

# WHY SIMPLICITY IS THE KEY TO EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

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PILOT

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# 01

## Foreword from Ben



## FOREWORD

As a former HR Executive, I experienced firsthand how challenging it is for HR leaders to drive change, even though most of us came into HR specifically because we wanted to be agents of change and make work better.

I'd watch how other departments -- Marketing, Operations, etc. -- were able to make change, and I realized they were leveraging something HR wasn't, which is simplicity.

Particularly when designing employee development programs, you might find yourself in the weeds. You might sequester yourself in a conference room for a year, trying to craft a dozen different offerings. Or you might paint yourself into a corner with a complex tech offering that requires pulling in your entire IT department.

Stop. Breathe.

Remember, your employees are focused on trying to succeed personally and professionally. The best way to offer support is with employee development offerings that are not only simple for you to implement, but simple for all of your employees to use. After all, you get zero impact when employees don't use what you offer.



02

**Perfect Is The Enemy Of Good**

## PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF GOOD

If you ever need to be reminded of the value of simplicity, try asking for advice on the internet. Two years ago, I was planning to travel to the East Coast and didn't have time to schedule a haircut at home before my trip. Before going to bed, I posted on social media asking if anyone had recommendations for a hairdresser in Halifax.

I woke up to complete chaos.

I had dozens of comments, but none of them were of any practical use to me. Some folks were replying with reasons I should keep growing my hair, others were sharing links to online tutorials of how to cut it myself. I got recommendations for a place to get it cut on the way to the airport, as well as for a salon two hours outside of Halifax "but totally worth it." When I saw that someone had helpfully shared a list of the top 38 salons in the city, I decided not to bother with any of it, and closed my laptop in frustration.

My phone buzzed. It was a text from my friend Ally, whom I was going to visit. "Your Facebook is a nightmare," she said "I booked you an appointment with the person who cuts my hair. It's Thursday at 2pm, ILU."

Simplicity.

Attempts to determine the best approach to employee development

often mirror what happened on my Facebook wall. HR leaders who want to ensure the best possible outcome for their employees risk going down a rabbit hole by researching every possible delivery method and program, only to surface a week later with 10 pages of notes that are neither perfect nor practical.

PILOT Founder & CEO Ben Brooks's advice on this approach is unequivocal:

**When an organization decides to offer more employee development, the HR department needs to resist the impulse to meet every imagined need.**

*"Inventing a new set of developmental principles, designing frameworks, laying out a curriculum, and experimenting with emerging technologies can seem thrilling on a conference call," Brooks says.*

*"But this often results in very expensive programs that come with long lead times to develop, unanticipated logistical headaches, and suboptimal employee impact."*

Luckily, there is an approach that is easier and more effective. This book will lay out how to get the highest employee development ROI by keeping every part of the process as simple as possible.



# 03

## The Siren Song Of Complexity

## THE SIREN SONG OF COMPLEXITY

If you need convincing that simplicity is the way forward, you can start by looking backward. In 1959, Fortune published [The 100 Best Designed Products of the Modern Era](#) as compiled by Jay Doblin, the Director of the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Going through that list today, clearly some of the simplest designs remain the most iconic and timeless: the pocket watch, the white china cup and saucer, the Pyrex flask, and the director's chair. On the other hand, succumbing to complication can be a threat to everything from [cybersecurity](#) to [health care delivery](#) to [distance education during the pandemic](#).

So how to fix it?

Eleanor Roosevelt framed simplification as “The first step toward rational living,” and she was right. The tendency to perceive simplicity as inferior is *completely irrational*.

But it's not uncommon.

In fact, even CHROs of the largest and most successful companies have fallen into this trap, mistakenly assuming that “more means more” in terms of employee growth. This leaves CHROs scrambling for more courses, more technology, more resources, more frameworks, which sadly ends in more wasted investment. When the first wave of Learning & Development vendors saw the insatiable desire for more, they began to feed the industry's cravings. Using volume as a proxy for value, these vendors charged HR teams more money for bigger libraries, longer assessments, additional modules, extra training days, and more complex models and frameworks.

**It's time to put an end to this cycle. “More” is bad for HR, bad for managers, bad for employees, and bad for organizations.**

Just think of some of the best consumer experiences you've had with products or services -- what delights us is how usable, easy, fast, and simple something is. How could you bring that same energy to your HR programs?

A simple approach means employees will be able to grow their capabilities to feel challenged and accomplished without having to navigate complex development programs.

