

An Etihad Airways aircraft is shown in flight against a blue sky with light clouds. The aircraft is white with gold and brown accents on the tail and engines. The word "ETIHAD" is visible on the fuselage. The registration number "4B-BLF" is visible on the tail.

Customer story

First-class training for a world-class sales team at Etihad Airways

By **Graham Cook**, Manager of Commercial Performance, Etihad Aviation Group

I'm just going to say it: Most professional training is boring. It's often neither engaging nor relevant to employees' everyday tasks. Training is often a check in a box, and any learning is forgotten soon after the training is complete.

If that sounds like your company's approach to employee learning and development (L&D), you're not alone. Some of the biggest and most successful companies in the world treat training as an afterthought—and for our teams at **Etihad Airways**, we had a long way to go to get our training and development process up to scratch.

Training eModules for our teams have long lived in our internal learning management system (LMS). While the eModules themselves were of good quality, the platform was limited in communication and other features. The modules were also generic. If they weren't relevant to an employee's job, it wasn't worth their time to watch. This was especially true for our salespeople, who are constantly on the move. It was clear that we weren't getting much business benefit from this type of training.

We also had classroom training that was more effective, but limited to sales beginners. Etihad prides itself on having some of the most highly experienced and effective salespeople in the industry, but we didn't help them improve. The classroom training wasn't advanced enough for their needs, and the eModules weren't mobile and didn't fit into their day-to-day routines. They couldn't level up.

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“When right-fit learning is part of your company culture, your employees feel empowered to proactively take ownership and accountability for their work.”

Stuck on the tarmac: the search for the right approach

I joined Etihad 11 years ago, and in 2018 I became the manager of commercial performance, which is part of the commercial strategy and planning team. All eight of us review and plan future business structure. My specific area of focus is predominantly around training and performance management within the commercial team.

When I came to Abu Dhabi, I had the opportunity to take on employee development through an entirely new process. We reviewed our entire sales operating model and decided that the best approach was to involve salespeople themselves. We didn't want to fall into the trap of determining the “rules” without involving the people directly impacted by those rules.

Instead, we wanted to come up with a sales process designed by salespeople for salespeople. We started making connections and putting plans together around the future of sales—all while keeping training and performance management top of mind.

Wheels up: the Axonify approach to L&D

Enter Andrew Stotter-Brooks, our senior VP of L&D, who joined Etihad in 2019. Andrew introduced us to different methodologies in a proactive and positive way, changing all of our thinking about the structure of performance measurement. As part of that structure, he introduced us to **Axonify**, a training solution built for frontline employees and learners on the go.



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Our past strategy was generic for all employees, spanning engineering to marketing, finance to government affairs. Andrew helped us build specific L&D and performance management strategies for the commercial sales team, using Axonify.

Axonify is incredibly simple to understand and use. For me, the real selling point is the concept of daily learning that consists of just three questions. Answering those questions takes a single minute to complete. Everyone finds it frustrating to sit in front of a screen for 30 minutes staring at a training module. But when employees can take a minute to reaffirm their existing knowledge and then get on with their day-to-day activities, it's time well spent.

Axonify came into our organization at the perfect time. We had created an Account Manager Framework, based on our "Know/Do/Be" L&D strategy. It's a straightforward strategy:

- Know: What the team member must know, including the theory and tools available at a defined career level
- Do: What the team member must do, including the theory, tools and behaviors at a defined career level that they regularly put into practice
- Be: How the employee must behave, including their understanding and embodiment of the behaviors, beliefs, values and knowledge important to the business

We combined the new learning framework with the thinking of the Know/Do/Be model. This year, this will form the basis of our performance management structure. We're thrilled to bring it to our teams because it delivers the changes that sales asked for: quick hits of information that are digestible, mobile and applicable to their daily tasks.



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Cleared for takeoff: accelerating a culture shift

This has been a major overhaul to the commercial sales teams. Our head office used to be the driving force behind how our salespeople approach their sales, training, agenda and contracts. But over the past 18 months, we've essentially redesigned the whole sales operating model from scratch, including our methodology.

Axonify has enabled us to communicate and roll out changes to the sales model in almost real time. Clear and consistent communication is key when overhauling an L&D approach (or any approach, for that matter). We set up daily communications within Axonify about the new sales and training models that inform everyone of all the new changes, why the changes took place, how they're different and whatever new process exists.

The biggest challenge for our team was in keeping up with the pace of change. We were writing Axonify content nearly in real time. It's difficult for us to think 6-12 months ahead when the bulk of our work is so urgent. But the rapid pace has accelerated adoption, and the sales team sees this new training model as a positive change around learning, performance management and autonomy within their ranks.

Our salespeople feel empowered to proactively take ownership and accountability for how they approach their markets and customers. They know what they should be doing and how to close sales, and now they have the freedom to do it in their own way. Our current strategy enters the next phase early this year, where we'll start building out the long-term learning strategy on Axonify to include negotiation and presentation skills.



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Training on the fly: engaging our learners through competition

Since we introduced the new framework, the uptake has been superb. Every month, we see our entire sales staff completing 4,500–5,000 extra training sessions on Axonify which blows me away because it shows their appetite for learning and professional growth, an ideal quality to cultivate within teams. It demonstrates true engagement, and we can build on that enthusiasm. Our previous history with eModules was never going to deliver that—not in a million years.

A big part of our transformation is to make training fun and engaging by embracing gamification. We created a monthly league table, which shows the top 20 learners of our entire sales staff across the network. If there's anything salespeople love, it's a competition. Everyone wants to get on the leaderboard, and it gets those competitive juices flowing far better than I ever thought it would.

Axonify isn't mandatory like our previous eModules were, but it's all self-driven learning. News of Axonify has spread quite a lot by word of mouth. People sell it to their peers because it's fun and easy. They just log in, complete their three questions and they're done. The participation rate among all Etihad salespeople for Axonify is 70%.

That's a far cry from our eModules, which have a 60% completion rate across sales teams—despite the fact that it's mandatory. People are more likely to do what's easy and fun, and training on Axonify is both of those things.

Nonstop learning, nonstop data analysis

I get an Excel report each week from the eModules, which lets us notify countries of the number of team members that have completed their sessions.



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But it's nothing compared to the data that comes from Axonify. The platform allows us to see our salespeople's knowledge growth, which is a great metric to share throughout the organization. We can also communicate with individuals or broadcast a message across the business as desired.

Working with people who invest in your success

Just as we've supported our sales teams, the team at Axonify has supported us every step of the way. We've attended workshops where they've shown us new developments and features, which excites us about the future.

Our next step is to engage local managers in leadership development as part of our holistic performance management strategy. We also expect to evaluate a revenue value tied to learning outcomes next year using the Axonify impact tool.

I get a big kick out of seeing other people succeed, and it's been great to see the commercial sales team achieve so much so quickly. It's allowed us to deliver a positive message in a positive way, and that's had a real impact on our company culture. Our teams know that we listen and have delivered the training they asked for in a much more fun and accommodating way. When people start believing that things are going to happen, rather than thinking they never will, that's when you know for sure that the sky's the limit.

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Graham Cook, Manager of Commercial Performance, Ethiad Aviation Group

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Axonify is the modern training and communications solution for frontline employees that actually works. Because when you give your frontline the tools to succeed, your business will too.

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