

FOR FUTURE-FOCUSED L&D PROFESSIONALS

DECEMBER 2025
VOLUME 52 | NO. 4

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

MEASURING AND MAXIMISING IMPACT



**RIGHT FIRST TIME: THE NEW
SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD FOR L&D**
NATALIE AINSWORTH

**COACHING: THE MISSING LINK IN
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ROI?**
SLAVEN DRINOVAC

**THE FUTURE OF L&D IS SUBTRACTION:
UNLEARNING, UNCLUTTERING, AND
UNBLOCKING THE BRAIN**
SHARM SHIVA

STOP DROWNING IN LEARNER EMAILS:

The Automation Strategy That Actually Changes Behavior

BY MIKE TAYLOR

Six hours.

That's how long an L&D manager spent last week manually sorting learners into email lists based on course completion status. She copied names from one spreadsheet. Pasted them into another. Created segments. Checked for duplicates. Started over when she realised she'd missed a column.

When I asked why she didn't automate it, she looked at me like I'd suggested she learn to code.

"I thought automation was just for marketing people."

Here's what most L&D teams don't realise: They're already doing marketing work. They're just doing it the slowest way possible.

THE REAL AUTOMATION GAP

Most L&D teams think they've got automation figured out. They've set up calendar reminders. Maybe there's a basic email that fires when someone enrolls in a course. Congratulations—you've automated a doorbell.

Marketers figured out something more powerful a decade ago. The real win isn't automating tasks. It's automating relationships at scale.

When Netflix recommends your next show, that's not random. When your phone suggests the next song before you finish the current one, that's not magic. These systems watch what you do and respond accordingly, for millions of people simultaneously.

L&D can do exactly the same thing. We just need to stop thinking small.

WHY "SET IT AND FORGET IT" FAILS

The old approach looks like this:

Create one email. Send it to everyone. Cross fingers.

The problem? Your star performer who crushed Module One in two days doesn't need the same nudge as the person who hasn't logged in for three weeks. They're having completely different experiences. Treating them identically isn't just inefficient.

It's actively annoying.

And annoyed learners disengage.

ENTER DRIP CAMPAIGNS: YOUR FIRST AUTOMATION WIN

Think of a drip campaign as exactly what it sounds like: content that drips out over time. Steady. Intentional. Spaced for maximum impact.

Here's a simple example from a sales team onboarding new reps:

- **Day 1:** Welcome email + product overview video (3 minutes)
- **Day 3:** Deep dive on the #1 feature customers ask about
- **Day 7:** Common objections + responses that actually work
- **Day 10:** Closing techniques + practice scenarios

Each email builds on the last. The spacing gives people time to absorb. And because it's automated, you set it up once. It runs for every new person who enters the program.

The beauty: you're respecting a fundamental truth about human learning. We need time and repetition. Spacing beats cramming. Every single time.

The limitation: Everyone gets email three on day seven. Doesn't matter if they watched the day one video or ignored it completely.

That's where things get interesting.

