

HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF VIRTUAL TRAINING

By Elaine Carr | June 10, 2020

ICMI has over a decade of experience offering virtual classroom training, and since COVID19, has more than doubled its virtual course offerings. We've spent considerable time honing our live-virtual training methods to make them as interactive, engaging, and effective as possible. In this article, we'll be exploring some of the thoughts behind virtual training, and how to maximize its value.

I sat down with Elaine Carr, ICMI's Instructional Design Manager, to learn about the process of adapting in-person courses to a virtual environment. Elaine designs our training courses, but she's also experienced at working from home and managing remote employees.

Andrew Gilliam: How do expectations for in-person training compare with expectations for virtual training?

Elaine Carr:

I think many people expect virtual training to be more like a webinar than training. They expect they can multitask and half-listen while they're doing other things. That doesn't work in virtual training, because you only get out of training what you put into it. All of our training is highly interactive with lots of discussion questions, creative and problem-solving activities, whiteboards, breakout groups, and audience feedback, either verbally or through live chat.

If you come in expecting that it's going to be like a webinar, it might not be as good a return on your investment. However, if you come to training with the mindset that you're going to be focused and mentally present, there's potential for an enormous return on your investment. You have to go in with the attitude that "I'm going to give it my all; this has my full attention. I am going to participate and be fully present."

It's important to schedule the time to really focus on the training; put the "do not disturb" sign out. If you usually work in an office, arrange a day to work from home, so you're not distracted by your surroundings. Check your email before class and on breaks, but otherwise, put everything away. This focus helps learners get the most out of training time, and it's also a nice break from the daily routine. If you're a manager sending your employees to training, you should let them know that unplugging is expected and encouraged.

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Andrew Gilliam: What else can leaders do to help employees make the most out of training?

Elaine Carr:

I wrote a whole article about how managers are vital to the training process! Before training, sit down with your employees and discuss what you both want to accomplish. What will they get out of the training that will help them on the job? Clarify your expectations early on, and ask what they want out of training, too.

Sometimes it's hard to know what that is ahead of time, but use our online course descriptions and outlines. All of our courses have detailed outlines explaining precisely what each unit of the course will cover. Even if the manager hasn't gone to the training themselves, they can use these outlines to start the dialogue.

Following up after the training is also vitally important. Ask learners what the experience was like, what they've learned, and topics they'd like to learn more about. Managers should help connect training to the job by asking how training topics can be applied in a concrete way. This shouldn't be a one-time conversation - every time you have a one-on-one meeting, go back to those topics and ask, "how were you able to use what you learned this week?"

We don't send people to training for the sake of sending them to training. Sure, it makes them feel valued and helps them feel important, but ultimately we send employees to training to help make them better at their jobs. That's how I design training: to help people do their jobs better.

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Andrew Gilliam: How do you know if the training worked? How do you know if you've gotten your money's worth out of the investment?

Elaine Carr:

You should see some kind of change in behavior. It may be small things. For example, if they understand service levels better, they might make better decisions or follow processes more closely, such as getting permission from workforce management before taking someone off the phones for a coaching session. It might be how someone talks about the topic after training; this may demonstrate a more in-depth understanding. They'll learn new tips, techniques, and strategies for handling situations that they apply.

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Andrew Gilliam: Have you had to adapt training content or delivery methods for virtual classrooms?

Elaine Carr:

In ICMI's standard live courses, we do a lot of activities, whether it's delivered in person or virtually. Some activities, especially physical activity, won't work virtually. You don't have someone physically sitting next to you, so we have had to come up with different ways to build those connections virtually in our Live-Virtual courses.

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Andrew Gilliam: Is there anything else you want the world to know about ICMI training?

Elaine Carr:

People are the most important out of all of this; they're even more important than the work or the training itself. If we take a detour from my instruction to meet the needs of the learners, that's not a bad thing. Work is important, the curriculum is important, but people come first.