“Ruthless prioritization is an act of compassion for those in management,” explains Brooks. “Reducing the number of gauntlets will produce a better, more elegant, and more empathetic experience for those we serve.”

Here is how to avoid these gauntlets and find the path towards simplicity.





# 04

## Design Principles For Simplicity

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR SIMPLICITY

As Alan Siegel and Irene Etzkorn write in *Simple: Conquering the Crisis of Complexity*, “One of the best ways to improve any experience is to simplify it—to remove complications, unnecessary layers, hassles, or distractions, while focusing on the essence of what people want and need in that particular situation.”

The same applies to employee development programs. They must be simple from the outset, which takes a certain amount of discipline. If you start with something simple and it turns out that it needs to be slightly more complicated, that is much easier to achieve than trying to declutter a complex program or offering once it’s been created. Here are the principles you need to keep in mind:

### **Anchor your program design in fundamentals**

Managers tend to gravitate to new and shiny objects. There is a sense that if there is something they’ve never heard of such as an outside certification or program, it could be the silver bullet that fixes everything. Great coaches know that the fundamentals are the key to growth. They teach their clients how to speak up when they need help, communicate effectively with colleagues, and get their needs met on a weekly basis.

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### **Use Human Centered Design (aka empathy)**

As a new employee development program begins, HR professionals might wonder “How will I get the budget for this? How will I enroll the right employee populations? How will I report back to management on success?” But there is another set of key questions HR needs to consider: “What’s it like for the employees participating in this program? How does this fit into their work week? How can we have the biggest impact?” We must design programs that are engaging and produce lasting impact.

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### **Test, design, and learn by doing**

As you formulate programs, you’ll have certain expectations, assumptions, biases, or hypotheses for how employees will experience them. Rather than get into a debate about who is right or wrong, go find out in reality. Break the logjam by saying “Let’s test it!” This will let you move on from the theoretical and get the best data from the employees you are charged with serving.



# 05

## Putting These Principles Into Action

## PUTTING THESE PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION

Employee development is at the core of the world's most successful organizations. An article on the Forbes website recently pointed out that quality employee development programs are a way to [keep top talent even if you can't afford to give raises](#). Also, when listing [ten customer focused companies that are great places to work](#), nearly half of the blurbs mentioned employee development programs.

Here are some ways you can use the building blocks of simplicity to create fantastic employee development programs at your organization:

1.

Prioritize what you can confidently and quickly deliver. Results happen in real life, not in a slide deck. Lean into both your existing resources and your existing constraints. Then, deploy quickly. Make the program visible and tangible, learning as you go.

2.

Leverage what's already working. If there are templates, frameworks, methods, etc., use them! Minimize the number of things you have to customize.

3.

Keep it simple for everyone. For HR, limit the design choices, cross-functional coordination, and rounds of internal approvals. For employees, remove as much friction as possible. Don't make them install new software, set up new logins, or attend trainings for unnecessarily complex new systems. For managers, make sure what you are asking of them is direct, time-efficient, and well-structured.

4.

Don't swing for the fences, try to make it to first base. Aiming for perfection will just delay employee growth, hurt performance, and increase attrition risk. Maximize efforts to get tangible developmental programs and opportunities to employees as quickly as possible. Test, learn, and get feedback by deploying programs.


5.

Balance HR's good intentions and passion for the subject matter with the most essential elements for employee engagement. Take on the role of curator and editor, delivering on the few critical distinctions, frameworks, models, etc. that will give busy and oversaturated employees the most value.



# 06

## **The Impact Simplicity Can Have On Your Organization**



## THE IMPACT SIMPLICITY CAN HAVE ON YOUR ORGANIZATION

A simple-to-execute employee development program is a high-impact employee development program. Simplicity boosts organizational performance and strategic execution by developing a workforce that is capable, engaged, and self-directed. When you prioritize simplicity in your employee development programs, you will see a high ROI in the results you produce.

**Finally, a simple approach means HR can focus on what it does best: delivering results.**

This will make HR successful in the eyes of the executive team, satisfy employee desire for development, and develop an employee base that feels valued, continually grows, and takes ownership of their careers and work experiences.



**07**

**Last Word From Ben**



## LAST WORD FROM BEN

*PILOT has simplified all of the elements of a highly effective employee development program, as this is all we do, day in and day out. PILOT continues to test, experiment, and polish our award-winning product, again and again and again -- so we have lots of data and many cycles to see what works.*

*Benefit from our learning! We focus on doing a few things really well. There's something beautiful to this singular focus and simplicity on our quest to achieve mastery.*