WHEN YOUR EMAILS START MAKING DECISIONS

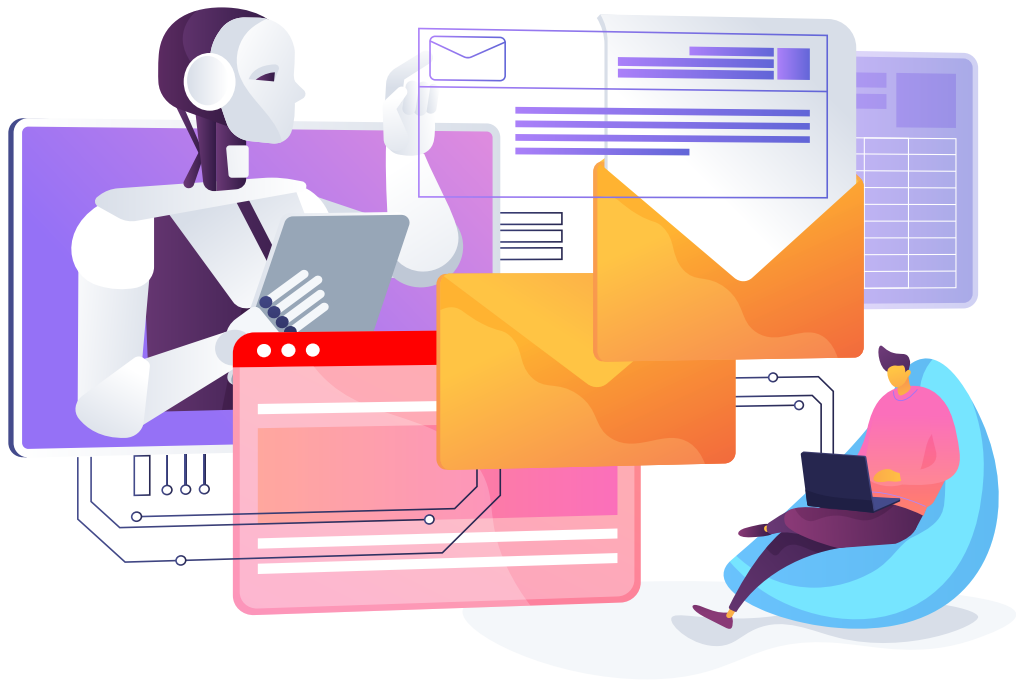
An adaptive campaign doesn't just follow a schedule. It watches. It responds. It makes choices based on what learners actually do.

Back to that sales onboarding. With adaptive automation:

Scenario One: The Eager Learner

Opens every email immediately. Clicks through to all resources. Completes the practice scenarios ahead of schedule.

System response: Recognises high engagement. Skips basic reinforcement emails. Sends invitation to advanced product demo. Suggests peer mentoring opportunity.



Scenario Two: The Hesitant Starter

Opens email one but doesn't watch the video. Lets email two sit unread for 48 hours.

System response: Switches tactics. New subject line: "Is this the wrong time?" Different hook emphasising quick wins. If still no engagement, notification to manager with suggested conversation starters.

Scenario Three: The Ghost

Doesn't open email one at all.

System response: Tries a different channel (Teams, Slack or text message). Adjusts send time (maybe they check email at night, not morning). Final attempt includes manager escalation.

See what's happening? The system is making personalisation decisions you'd make if you had time to track every learner individually.

You don't have that time. The system does.

THE TRIGGERS THAT MATTER

Here's what separates amateur automation from the sophisticated stuff:

Understanding Behavioral Triggers

- Marketers obsess over these. They track:
- Email opened? (Engagement signal)
 - Link clicked? (Interest signal)
 - Action completed? (Commitment signal)
 - Expected behavior missing? (Warning flag)

In L&D, your gold-standard triggers:

- 1. **Completion Events:** Learner finishes Module One → System unlocks Module Two + sends congratulations
- 2. **Inaction Warnings:** No login for seven days → Re-engagement email with different value proposition
- 3. **Performance Flags:** Score below 70% on knowledge check → Auto-enrollment in supplemental microlearning
- 4. **High Engagement Signals:** Completes optional resources → Fast-track to advanced content

Each trigger should prompt a specific, automated response. The system works while you sleep.

THREE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU AUTOMATE ANYTHING

Hold up. Before you run off building complex flows, pause. Not everything should be automated.

Run this litmus test:

- 1. **Is This Task Eating My Time Without Adding Value?** Copying learner names into emails? Automate it. Having genuine coaching conversations? Don't you dare.
- 2. **Do I Have Clear Behavioral Signals to Track?** Adaptive automation only works if you can see what learners are doing. If you can't track meaningful actions, stick with drip campaigns until you can.
- 3. **Will Automation Make This Better or Just Faster?** Automating a bad process gives you bad results more efficiently. Fix your content first. Then automate.

