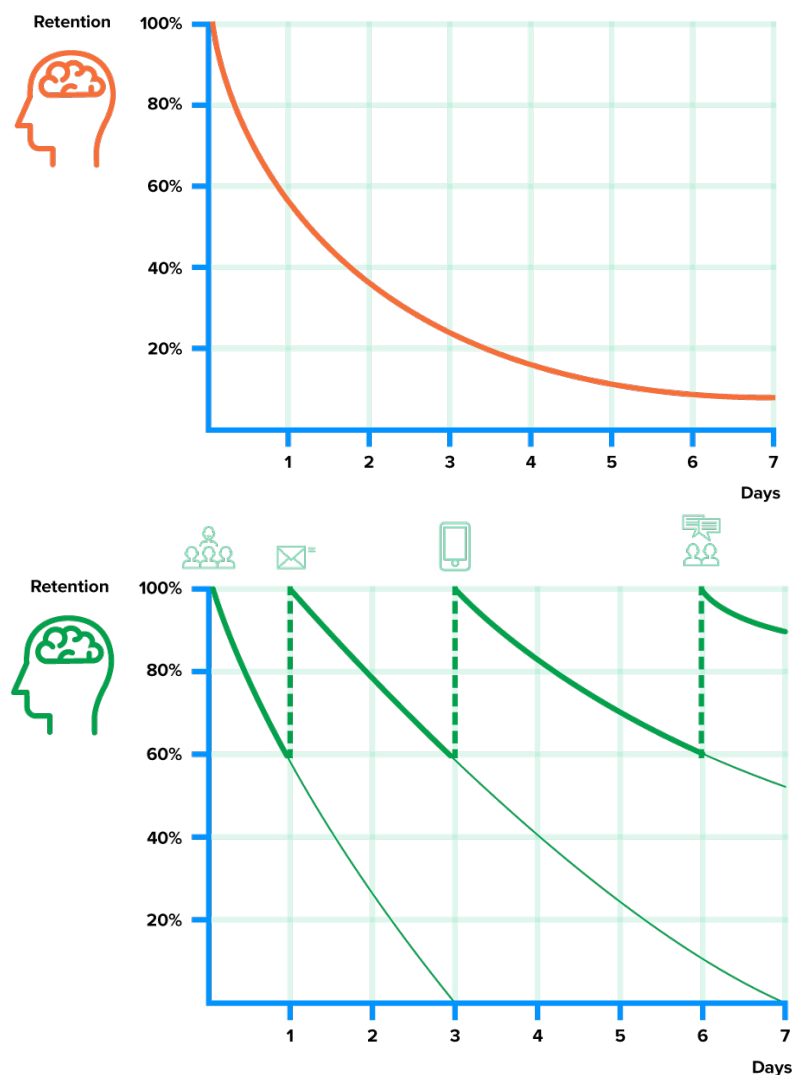
The good news is that spacing out and repeating learning over time—otherwise known as distributed practice—can combat the forgetting curve. Microlearning is perfect for repeated spacing because the lessons are short, giving people time in between to think, reflect, talk to others, and consolidate their memories. The learning builds on itself and is resistant to forgetting.

Three ways to make microlearning stickier

Each uses the principles of spaced repetition.

During the micro-lesson experience.	During the campaign.	After the campaign.
Use the top and tail technique.	Daily learning is ideal.	Send learners spaced practice a week after the campaign ends.
At the beginning of every lesson (before the aha moment), review what was taught in the previous lesson. Then at the end of each lesson, preview what's coming in the next lesson. This way, learning gets automatically spaced three times.	Deliver one 5-minute burst of learning every day for the duration of your campaign (usually 1-2 weeks). That gives learners enough space to process and reflect, but enough repetition to build strong neural connections around the learning.	Email or text learners with either a reminder or a refresher of what they learned. For example: "Having trouble on this?" or "How much do you remember?" Engagement with the refresher can be optional or mandatory—the main point is to reinforce the learning in a timely fashion.

What would it look like if you combined all of these tactics into a single week-long microlearning campaign? Here's a mock schedule:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
- Learn micro-behavior 1 - Practice - Preview micro-behavior 2	- Review micro-behavior 1 - Learn micro-behavior 2 - Practice - Preview micro-behavior 3	- Review micro-behavior 2 - Learn micro-behavior 3 - Practice - Preview micro-behavior 4

Thursday	Friday
- Review micro-behavior 3 - Learn micro-behavior 4 - Practice - Preview micro-behavior 5	- Review micro-behavior 4 - Learn micro-behavior 5 - Practice - Get ready to perform

Follow these practices and you'll be well on your way to making microlearning stick—and seeing more on-the-job application in the process.

