

EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING ELEVATED: A DELTA AIR LINES CASE STORY

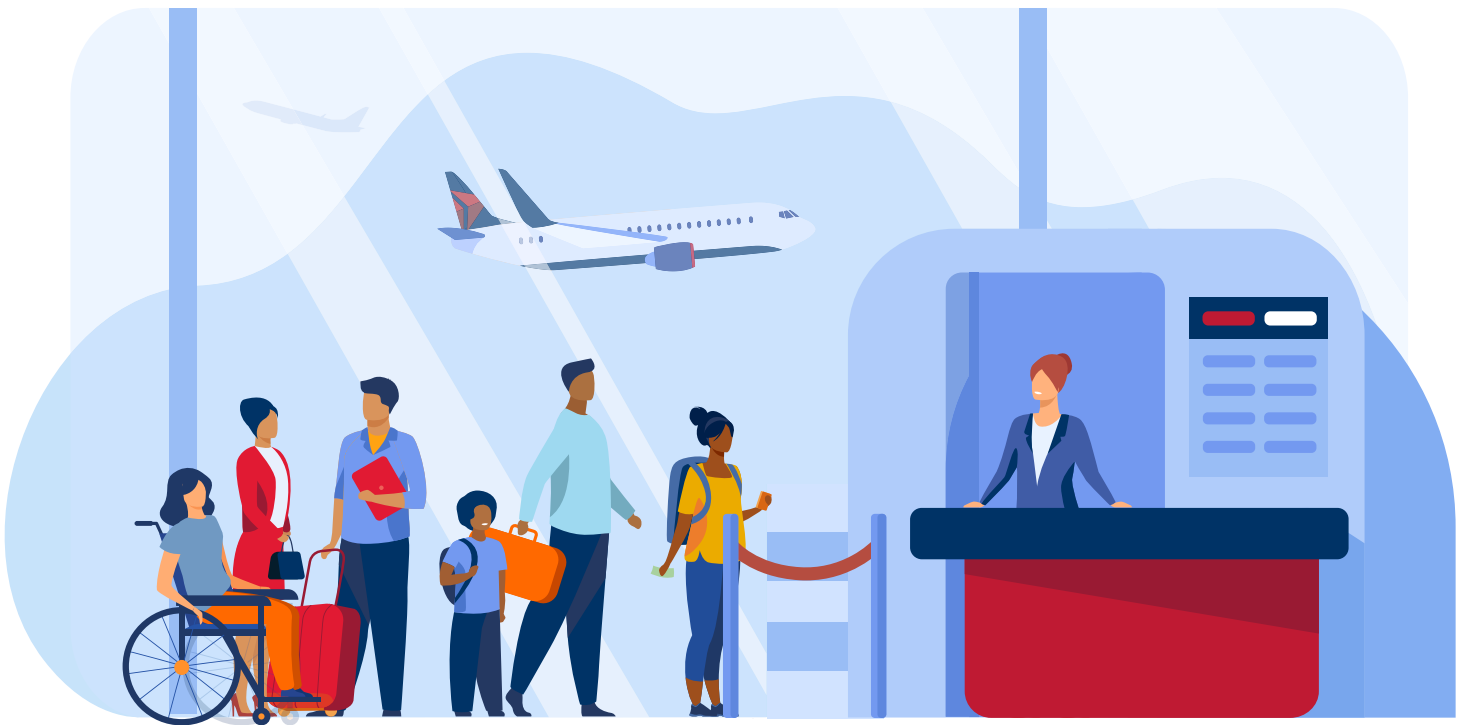




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SECTION 1:

DESIGN THE EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE TO OUTPERFORM BUSINESS EXPECTATIONS

Sound too ambitious? When revolutionizing employee onboarding—en masse—was a necessary business milestone for [Delta Air Lines](#), ambition was in order.

The Ask: Design and implement a comprehensive hybrid employee onboarding program...in four weeks.

What if the only way to achieve your business needs was to design a hybrid ecosystem of onboarding for over one thousand new employees to be hired and trained in just a few weeks? The Delta Air Lines-AllenComm team rose to meet that challenge, brought on in the wake of the dramatic COVID downsizing and then rapid restaffing of Delta’s Reservations workforce. The urgency included more than scalability: The project required a new hybrid design (WBT, ILT, on-the-job sessions, coaching, goal setting, self-study, practice games, self-evaluations, manager evaluations, toolkit builders, etc.) with a new structure and approach that reflected the new needs of forever-changed Delta customers and employees.

The Need: Grow the business with new performance expectations...and metrics.

