



# FROM ORDER-TAKERS TO ADVISORS

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A Practical Guide to Building Influence Muscles in the L&D Function

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# Outline

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# The Core Problem:

## The Influence Gap

02

Most L&D professionals are highly skilled in adult learning theory, experience design, facilitation, and technology. What they're rarely trained in are organizational dynamics, stakeholder influence, and business decision-making.

This creates an **influence gap** that can be defined as the space between L&D's technical expertise and its ability to shape priorities, challenge assumptions, and ensure learning actually changes performance.

One global services organization learned this the hard way. Their L&D team launched a leadership program that executives publicly praised. Yet six months later, funding quietly dried up. Why? Because while the program was well-designed, no one could clearly articulate the business problem it solved, who owned the outcome, or how success would be measured beyond satisfaction scores. Bridging the influence gap isn't a soft skill. It's a strategic imperative.

### The Advisor Mindset: Solving Problems, Not Filling Orders

Trusted advisors don't wait to be told what to build. They diagnose before they prescribe. They reframe requests into business conversations. And they accept accountability for outcomes and not just delivery. Through our work with L&D teams across industries, we've identified four influence muscles that enable this shift. This isn't advice. It's a system.

# The Four Influence Muscles of a Trusted L&D Advisor

03

## Influence Muscle 4: Diagnostic Consulting

Advisors diagnose before they prescribe.

Order-takers ask: "What training do you want?"

Advisors ask:

"What problem are you trying to solve?"

"What happens if it isn't solved?"

"What have you already tried?"

**Example:** A technology team requested a communication workshop. Through deeper inquiry, L&D discovered the real issue was decision ambiguity; roles and authority were unclear. Training alone wouldn't fix it. L&D partnered with leadership to clarify decision rights, then supported the change with targeted learning.

**Result:** The initiative showed early indicators of positive change, giving leaders greater confidence in the approach and strengthening the case for continued focus on the underlying business issue.

**Your move:** Train your team in humble inquiry. The first meeting should be 80% listening, 20% talking.

# The Advisor Engagement Model 04

## (What Changes in Practice)

Every request moves through four deliberate stages: Diagnose, Align, Design, and Prove. This operating rhythm turns influence from an individual skill into a team capability.

01

### Diagnose

Clarify the business problem, risks, and success measures

02

### Align

Map stakeholders, secure a champion, surface objections

03

### Design

Co-create solutions tied to measurable outcomes

04

### Prove

Pilot, measure impact, and tell the story

# Self-Assessment As Your First Step

05

## Influence Muscle 1: Business Translation

### What Your Responses Likely Mean

If most of your responses here are “Sometimes true” or “Rarely true,” your L&D function is likely delivering quality work but struggling to clearly connect it to business results. Leaders may appreciate the effort, but still question the impact.

### One Behavior to Practice

Commit to this for the next 60–90 days: Before designing any solution, clearly define the business problem you are trying to solve and the business outcome that needs to change.

### Example

Instead of starting with, “We need a leadership program,” start with, “We are trying to reduce first-year manager turnover.”

Statement	Consistently True	Sometimes True	Rarely True
We routinely reframe training requests into clearly defined business problems before designing solutions.			
For major initiatives, we can articulate which business metrics are intended to change and why.			
Our success measures go beyond satisfaction and completion data.			
Stakeholders can easily explain the business value of our work in their own words.			