> *Action item*
>
> **Design a refresher that you'd send to learners a week after your initial micro lesson. Options include: a survey, quiz, practice activity, or simple reminder. Whatever you choose, follow-up or your learning event will become a forgetting event.**

Case study: LivePerson

The transformative power of (micro)learning that sticks

Seeing how well learners retain training with microlearning versus more traditional methods was a real aha moment for Craig Congdon, Field Enablement Director at LivePerson, a live chat software company.

For a company that's all about connecting brands with consumers in the simplest and easiest way possible, giving employees short bursts of highly distilled, no-fluff learning content just makes sense. "The philosophy of microlearning is right," continues Craig, praising the power of "short, sharp, hard-hitting units of study" to give employees the learning they need little by little over time, in a way that respects the brain's cognitive limits.

"Before Grovo's microlearning about 30% of our training would stick," he says. "Now it's up to 80-85%. Because we were able to measure that success quite well, it meant we were able to move forward with more and more projects across the whole organization."

Tracking microlearning results

The true test of whether or not microlearning actually sticks can be seen not in the number of learning platform logins or lesson completion rates, but in on-the-job behavior change. So how do you track that? Here are a few ways we've found useful.

Conduct surveys

Use Likert-scale surveys to measure behavioral change, course correct, or celebrate progress. A Likert-scale survey, also called a rating scale, allows respondents to specify their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. In this case we want to focus people on behaviors or micro-behaviors:

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How frequently do you do each of the following?

Continue

</td>
<td>

I ask for permission before I give someone feedback

○ Never

○ Sometimes

○ Most of the time

○ Almost always

○ I'm not sure what this means

</td>
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Sample Likert-scale behavioral change survey.
Free or freemium apps like Typeform, SurveyMonkey, or
Google Forms make them easy to build.

Likert surveys are subject to various response biases that would lead a learner to either underreport or overreport the frequency of a particular behavior. A way to un-bias results is to confirm them by surveying the learners' peers, managers, or other colleagues as well.

You can also anonymize the data to reduce response bias. You'll lose data at the individual level, but still collect it at the department or organization level to show change happening in your workforce.

For example, we ran an internal one-week program at Grovo to help our managers run better one-on-one meetings. We surveyed them before the training, and then a few weeks after. Here's what we found:

Question	Response	Before	After	Difference
Do you have weekly 1:1 meetings with your direct reports?	Most of the time Almost always *Total positive*	12% 83% **95%**	8% 91% **100%**	**4%**
Do you start your 1:1s by asking for wins and frustrations?	Most of the time Almost always *Total positive*	33% 41% **75%**	41% 50% **91%**	**16%**
Do you give feedback at the end of your 1:1s?	Most of the time Almost always *Total positive*	50% 12% **62%**	50% 33% **83%**	**20%**

See the positive uptick in behavior change in the right-hand column? We were able to share this progress with the participants as well as the rest of our company. It gave us a way of demonstrating how our learning efforts were showing up in tangible ways across the organization that everyone could see and feel.

Set milestones

Milestones are learning achievements that are small enough to be measurable, and large enough to be meaningful. Milestones, with clear timelines, focus our energy and serve as tangible proof of behavioral change. Here are a few examples:

Learner	Milestone
Employee learning to be efficient with email	Get to inbox zero
Salesperson learning spin selling	Close a $50K deal
Engineer learning a new coding language	Deploy 10 lines of code in one day

G

Assign role models

You can pair learners with internal role models who can provide feedback on their actions on a regular basis. Not random people—anyone can tell you you're playing the piano well if they're not pianists themselves. Role models should be peers or mentors that are further along in the areas in which the learner wants to grow.

We're approaching a time when evaluating learning based on behavioral change will become the norm. Let's start taking steps to get there—and the ideas above will help you do just that.

Is your microlearning made to stick?

Follow these nine steps to help employees build the behaviors they need to perform their best through the power of microlearning.

Part I: Set a microlearning strategy

☐ Investigate the business problem before agreeing to design a learning solution, rather than act immediately to fulfill a training request.

☐ Define specific behaviors you're targeting and how you will measure behavior change, rather than set learning objectives that drive knowledge acquisition.