An onboarding program that can flex to major changes in policies, people, and performance needs is one that can outlast even a global tidal wave. Post-COVID, the travel industry, its methods, and almost everyone who touched it needed to be redefined and re-strategized. Just as the re-emerging Delta customers (and indeed those in most industries) now required faster, more comprehensive, omni-channel support, the newly-hired Delta Reservation Specialists expected an [onboarding experience](#) that included formal, informal, social, experiential, and personalized elements. The Delta business expected all of it to be measured, with scrutiny on the newly-defined metrics.



Pictured: Sample graphics from the Delta Onboarding Training

Fast-forward to the happy ending: The business impact was staggeringly successful. Almost all of the KPIs improved in positive directions, the team could see positive results in even [Kirkpatrick measurement](#) Levels 3 and indicators of 4, and only after five weeks post-rollout. The solution? AllenComm had a plan to accomplish all of these goals. (Wait, turn off any recording device. This part is the secret sauce...)

The Plan: Design for measurement... in every detail

- Define your organization's KPIs.
- List how the business metrics need to change.
- Define the performance metrics per role that feed those KPIs.
- List how the performance metrics need to change (the gaps) and the corresponding performance objectives.
- Outline why those performance objectives are hard.
- Designate your measurement methods.
 - The strategy, then tactics, then the measurement benchmarks that make sense for your organization
- Adjust before the next measurement benchmark.

Okay, but how do you do that? Keep reading.



Pictured: Sample graphics from the Delta Onboarding Training

SECTION 2:

PERSONALIZE THE LEARNING AND EMPOWER THE PERFORMER

[Hybrid onboarding](#) can turn needed performance metrics into personal employee workflow performance. Here's how, in terms of the design strategies and their tactics:

The Strategy: Personalize onboarding...by empowering the learner to be a creator

An onboarding curriculum this revolutionary required change management. The Delta-AllenComm team approach was to first outline the up-front challenges if change was not managed, thereby planning for a smooth transition.

Recommendations that worked for Delta included:

- If the change in ways-of-learning affects ILT facilitators, many of whom being experienced and expert trainers, hold a Train the Trainer workshop in which facilitators define their professional value-add to the new curriculum.
- If the change in ways-of-learning is somewhat bold and causes leaders and stakeholders to tilt and scratch their heads in skepticism, offer frequent touchpoints and any data along the way so they are invested influencers in the new design.

To make the Delta Reservations onboarding “sticky” quickly, the design team optimized the best of a hybrid learning ecosystem to help learners personalize their progress and success. This empowers employees not only to set their own benchmarks for success, but it also incentivizes them to shape the customer experience themselves. Learners can become more than customer support. They can become consultants.



Pictured: Sample graphics from the Delta Onboarding Training

The Tactics:

Here is a representative sample of the tactics used in the employee onboarding experience for Delta new-hires to personalize the “stickiness” and empower employees.

DESIGN LEARNING SOLUTION	
STRATEGY	TACTIC
<p>Knit the hybrid elements together to ensure they cross-pollinate (vs. existing in a vacuum). Include measurable individual and social learning that is formal, informal, and experiential.</p> <p>Allow for self-paced, self-study, practice, and self-reflection right within the WBT.</p> <p>Create on-the-job accessible, reusable, multi-purpose interactions and performance supports.</p>	<p>Formal, informal, and experiential learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Workbook goal and action planner, favorite resources toolkit builder, and self-reflection compiler in WBT, ILT, and OJT* • With a note-taking tool, learner inputs in the Notes and Questions tab populate in My Workbook and transfer from WBT to ILT • Self-evaluations that serve up Recommended Replays of WBT modules with which the learner identified having less confidence • Navigator and Airport Codes Identifier digital timed refresher games accessible any time for pulled learner practice • Diagnostics that produce personal competency gauges and serve up suggested refresher micromodules <p>Social learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer interaction prompts in My Workbook • Sharing set goals and targets in My Workbook with peers and tutors • Personal customer call observations with peer and coach feedback in ILT and on the job, with peer and coach-shared personal goals.



Screenshots from the Delta Onboarding Training

*WBT = web-based training; ILT = Instructor-led Training; OJT = On-the-Job Training

How could we guarantee results using an onboarding training that gave new-hires so much opportunity to take charge and self-direct their learning experience? Read on.

SECTION 3:

ONBOARD ON THE JOB

Learning and development professionals and instructional designers, collectively, generally get behind experiential learning to design the learning experience.

