



TRAINING

Virtual + Engaging

How to Bring Classroom Training Online



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Virtual + Engaging – How to Bring Classroom Training Online

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Work-At-Home Saves The Day

I heard it said best by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker during a televised coronavirus address. His remarks included the following details I have paraphrased:

“We had a 50-person contact center in Boston to handle unemployment inquiries,” he told the residents of MA. “All of a sudden, we have a 500-person contact center and they’re available to help you. I don’t know how they did it.”

Folks outside the contact center space rarely understand the adaptability and commitment of our professional colleagues. In urgent times of change, contact centers pivot on a dime with minimal service interruption, and even less applause.

Usually, we get to pivot back to the well-planned structure with the commonly known rules. The ruckus ends and normalcy returns. This ruckus, however, has some permanent changes.

Working at home has been successful for thousands of contact center employees and was enjoying a gradual expansion as businesses hand-picked their people, places and tools. Suddenly, the command to send everyone home has caused leaders to realize these workers may never need to come back. Even the individuals who want to return to the camaraderie of their high energy offices may not be given the option. The expanded pool of candidates and the lower overhead costs are just two of the reasons why work-at-home will be here-to-stay.

Work-At-Home Impact on Training

Most contact centers provide comprehensive training that includes 2-5 weeks of busy instructor-led days. Typically, this includes observing their colleagues on-the-job and jumping in to help as they gradually build their skills. Training continues on-the-job for 3-4 weeks of “nesting” where coaches provides instant assistance. If 20 new hires came on board this month, a company may assign as many as 4 dedicated team leaders as constant companions.

Who wants to do the math: 20 learners x 20 days of content x varied subject matter experts and trainers x on-the-job help from 4 coaches?

That’s a lot of moving parts to be considered and re-designed to create the level of competence and confidence companies expect.

Even a short up-skilling program on listening or handling anger needs to be well-thought-out before it will be as effective virtually as it has been when trainers are in the room with their learners.

VIRTUAL TRAINING THAT WORKS

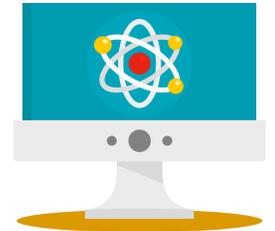
1. SET THE STAGE FOR YOUR PEOPLE

Engage individuals and help them become a virtual team.



2. USE EVERY CAPABILITY YOUR TECHNOLOGY OFFERS

Most web-meeting technology includes more capabilities than we realize. Here are a few examples.



3. REPLACE IN-HOUSE OBSERVATION or SIDE-BY-SIDES WITH PRE-RECORDED AUDIO + VIDEO

Let them see what they are aiming at without violating compliance laws.



4. GO HEAVY ON STORIES + GRAPHICS

People remember stories and pictures forever.

5. PROVIDE SELF-PACED ACTIVITIES

Strategic thinking, decision-making, memorizing key terms, navigating a knowledge base and finding answers are examples of task best performed alone and with plenty of time. Pre-work, work in between web meetings, etc.



6. PROVIDE TESTS THAT REMIND THEM HOW MUCH THEY HAVE LEARNED

Exams build confidence and competence.



7. PROVIDE AN AGENDA + BREAKS FOR TRAINING LASTING 60-MINUTES OR MORE

Facilitate at home workers time management



8. PASSIONATE DELIVERY

Enthusiasm comes through via webcam and audio

9. GIVE PERSONAL ATTENTION FROM SUPERVISORS + LEAD AGENTS

Leaders must bond with their teams during training to enhance engagement and results



10. MAKE TRAINERS EASY TO CONTACT

In this 24-7 business environment, you never know when a learner might need your help



BEST PRACTICES FOR **VIRTUAL TRAINING THAT WORKS**

1. SET THE STAGE FOR YOUR PEOPLE

Engage individuals and help them become a virtual team.

- A. Your learners need to feel they are at work and part of your team even when they are at home. Send them posters, mugs, blankets, laminated job aids and anything you can think of that will turn their home offices into your off-site business. Learn each person's favorite beverages and snacks then provide coupons or gift boxes as rewards for participation or high test scores.
- B. Help everyone become part of a team by creating a virtual space for photographs, personal stories and chat. Staff will use this to get to know each other, then help each other through training, then help each other on-the-job.
- C. Your trainers or speakers or subject matter experts need to feel comfortable with the online meeting tool you selected for virtual training delivery. Give them practice time before they run a lesson. Provide tips and tricks for creating interaction and assessing how well learners understand what they are teaching.



2. USE EVERY CAPABILITY YOUR TECHNOLOGY OFFERS

Most web-meeting technology includes more capabilities than we realize. Here are a few examples.

- A. PowerPoint uploaded and shared on a screen can provide great visual interest and information. Use it for sharing graphics that illustrate a point, photographs of the case study customer you are discussing, and instructions for an exercise the learners will work on while the trainer is silent.
- B. Look for the ability to create break out groups and see how easy it is to use. With a few clicks, you can separate folks into small groups who can hear each other and collaborate on exercises as if they were in the classroom together. Trainers can “drop in” on the groups to answer questions or observe role-play just like we would in a non-virtual setting. For most technology, only a single phone line is needed to create this cool, high-impact learning experience.
- C. Learners can mimic the experience of creating flip chart posters by using virtual whiteboards. Open their phone lines so they can present their work.
- D. Encourage the use of webcams during hourly discussions and unmute your phone lines. This helps folks who feel they must talk during training to get and stay fully engaged. Typing into chat boxes can be great, too, but does not create the same energy as live voices.
- E. Attach handouts for each lesson so folks who learn by taking notes will have useful supporting documentation. Adapt an SOP document by turning some of its text into “fill in the blanks”. Design a participant guide with space to complete the activities they will be assigned.
- F. Record the lessons so learners can go back and listen to refresh their memories before an exam. They may also use the recordings to practice skills on their own time, so do make them easily available day and night.



