

The 2026 L&D Outlook: Insights From Our Conversation with Josh Bersin



Hey There!

Learning & Development has been...a lot...lately.

Budgets have tightened, teams have shrunk, and the AI wave has made even the most adaptable among us feel like we're treading water.

So when we sat down with **Josh Bersin**, global analyst, researcher, and long-time champion of our field, we wanted to ask the questions that have been quietly sitting in everyone's noggin:

- What the heck happened to L&D in 2025?
- Where are we really headed?
- What can we do right now to feel prepared for 2026?

Josh's take was refreshingly optimistic! He reminded us that L&D isn't being replaced. It's being rebuilt! Josh feels that 2026 will be one of the most exciting eras our field has ever seen.

Of course, optimism doesn't erase the nerves. We're just human beings with big brains, soft spots, and the same old pesky survival instincts.

Any time new technology shows up promising to "change everything," it's normal to brace for impact. It's the same uneasy curiosity a lot of us felt the first time we "surfed the web."

Who remembers Geocities and dancing hamsters? We didn't know if we'd just discovered the future or accidentally infected our computers with ten new kinds of viruses. Turns out, it was both. Our computer never recovered.

Anyway, we figured it out! And, just like then, we'll figure this out too.

Here's what we learned from our conversation with Josh, what it means for your team, and why 2026 might actually be something to look forward to.

[But first, let's dissociate to the dancing hamsters. What a time to be alive!](#)

The Paradigm Shift is Already Happening

“The solution to every problem isn’t a course.”

For years, our field has been wired to respond to absolutely every challenge with a training request. We’re talking about low sales, weak onboarding, disengaged managers, and a whole lot more. Someone says, “We need a course,” and the conveyor belt just starts rolling.

This instructional paradigm made sense in an earlier era of corporate learning. But that’s changing fast. As Josh put it, “You’ve been locked in the instructional paradigm where the solution to every problem is a course... but you haven’t been given the flexibility to do other things. All of a sudden, you’re going to have a new toolset.”

That toolset—AI, automation, and embedded learning systems—is expanding what L&D can actually do. Instead of just producing content, we can now orchestrate learning across the flow of work, connect systems, and create experiences that flex as fast as the business does.

Josh sees this not just as a shift in how we work, but also in who we can become. “The better you are at it,” he said, “the more money you’re gonna make. There are going to be companies looking for people like you who are experts at this.”

He calls this the rise of the Super Worker—people who can combine human intelligence with digital tools to do their jobs faster, smarter, and with more creativity than before. The challenge isn’t whether the technology works; it’s whether organizations know how to help employees use it well and redesign their jobs around it.

Right now, companies are investing heavily in AI infrastructure like Microsoft Copilot and SAP, and paying serious money for it. But the return will only come if people are empowered to use these tools in meaningful ways.

That’s where L&D comes in: equipping employees not just to consume AI, but to partner with it. It’s highly possible that a decade from now, we’ll look back at 2025 and say, “Wow, we had no idea how much potential was sitting in front of us.”

The L&D professionals who can step out of the “course factory” mindset and into this broader systems view will be the ones organizations compete for.

Put it into practice:

Design systems, not just deliverables.

Think beyond individual courses. How does learning flow between systems, people, and moments of need?

Measure outcomes, not output.

Shift your metrics from “courses delivered” to “problems solved” or “time to proficiency.”

Reimagine your value.

Position yourself and your team as learning engineers and enablers, not just instructional designers.

Stay curious.

Experiment with new formats, workflows, and tools. The more fluent you become in this expanded toolset, the more indispensable you'll be.

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AI Isn't the Enemy

“AI is a tool to help us. It's not a replacement for us.”

There's been no shortage of panic about AI in L&D. But for Josh, AI is just the next tool in the evolution of learning. It extends our reach without erasing our value.

He emphasized that AI's real power lies in amplification – speeding up the mechanical work so humans can focus on empathy, interpretation, culture, and leadership. In that sense, AI reflects our creativity, our clarity, and, sometimes, our blind spots.

As Josh put it, “I don't care how smart the AI is – it isn't even close to the intelligence we have in our bodies.” Machines can replicate language, but they can't replicate care. They can generate text, but not trust. That's why the real opportunity for L&D is in designing learning that keeps the human layer in place.

The good news is L&D teams already get this. In our [AI in L&D Report](#), when asked about their biggest challenge in adopting AI, **65% of respondents** said data security and privacy. Privacy and ethics rose to the top, not cost or efficiency. We love that result! Ethics often sits in the background as an “IT problem” or a “legal thing.” Seeing it emerge as a front-and-center concern signals maturity. It shows that adoption isn't just about what AI can do, but whether people feel safe and respected while using it.

