How to train your team on data skills

Your guide to data literacy

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As enterprises digitally transform through e-commerce, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, there's an even greater influx of data to leverage across the business, meaning there's an even greater reason to teach your team data literacy skills. Think about what data you have, where it's coming from, and who is using it.

- **Consumer data** comes from website traffic, sales conversations, online transactions, customer service chatbots, and more. Marketing, sales, operations, and finance all tend to use this data.
- **Product data** is created internally but effects e-commerce product information, inventory, merchandising, and shipping. Marketing, sales, operations, and merchandising all tend to use this data.
- **Operational data** is created internally but effects the business processes, performance metrics, and decisions. This effects the work of leaders, analysts, strategists, and departments.

Your business is already using data, but are the insights accurate and relevant to your business initiatives? And, do your team members—marketers, sales reps, and analysts—leverage the data effectively?

[Businesses are saying](#) data is one of the most valuable assets to their organizations. In today's world, you can't function without being supported by evidence. **Businesses are also saying they see data literacy as a core competency that all employees must have in the next five years.**

Train your team to become data literate so you can excel operations, improve customer experience, and ultimately, grow your bottom line. **Let's start now.**

1 Start by asking questions.

Start by asking yourself these questions to organize your vision for teaching data skills:

1. What is your vision for this program? And, why?
2. Will your envisioned program resonate with the culture of your organization?
3. How would you want this plan to be communicated if you were the business user?
4. How will you assess the success of the program?
5. What will your training road map look like?
6. Is your training road map adaptable to teams across your business?
7. How will you continue to measure success?

These questions will help you formulate a data literacy program. It's a chance to put yourself in the shoes of your business users, think about what data skills your organization needs to improve, and the best approach to shift your team's mindset from data project to discipline.

2 Building out your data literacy program.

From communication to the execution of the training, your plan should be formulated to best fit your organization's culture. The goal is for your people to adopt data literacy skills and practices, and for that, you need the best communication and assessment plan, and most importantly, training program.

Executing your training program.

To kick off building your data literacy program, think about how your training program will operate. You have a couple of options:

- **Informal training program:** This could consist of optional lunchtime sessions, ad-hoc learning materials, self-learning, and more.
- **Formal training program:** This could consist of regular, mandatory lessons, learning materials, and more.

The key to success here: Make sure your program is flexible to adapt to the needs of each department--think about having a formal training for departments who use data daily, and optional lunch trainings for others. The learning material should be relevant to your departments taking your data literacy course. We'll dive into this in the next section "Training your employees on data skills."

Assessing your program.

As you kick off your training program, make sure you build in room to assess your operation. Like your business, your training program will evolve. As you educate your employees on data literacy, you want to continuously ask your students:

1. Is the material resonating with you?
2. Can you apply these data skills to your day-to-day responsibilities?
3. How can the program be improved?

The answers to these questions will give you the insight you need to adapt the program to the needs of your business users and help inform future training material.

Communicating your program.

Lastly, to effectively execute and asses your data literacy training program, you need strong communication. From the initial announcement through the training to the assessment period, you want to make sure you highlight the power of data and the benefits training will do for users:

• The data literacy program is an **investment the business is making in it's employees growth.**
• The data literacy program is an opportunity to **align business initiatives to succeed.**
• The data literacy program is a chance to **work efficiently, giving teams more time back.**

For some folks, a new training means time away from their busy work schedule—initially, they may be overwhelmed versus excited. Emphasize on the first point, data literacy training is an investment in the employee. The Data Literacy Project reports 94 percent of business say data is key to professional credibility, so you truly are equipping your people with the knowledge they need to do their job now and in the future.

Reading, writing, and arguing with data has become a necessary learning in today's digital world. If you start now, you and your team will be ahead of the curve.

3 Training your employees on data skills.

Now, your employees are in the data literacy classroom and they're ready to learn data skills—this is your data literacy program. Your goal at the end of this program is to have your team reading, writing, and arguing with data effectively. In other words, this training will develop your team's skills to successfully tell their data story.

"A lack of data storytelling related to the full impact of poor data has caused organizations to underinvest in these areas and not fully understand the impact," says Erin Haselkorn, head of market research for Experian's Data Quality NA division.

To get started on building learning material to train your employees, ask yourself these three questions:

1. What data skills do you need these team members to develop?
2. What day-to-day responsibilities fall under this team?
3. How can improving their data language help them work more efficiently and effectively?