☐ Interview your audience to learn why they succeed or fail at the target behaviors, rather than design around the points you find important.

Part II: Create effective, engaging microlearning content

☐ Scope your microlearning track and share a lesson list with stakeholders to get buy-in.

☐ Follow the anatomy of a microlearning lesson from opening aha moment to closing call to action.

☐ Produce multimedia materials that integrate a wide range of digital content type, rather one single format.

Part III: Launch a microlearning campaign

☐ Time your microlearning to an upcoming performance, project or other point of need, rather than push learning out to people week or months before or after they may need it.

☐ Launch with fanfare across multiple channels, rather than simply making content available with minimal communication.

☐ Repeatedly space microlearning over time, rather than deliver it once with no follow-up reminders or practice.

What's next?

The art and science of microlearning offers a path forward for L&D. It helps people begin practicing and performing desired behaviors right away, rather than stockpiling knowledge that never gets applied. People end up learning on the job, in the flow of their work, instead of taking time off for lengthy workshops or training sessions whose lessons are lost to cognitive overload, memory loss, misunderstanding, and host of other performance obstacles.

Let's talk microlearning

Our goal in putting this book together was to inspire and empower you to do more with microlearning at your organization. If we've succeeded, don't hesitate to reach out—email us at **microlearning@grovo.com** to share questions, feedback, or any micro-lessons you've produced. We'd love to hear from you, see what you're working on, and take this exciting new method of learning to the next level together.

# *Get in touch with the next generation of Grovo*

The art and science of microlearning is evolving fast—and Grovo's microlearning platform can keep you on the cutting edge:

- Access thousands of engaging, bite-sized lessons from our award-winning content library.

- Instantly micro-fy your existing training materials with our simple, powerful authoring tool.

- Empower managers and teams to create instructionally-sound micro content in minutes using lesson templates .

- Automate delivery of the lessons learners need, the moment they need them, on our immersive user interface.

- Track and share the results of your microlearning programs quickly, easily, and reliably.

The micro revolution is here. It's only going to get bigger. And if you're ready to learn more about microlearning, we're here to teach you.

Just click the button below and we'll connect you with one of our microlearning specialists right away.

SEE GROVO
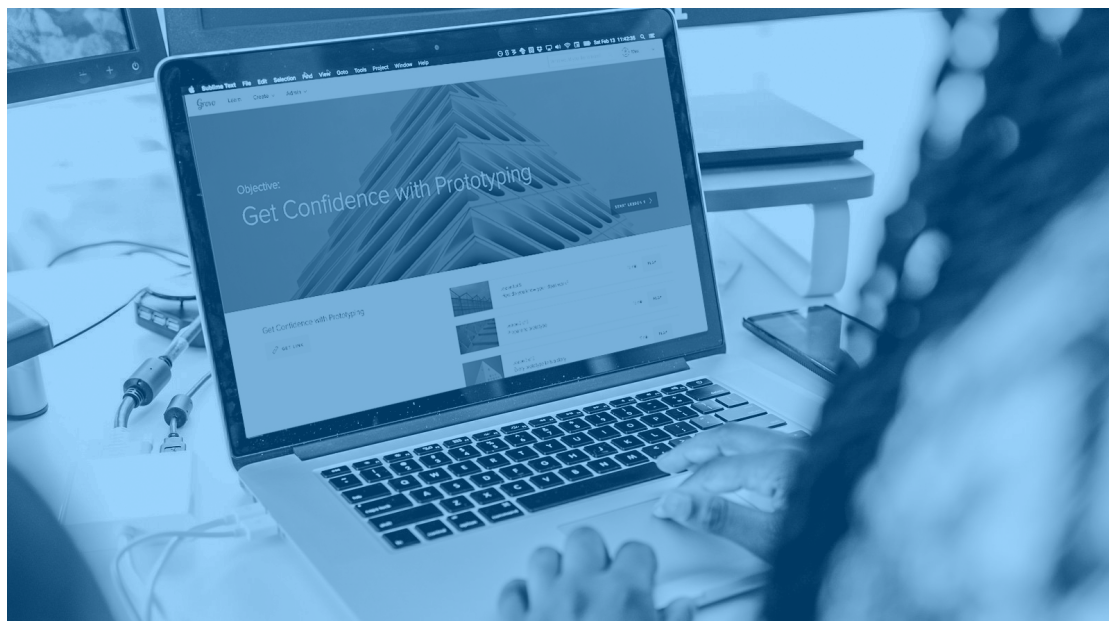
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