If you answered yes to number one and two, and you've thought hard about number three, you're ready.

START SMALLER THAN YOU THINK

Here's what I tell every L&D team struggling with where to begin:

Pick one high-volume, high-repetition task. Just one. For most teams, that's onboarding. You're doing it constantly. The content doesn't change much between participants. The stakes are high enough to matter. Set up a basic drip:

- Welcome email (day one)
- Resources reminder (day three)
- Check-in (week two)
- Milestone celebration (Day 30)

Once that's humming along, add one behavioral trigger: "If learner doesn't complete week one checklist, send alternative email with manager cc'd."

You don't need enterprise software. MailerLite costs less than your monthly coffee budget. Zapier connects it to your LMS.

The goal isn't perfection. It's momentum.

WHAT YOU GET BACK

That L&D manager with the six-hour sorting problem? After we set up her automation, she got those hours back. Every single week.

She used them to redesign her onboarding program—something she'd been trying to find time for over the past year. The irony? Automation gave her the capacity to improve the very process she was automating.

But here's what she told me mattered more: "I'm not drowning anymore. I'm actually designing learning experiences instead of managing administrative chaos." That's the real ROI. Not efficiency.

Transformation.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Open your sent email folder right now. Find the three emails you sent most often to learners last month.

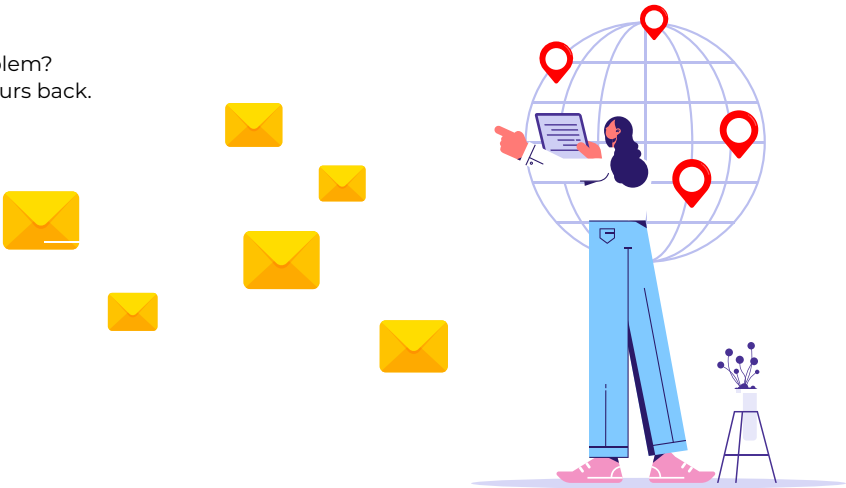
Ask yourself: "Could a system send this based on a trigger instead of me doing it manually?"

If the answer is yes to even one of those emails, you've found your first automation project.

Go Deeper: This article covers the fundamentals of learning automation, but it's just the beginning. For detailed workflows, tech recommendations, and real case studies—including the 42-workshop project that saved dozens of hours—grab your copy of *Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro* via <https://trainlikeamarketer.com/>

The L&D teams that thrive in the next decade won't be the ones working harder. They'll be the ones working smarter.

The technology is ready. The question: Are you?



MIKE TAYLOR

With over 20 years of experience as a learning consultant, Mike Taylor helps organisations design learning that sticks and sparks action. As a faculty member in Franklin University's Graduate Instructional Design and Performance Technology program, he bridges research and real-world practice to prepare the next generation of learning professionals. Mike is also the co-author of *Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro*, a practical guide to creating learning that grabs attention and drives results. His popular newsletter shares fresh ideas at the intersection of learning, design, and technology. Whether leading workshops or speaking on stage, Mike's approachable style and sharp insights inspire audiences to rethink what effective learning can be. Learn more at <https://trainlikeamarketer.com/>