Here's a great resource to know what top skills to look for in your employees—check it out!

Weaving the answers to these questions into the foundation of your training program will ensure relevancy between data analytics and business needs, and help develop data skills like communication, analytics, and visualization.

Now, let's discuss what data information you need to include in your classroom—**your lesson plan.**

Your data lesson plan.

Lesson 1: What is data?

Data can take a variety of shapes and sizes. Data could be individual customer contact records, phone numbers, email addresses, and addresses, product queries, employment records, and more. More specifically, marketers look at data that takes shape as web traffic, email engagement, and leads. For sales, data is contacts, meetings, product lines, and transactions. It's important to train your employees to look at data from a variety of angles--data is no longer just "IT" language. If you impact your customer's experience, you are working with data.

Skills to focus on: communication, presentation, and data visualization

Lesson 2: Data quality

Not all data is trustworthy. With such a high volume of data, there's bound to be mistakes. In fact, **50 percent of inaccurate data is caused by human error**, according to our research. That's why one of your first lessons should be learning about the importance of data quality.

If you are not using accurate, relevant insights to inform business decisions, you cannot be confident that you are on the path toward success. Here's an example:

You are in the marketing department and looking to do an email campaign, so you rely on your customer database to inform who you are emailing and to what address. Your email campaign is ready, and you click 'send.' However, without cleansing or profiling your database, you can't be certain every single email is arriving in the intended inboxes. Or, that those customers are your intended target market. For the emails that bounce back, you've wasted time, money, and energy because your data wasn't qualified.

Our research reports 65 percent of inaccurate data undermines key initiatives. This is why you want to teach the importance of data quality.

Skills to focus on: communication, presentation, and data visualization

Lesson 3: Data quality management

Now that your students know what data is and the importance of accuracy, it's time to teach them how to manage valid data effectively. Your next lesson: data quality management.

This lesson will look different depending on how the business has historically managed data. For example, if your business already has enterprise-wide usage of a data quality management tool, like this one, this could be time to train business users on how to use the tool effectively for their department. If the business or department does not have a tool or the tool is only used in the IT department, this is a chance to look at other options.

Data quality management tools are great to have, but some businesses may not have the resources to implement one right now. In that case, you can still clean your data through a batch process. This is great for departments because they can send in their records to be cleaned and receive a report back with accurate data and findings.

Although the ability to have tools differs between businesses and departments, the lesson remains the same: Regardless of your resources, manage the quality of your data on an ongoing basis.

Skills to focus on: communication, presentation, data visualization, and management

Lesson 4: Analyzing the data

You've taught your team about the ins and outs of data, now it's time to teach how to analyze their insights. When teaching skills like critical thinking or analytics, train your team to ask themselves:

1. What trend(s) are they seeing?
2. What does this mean? Is it positive or negative?
3. Why is this happening?
4. How will this affect other initiatives?
5. If negative, how can you fix this?

Being able to understand the data journey—where did this trend derive from and what does it mean for the business? —is an important skill to have when communicating with other departments on your findings and reasons for your team's strategy.

Skills to focus on: critical thinking, analytics, and presentation

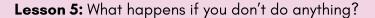**Lesson 5:** What happens if you don't do anything?

End your training materials with the challenges that will arise if your team decides to do nothing to improve their ability to read, write, and argue with data.

Firstly, the business won't have a holistic view on their data without every team having a data-insightful mindset. Not only that, team members will be holding back their own professional development.

Secondly, several challenges will arise if departments don't understand they need to regularly clean or monitor their data. For example, you could be putting the business deeper into data debt by allocating resources, money, and time into initiatives supported by incorrect data.

Thirdly, you could be facing regulatory risks by not accurately reporting consumer data. This could result in hefty fines and a lot of rework on business initiatives.

Skills to focus on: critical thinking, analytics, and problem solving

With this background knowledge, your team will be able to leverage accurate insights to communicate strategically and effectively to other departments about trends, performances, and decisions. Departments across the business will be aligned because everyone is hearing each other's data story.

84%

see data literacy as a core competency all employees need to have in the next five years.

- 2020 Global data management report

When your organization is equipped with data literacy knowledge, you are empowering your people to leverage accurate data to align strategies and drive business initiatives. Having a data-insightful mindset will put you on the path toward growth, keeping you ahead of the competition.

Learn how investing in your employees' data skills will transform your organization and set you on a path to fuel a data-driven operation.

Get started today.

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