In practice, this may look like starting newly onboarding employees with on-the-job action after the formal onboarding. But what if the actual on-the-job work in the workflow were a part of the onboarding—and not toward the end of the curriculum, but toward the beginning? Is putting learners within the flow of work early in training a risky move in a potential attempt to speed up experiential learning? Especially if learners are directly frontlines client-facing? Would it lead to disaster in the form of mass immediate attrition and nose-dives in customer satisfaction?

The Delta-AllenComm team took the calculated risk—trusting the new employees and evidence that extreme experiential learning within a hybrid learning ecosystem increases the speed to proficiency—and changed the timeline for when the new Reservation Specialists would get on actual phone calls with actual customers from Day 20 in the legacy curriculum to Day 4. Please hold for the results...

First, consider this: Employee onboarding, like many other types of employee learning programs, produces desired business impact sooner and more smoothly if learning designers and stakeholders follow these three important maxims to engage learners: Create connection. Cultivate confidence. Kickstart contribution.



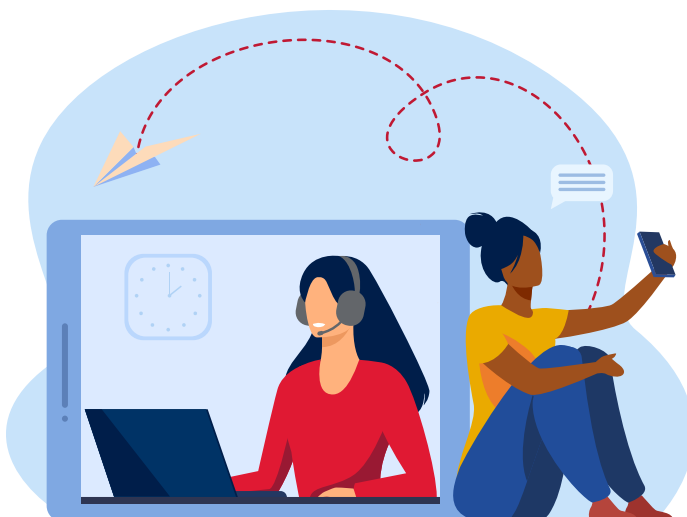
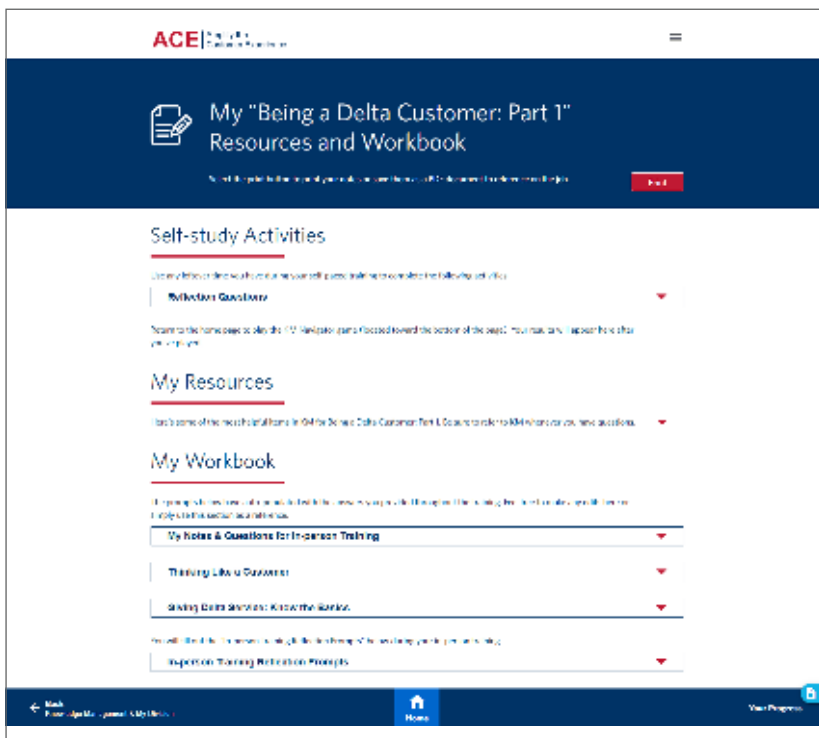
Screenshot from the Delta Onboarding Training

Here's what that looks like:

- **Create Connection.** Learners who feel connected to *why* doing, thinking, and saying certain things will bring success to them will perform that way more intrinsically.
- **Cultivate Confidence.** Learners who see gradual improvement in themselves with key skills and competencies and feel confidence build strategically will be ready for more challenges sooner.
- **Kickstart Contribution.** Learners who connect with their work, increase in confidence with key performance behaviors, and are given stretch assignments that may ask them to embrace early discomfort will more likely rise to the expectations and drastically shorten the time to proficiency.

