



Virtual Learning

Seven Considerations for Today



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In the Deep End

My father tells a story about *his* father teaching him to swim in the early 50's. No parenting sensitivity classes were available at that time, just a flat bottom boat and a small tank on the back of the property. However, my grandfather had decided it was time for his son to learn to swim. With little forethought, he simply grabbed my father who was around the age of seven, chunked him in the tank, and proceeded to row for the shore. I am sure Grand-Pops was keeping an eye on dad though, I cannot be sure. Dad thought he was going to die. In the end he made it to shore and from that point forward, he had joined the ranks of swimmers.

If you are primarily a classroom facilitator with little experience in navigating the challenges of on-line learning, you may feel like you have been thrown in the deep end and expected to swim. The challenges of social distancing and the limitations in place due to COVID19 may have you feeling like you are floundering in twelve feet of water with little skills and no life vest. Either you are facilitating no classes at all or you are having to adapt to smaller classes, blended learning, and navigating the path of virtual learning. This short e-book is designed to start you in thinking about how to adapt and then thrive in this new world. It consists of seven things to think about or implement immediately to help improve your on-line presence now, and navigate to a virtual environment later.





Adapt Then Design

Almost everyone has had to adapt to the new world of virtual training. We are learning the technical skills needed to facilitate a class using Zoom or GoToMeeting, learning how to conduct a mixer virtually, and exploring how to take what we have written for the classroom and make it appropriate for the virtual world. Soon, however, we will need to stop adapting and start designing for our new reality. It is possible that the Corona Virus has pushed us a decade forward in regards to how we maximize the use of technology in learning. While adapting is necessary due to the current situation, organizations will need to pivot quickly and start designing classes for our new “normal.” The most effective learning organizations have already started creating courses designed for the virtual environment. These organizations are leveraging technology to create engaging content that can be delivered in smaller timeframes spread out over time. While you are learning to swim in the churning waters of today, don’t forget you will also need to pay attention to the water you will be swimming in tomorrow.



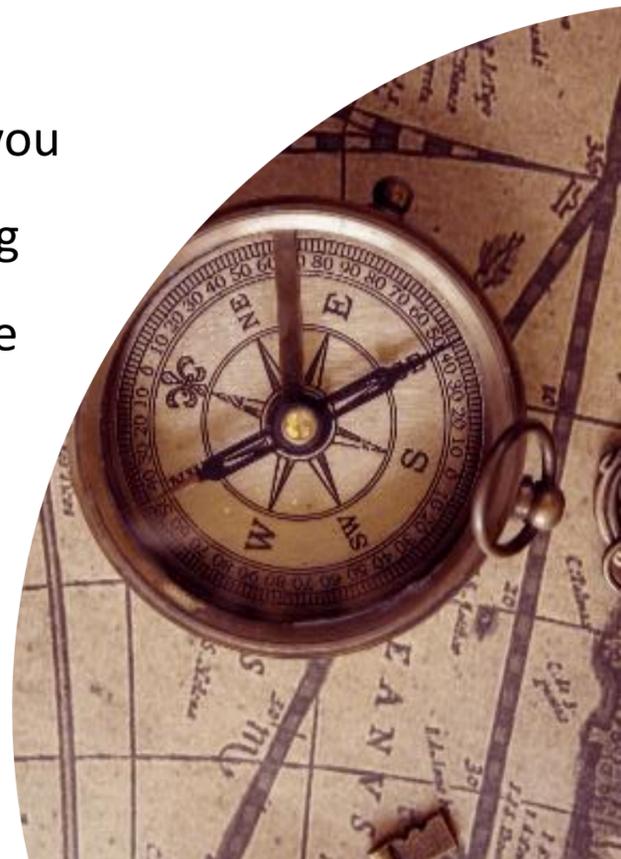


Create a Clear Map

While we are adapting, facilitators will be required to get razor sharp on the objectives for each class. Many of us teach courses over time by rote and forget the primary learning objectives of the class we are instructing. As we adapt, we will need to go back to the basics for the virtual environment. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What are the primary objectives for the class?
2. What do they really need to walk away with? What do we want them to learn and do as a result of attending this course?
3. What objectives can we adapt or simply remove from the class, if necessary? If I had to reduce the content by 20%, what would I consider least important?
4. What objectives are not open to change or compromise?

Taking the time to ensure you have a clear roadmap of where you want to go will help you regardless of whether you are adapting to your current environment or creating content to thrive in the environment of tomorrow.





Starting the Journey

Now that you have a roadmap, you are ready to begin the process of adapting your class for the virtual world. With your new “streamlined” objectives, it is time to start asking some more questions.

What activities do we use in the classroom to achieve the remaining objectives? Whether it be building paper towers to encourage oversight or conducting a gallery walk to share methods of effective communication, pay attention to what activities are related to the objectives listed on your new roadmap. Once you have these questions answered, ask yourself which of these methods need to be adapted. If you decide the objective tied to a paper tower is important, ask yourself how you can achieve the same outcome with another activity facilitated in a virtual group on-line? Take up the challenge to create an on-line activity that creates the same outcome, hopefully with the same level of excitement.