Josh also pointed out that the real crisis in organizations right now isn't a skills shortage or technology, it's emotional safety. Engagement levels, he noted, are lower today than they were during the pandemic. After years of uncertainty, layoffs, and fear of automation, employees are tired and anxious.

It's hard to learn when you're scared. When people feel uncertain or under pressure, their brains go into self-protection mode, not curiosity mode.

Our job isn't just to help people use technology, it's to help them trust it. We're the bridge between innovation and understanding. Our goal is to make sure progress feels safe, purposeful, and human.

Because when people feel supported, they discover what they're capable of!

Put it into practice:

Build trust into every AI initiative.

Before adoption, ask: “Would I feel safe using this tool?” Make privacy, transparency, and consent part of your learning culture.

Keep humans in the loop.

Learners should always have access to real human support when they’re stuck or uncertain.

Design for safety, not just skill.

Bake psychological safety into the learning experience, from onboarding to coaching to AI-based tools that learn from employee input.

Measure trust and belonging, not just completions.

Track engagement, confidence, and connection as leading indicators of performance.

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From Courses to Enablement

“It’s not just training. It’s also enablement and knowledge management.”

L&D’s job is expanding.

Training will always have its place, but it’s now one piece of a much larger puzzle that includes enablement, knowledge management, and performance support.

In other words, learning is moving closer to the work itself. Instead of waiting for quarterly courses or annual refreshers, employees expect guidance in the moment when they’re solving a problem, talking to a customer, or leading a team. That shift requires us to think of learning as infrastructure.

The question isn’t “Will training go away?” but “How can we make learning continuous and useful at the exact point of need?” It’s the difference between producing content and creating capability.

It’s a move away from the old publishing model of learning where we build courses, upload them, and hope people find time to take them, toward something much more fluid and human. Josh pointed out that **60–70%** of what people are doing with ChatGPT right now is learning.

That’s how humans naturally learn. We do it every time we look something up, test an idea, or ask for help online. The most dynamic way to teach people is to give them a conversational tool that allows them to learn at their own pace.

That’s the core idea behind enablement: meeting people where they are, in the moment they need help, through systems that make learning feel like talking.

For many L&D teams, this means rethinking what a deliverable looks like. Instead of long-form courses, it might be a five-step decision flow that saves someone ten minutes. Or a searchable playbook that turns tribal knowledge into something findable. Or a short video built into a CRM that helps a rep handle a tricky conversation in real time.

When done right, enablement amplifies learning. It makes every task a chance to get a little better, every workflow a learning opportunity, and every learner a more confident problem solver. This is what “learning in the flow of work” really means. It moves with people instead of pulling them away from what they’re doing.

Put it into practice:

Design for the moment of need.

Create resources people can access *while* they're working – embedded guides, searchable toolkits, or smart prompts that surface help automatically.

Build performance-first metrics.

Shift your KPIs from completions to outcomes: speed to proficiency, reduced error rates, customer satisfaction, and team readiness.

Close the gap between learning and doing.

Audit your learning portfolio. Where are employees forced to “pause” work to learn? Redesign those experiences so learning flows directly into their daily tools and processes.

Work cross-functionally.

Partner with operations, IT, and HR to unify knowledge management and enablement efforts. Together, you can build systems that make learning frictionless.

Treat enablement as a product.

Manage your learning ecosystem like a living product—through continuous feedback, iteration, and version control.

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Built for Change

L&D isn't disappearing or being automated out of relevance. It's evolving into something more connected, human, and more strategic than ever.

The future Josh described isn't about racing to keep up with technology. It's about using new tools to make more room for what really matters—helping people learn, adapt, and feel safe enough to grow.

The goal isn't to master every new platform or trend. It's about keeping up the systems that make learning feel less like a transaction and more like a living, ongoing conversation.

And that's where hope comes in. Because every organization still needs what L&D brings at its best: clarity, compassion, and the belief that people can change. The tools may evolve, but the mission hasn't.

At the end of the day, L&D professionals are uniquely equipped for this moment. We're connectors by nature – bridging people, tools, and ideas in ways that make work more human. And it's easy to forget that we're learners too. Change is what we do. It's literally the job!

If 2025 was about endurance, 2026 can be about intention.

It's a chance to build smarter, kinder, more resilient learning ecosystems that meet people where they are and help them get where they're going.

And while we're at it, why not bring back those dancing hamsters?! They were a delight and good for morale if you ask us.

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More Resources

Want to dig deeper into the ideas behind this conversation?

- **Watch the full replay of our conversation with Josh Bersin:**
[L&D Unfiltered: A Candid Conversation with Josh Bersin \(Recording\)](#)
- **Read one of Josh's latest reports:**
[It's Time for an L&D Revolution: The AI Era Arrives](#)
- **Schedule a Chat with IDLance:**
If you're rethinking how your team approaches learning, or just need a sounding board, we'd love to talk!
[Click here to schedule a quick call with us!](#)





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