The Delta newly-hired [onboarding training](#) participants provide the evidence. At first glance, their curriculum map revealed to them that on Day 4 of a 19-day curriculum, they would be facing the phones and—more unnervingly—live customers with problems they were expected to solve and solve quickly. Momentarily awestruck but then heartened by the confidence placed in them, Delta learners rose to the occasion and took on their new job duties long before they had formally encountered the theoretical particulars of Reservations. The on-the-job phone sessions began with short sessions, were closely monitored, supported by tutors, and debriefed in each learner’s personalized, web-based workbook and the next morning by their attentive ILT facilitators. And the outcomes were staggering.

Specific results, you might ask? Next up...



Screenshots from the Delta Onboarding Training

SECTION 4:

**SEE MEASUREMENT THROUGH...
BEFORE, DURING, AND WITH ONGOING LEARNING**

As compared with previous control data, at only the five-week post-training benchmark—but with ongoing structured workflow challenges, performance supports, coaching, and accessible pulled continual learning—newly-hired Delta Reservations Specialists delivered:

- **15% increase in productivity on calls with customers**
- **2-point increase in NPS (customer satisfaction)**
- **3-point increase in proficiency (self-sufficiency in serving customers)**

As another boon
to the business, the
**onboarding capacity with
the new hybrid employee
learning program itself
increased in scale**

207%



Sample graphics from the Delta Onboarding Training

If you're in the understandable space that assumes that [Kirkpatrick](#) Levels 3 and 4 are not realistic, clearly these early Delta onboarding measures mark results way beyond [Kirkpatrick](#) Level 1 (learning happened) and Level 2 (learner reaction). These hybrid onboarding modalities and tactics were designed to and successfully achieved Level 3 and even projected Level 4 business results. Measurement at designated benchmarks will continue, watching progress as we go.

Here's what the learning leaders and stakeholders at Delta have been saying:

“This design is groundbreaking.”

Managing Director Employee Experience

11/17/21

“You have revolutionized the way we train at Delta.”

Director of Delta Reservations Sales and Customer Care Learning

1/22/22



Screenshot from the Delta Onboarding Training

“This training has been well received at all levels of our organization. We are getting feedback that this training takes the learner experience to the next level. Learners love the fact that they have the opportunity to interact with our customers earlier in their training journey. One of our main objectives was teaching our specialists to be resourceful, and this training does just that!”

General Manager Learner Experience for Delta Reservation sales & customer care

What you can start doing...

None of this happens all at once, but it does start with a can-do attitude and getting into a mind space that's prepared to:

- **Expect the most of onboarding. Forget “check-the-box” mentality**
- **Design to measure**
- **Personalize the modalities so learners feel connected, confident, and like contributors sooner**
- **See the measurement through**

Foremost, remember that happy endings often require hard work, trial and error, collaboration, and deep commitment to answering the questions: “What am I assuming?”; “What’s another way to do it?”; and “What’s next?”

If you'd like to talk about how the answers to those questions can help you, or any other learning design ideas, please reach out.

[Get My Customized Onboarding Solutions](https://www.allencomm.com) – (801) 537-7800 | info@allencomm.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kate Worlton-Pulham is a Senior Performance Consultant for AllenComm. She has designed eLearning courses for diverse, Fortune 500 clients. She has also served in senior management in several training and learning capacities for the past 10 years. She is the Executive Director for Education Weekend: The Tradition of Enquiry, held annually at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, where she served as a professor in English Language and Literature and where she received PhD and MPhil degrees. She has recently been recognized as a Top Thought Influencer by the eLearning Industry.



ABOUT ALLENCOMM

The experts at AllenComm solve business problems with human-centered, beautifully designed custom learning solutions. We bring creativity into instructional design. We change behaviors and influence choices. We build better training.

AllenComm is a leading custom training solutions provider that partners with the nation's top brands to create unique and innovative learning solutions that make an impact.

Our extensive instructional design experience, innovative learning technologies, and agency-level creative teams, in combination with our leading-edge design and development system, empowers AllenComm to meet our clients' and their learner's needs and objectives. AllenComm uses a performance acceleration platform to incorporate the most innovative elearning techniques and meet the most challenging training objectives, allowing AllenComm clients to scale for growth.

AllenComm explores and utilizes the best methodologies for their clients, such as microlearning, gamification, blended learning, motion graphics, AR/VR, and more. You can learn more about our award-winning AllenComm learning solutions in onboarding, brand, compliance, leadership, and sales enablement training at www.allencomm.com.