Motivated Brain Design Audit

A transfer checklist for training that changes behavior

Use this audit to evaluate whether your training design creates the neurological conditions for sustained motivation and lasting behavior change. Work through each section for a single program. Check every item your design genuinely addresses. Review the scoring guide at the end to identify where to focus next.

I. REWARD SYSTEM ACTIVATION

Does your training create the neurological conditions for motivated learning?

- ☐ Can every learner name one specific problem this training will help them solve in the next week — not someday, but now?
- ☐ Do practice scenarios include the real cognitive load, time pressure, and constraints of their actual work?
- ☐ Are learners making decisions about how to apply content, or are they following a prescribed script?
- ☐ Is the connection between effort and meaningful outcome made visible throughout — not just at the start?

II. AUTONOMY

Does your design give learners agency over how they apply what they're learning?

- ☐ Are learners given frameworks and principles to adapt, not just procedures to follow?
- ☐ Does the design include explicit prompts asking learners to customize application to their specific context?
- ☐ Do learners have opportunities to make decisions, monitor results, and adjust their approach?
- ☐ Are self-regulation skills being developed, or are learners simply executing instructions?

III. COMPETENCE

Does your design build learners' belief that effort will produce growth?

- ☐ Are challenges sequenced progressively, with complexity increasing as capability builds?
- ☐ Does feedback show learners specifically what changed between attempt one and attempt two?
- ☐ Do learners receive concrete evidence of improvement — not abstract praise or scores?
- ☐ Does the design avoid both overwhelming complexity and tasks so easy they feel pointless?

IV. RELATEDNESS

Does your design leverage the social brain's role in motivation and learning?

- ☐ Do learners see others in their context successfully applying these skills?
- ☐ Are peer observation and social modeling built into the design — not left to chance?
- ☐ Does the design create psychological safety for experimentation and visible struggle?
- ☐ Are managers or coaches equipped to recognize and reinforce early application attempts?

V. THE TRANSFER CHAIN

Does your design create the full Relevance → Motivation → Practice → Neural Connection sequence?

- ☐ Is relevance established before motivation is required — not assumed or hoped for?
- ☐ Do learners have sufficient time on task for practice to become rehearsal?
- ☐ Do learners practice enough times, with feedback, for new behaviors to become automatic?
- ☐ Is there a structured plan for application attempts after the formal learning experience ends?

VI. FEEDBACK THAT CHANGES THE BRAIN

Does your feedback create the prediction errors the brain needs to learn?

- ☐ Is feedback connected to concrete consequences, not abstract evaluation or ratings?
- ☐ Does feedback specify what changed — not just what was right or wrong?
- ☐ Does the design create psychological safety so feedback registers as information, not threat?
- ☐ Are learners developing the capacity to seek feedback and self-evaluate, not just receive it?

Scoring Guide

✓ **22–24 checks:** Strong motivational architecture. Focus on execution and follow-through.

✓ **16–21 checks:** Solid foundation with gaps. Identify which sections are lowest and prioritize those.

✓ **10–15 checks:** Engagement may be present but transfer is at risk. Redesign Practice and Feedback sequences first.

● **Below 10:** The training is likely creating temporary awareness, not behavior change. Start with Relevance and Autonomy.

If you're answering "no" to more than two items in any single section, that section represents a design gap. Motivation gaps compound: missed relevance makes competence harder to build; missed autonomy limits

how far feedback can take someone. Address them in sequence — Reward System, then Autonomy, then Competence.