3. REPLACE IN-HOUSE OBSERVATION or SIDE-BY-SIDES WITH PRE-RECORDED AUDIO + VIDEO

Let them see what they are aiming at without violating compliance laws.

- A. They cannot sit with a top performer, but you can do better. Script and record “perfect calls” using a professional voice actor. Record calls that sound confused or angry or grateful on demand, as scripted. The cost is low, and learners gain enormous value from hearing what to do. Imperfect calls have learning value, too. Break calls into small chunks that correspond to the soft skill or product or process in your lessons. Learners can practice deciding what to say or do next. Play entire calls to end each training day or section reminding learners of your standards for quality [www.holdcom.com is an excellent resource for low cost calls that really teach.]
- B. Build some scripted calls around case or call screen video you already have recorded in your system. This facilitates the teaching of systems procedures. If you do not have existing screen recordings, PowerPoint offers this capability (as do many other tools).
- C. Create dynamic character and story-driven learning using a photo, an audio file and screen shots. Even two of these elements will help staff understand who they are helping, why, and how.



4. GO HEAVY ON STORIES + GRAPHICS

People remember stories and pictures forever.

One of the easiest ways to explain what you are going to teach, why it is important, and what learners will know how to do is to introduce a character who they will eventually be able to help.

"Meet Maribel, she is your new hire from Canada now living in Wisconsin. She speaks French and English and is excited to use both languages in her new job as your medical device product specialist. She has never worked from home before and is nervous about being on her own without a team lead or supervisor to help her. By the end of this whitepaper, you should have at least 5 good ways to help Maribel come onboard and be successful."



Meet Maribel



5. PROVIDE TESTS THAT REMIND THEM HOW MUCH THEY HAVE LEARNED

Exams build confidence and competence.

- Mix up assessment styles but keep expectations high by setting the passing grade at 85%. Multiple-choice, fill in the blanks, explain a procedure, complete a procedure, find information and record an explanation, etc. These are all good examples of methods for testing knowledge and understanding.
- eLearning technology is excellent for programming assessments that automatically tally the score. This can save trainers a lot of time receiving, scoring and returning exams.
- Build in time to review and discuss the exams to reinforce what has been learned and correct any misunderstandings.
- Have a second version of each test with similar questions in a different order. Any learner who does not pass the first exam can take the second exam and achieve success.



6. PROVIDE SELF-PACED ACTIVITIES

Strategic thinking, decision-making, memorizing key terms, navigating a knowledge base and finding answers are examples of tasks best performed alone and with plenty of time.

- eLearning, when well-designed, transfers knowledge and helps learners apply it to real world situations. Make sure the feedback for each activity thoroughly explains what went right or what went wrong. Use lots of graphics and action to keep eLearning from feeling like a dull, online memo.
- Games and quizzes can help folks review what they learned or prepare for tomorrow's learning. Crossword puzzles are easy to create online and support memorization of important terms that must be spelled correctly. Match games help folks connect key concepts together. Board game and TV show games can award badges and prizes for speed and accuracy with procedures and policies. Design a mix of learning experiences for new hires to grab each week.
- Case studies come alive with dossiers that include customer photos, account history, motivations and new complaints. Learners can use their notes, knowledge base, brand website and other tools to map out resolutions or prescribe remediations.

BEST PRACTICES FOR **VIRTUAL TRAINING THAT WORKS**



7. **PROVIDE AN AGENDA + BREAKS**

Facilitate at home workers time management.

Create excitement for each hot topic with a well-written list of takeaways from a day of training. Make it easy for participants to plan their restroom breaks so they don't miss an activity.



8. **PASSIONATE DELIVERY**

Enthusiasm comes through via webcam and audio.

- A. Remember to perform for the class. Tactical stories, funny memories, and enthusiastic descriptions will create engaged listeners.
- B. Ask questions and open phone lines so they can pipe in with their responses. This moves them from listeners to participants.
- C. Show genuine joy when they succeed and credible empathy when they struggle.



9. **GIVE PERSONAL ATTENTION FROM SUPERVISORS + LEAD AGENTS**

Leaders must bond with their teams during training to enhance engagement and results.

- A. Get everyone involved in the virtual training experience. Supervisors can "attend" and provide a personal story as a way for new hires to get to know their leaders.
- B. Schedule one-to-one phone time as part of the curriculum so at home agents can bond with the people who are there to support them.
- C. Conduct virtual "huddles" in between planned learning modules where teams can discuss and practice skills as if they were all in the office together.



10. **MAKE TRAINERS EASY TO CONTACT**

In this 24-7 business environment, you never know when a learner might need your help.

Shift work can be challenging for folks working at home and is especially difficult for new hires who chose second or third shifts for good reasons. Avoid losing good people by having a designated go-to trainer for each shift beginning on day 1 of training.

About the author

Ronna Caras, President, Caras Training is a sought after Speaker, Author and Curriculum Developer with more than 30 years experience training customer service and sales front line staff and leaders. She is known for innovative, real world solutions to employee development challenges that create measurable results. She can be reached at rcaras@carastraining.com; www.carastraining.com; **508.527.9599**.