Learn the Technology

Every time I get into a new rental car, I find myself having to learn how to connect my phone, turn on the navigations system, and open the gas cover. Facilitating in a virtual environment is similar in nature. Not only will you have to rely on your old skills learned through years in a classroom, you will have to realize that facilitating in a virtual environment is significantly different than facilitating in a classroom setting. Many times you will not be able to see body language and other non-verbal feedback which a master facilitator uses to gauge and adapt to their class. In addition, without people being in the same room, having small group discussions and “shoulder shares” is only available if the on-line platform you use has that capability. Learning what tools are available allows you to better adapt and design a virtual classroom. Learning how to use surveys, polls, google docs, and other on-line resources can assist you in adapting or creating content that is fun and engaging, just like your classroom.





Get a Driver

Working in a virtual environment is a team sport. Just like a championship driver is constantly on the radio with his team, a virtual instructor needs a team to support them during the course. It may be only one person or a couple, but at a minimum there needs to be someone who launches polls, reviews polls, keeps an eye on attendance, answers questions in the chat box, launches review quizzes and facilitates course testing. In addition, an instructor may want to consider the value of someone available for technical support, especially for technical training. When a participant gets lost in a technical activity, the technical support person can contact them on a separate on-line meeting and help them get caught up. Having a “driver” can be the key to a successful, well organized, and smooth running session. In the event you do have a driver, it is important that you create a script of the course. This allows you and the driver to have a clear outline of who does what when.





Look Good and Sound Good or it's No Good

As we have adapted to working from home and using a virtual environment, many of us have become somewhat lackadaisical in dressing for work. Let's face it, below the desk many are wearing pajamas or shorts...at best. When it comes time to present however, it is important to dress appropriately as an instructor. Check into the meeting 30 minutes early so you can be prepared to greet trainees as they arrive. When you first log in, make sure you check your camera and look for the distractions listed below:

1. What's in the background? If your spouse is using a headset to watch Game of Thrones 20 feet away, make sure the camera is not showing any "distracting" footage in your background.
2. Speaking of backgrounds, setting up a solid background, or one that helps the participant focus on you, can be very helpful.





Look Good and Sound Good or it's No Good (cont.)

3. Make sure there are no distractions with your garment. Eggs on your shirt left over from your breakfast, a low-cut neckline or revealing shirts can be quiet distracting during a virtual event.
4. Ladies, make sure “nothing” is revealed from the waste up on camera that might be distracting. A loose flowing shirt or a scarf can ensure participants are focused on your content instead of elsewhere.
5. Complete a sound check and ensure your microphone and speakers are working before the course begins. A good directional microphone or headset can be a valuable investment in presenting as a professional.
6. Watch lighting, especially bright backgrounds that will result in lower lighting for your face. A small light kit may be a worthy investment in professionalism.





Be Prepared

The Scout motto is “be prepared.” This should be the motto for the professional virtual trainer as well. Invest the time in preparing for an exciting virtual event.

- Create a script so you and your driver know when an activity needs to be launched. If you have a background in theater you know the technical support team has a detailed script of when to turn on and off lights and microphones as well as when to prepare for stage changes. Create a script so everyone knows well in advance when something will be required during the course.
- Practice like you vote, early and often. Invest the time in practice sessions. Have friends listen in as you go through parts of the course. Test the polls, quizzes, and tests to make sure they work as planned.
- Have a back-up. Technical glitches will take place. What is the backup plan when this happens? Does your Zoom meeting have a back-up number when VOIP fails? Planning what you will do ahead of time is the key to remaining on task in a virtual environment.





Resources

We are facing exciting times. Virtual learning is being proven as an effective method of education and training. While we are adapting now, as professional trainers we need to be considering how we can plan to be more effective as trainers tomorrow. As you work to improve your virtual training skills, the following resource may be helpful.

Bob Pike Group – [Video and Podcasts](#)

Talented Learning - [COVID 19 Resources](#)

GoToTraining - [Resources and Overview](#)

ZOOM - [Tutorials](#)

A simple search concerning effective methods for a virtual training will also provide numerous resources to draw on while learning the skills to create and facilitate in the virtual environment.





About Michael



Michael Curtis is a certified Master Trainer who loves making learning fun and interactive. He has worked as a trainer for numerous government agencies at the federal, state and county level which has led him to be able to train around the world. A certified curriculum developer through both Langevin and Bob Pike, Michael enjoys creating training that is interactive, improves retention and is fun. He is a certified Master Facilitator and coach for the Leadership Challenge and is a Seven Habits of Highly Effective People consultant. Michael teaches a wide variety of courses in leadership, supervision, cultural diversity and helps develop other trainers as they grow in their classroom facilitation skills. He supervises a dedicated and industrious team of trainers located throughout the state of Texas. In addition to his daytime job he is a husband, father, deacon, marriage minister, and Sunday school director. For resources or to contact Michael please visit his website,

www.poortrainer.net

