



Better Training through Technology

Rain T. Van Den Berg, MPH and John E. VanDenBerg, Ph.D. (2020)

Introduction

Good training is more important than ever before, and the way training is done may never be the same again. The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated these changes, but shifts in training methods have been coming for years. We understand that having physical, in-person training involves logistical challenges, wasted time, and possible travel costs. When the actual cost of holding in-person trainings is calculated, physical trainings don't always pay for themselves. Ten people in a training session for three hours, assuming an hourly rate of \$20, can be a cost of over \$6,000, not to mention the travel time spent getting there.

In-person trainings can have positive benefits (especially team building for a new group that is getting to know each other), but we have found we can replicate these benefits with virtual technologies. This paper offers an overview of how to use the virtual environment in a way that produces highly skilled participants, and gives tips and guidelines for presentations.

Delivering Training Where It's Needed

At a recent training in Alaska led by Rain, over 100 participants from around the state met together on computers, tablets, and phones to learn about bridging cultural understandings of developmental milestones in children. The first 30 minutes gave an overview of state projects and strategies used for outreach to Alaska Native and Tagalog communities. The next 45 minutes featured a parent panel where parents from those communities shared their experience, offered advice, and answered questions. In the last 45 minutes, participants met in small groups of 4–5 people to discuss case studies, then returned for a whole group debrief facilitated by a developmental pediatrician. From the training evaluation, we saw that we had achieved our learning objectives, as people were able to answer the competency-based questions. Many people who had never experienced anything like the training were amazed. Most loved the technology and found the variety of speakers and activities refreshing and engaging. People marveled at being able to join with others all over the state and learn from a diverse group of participants. For most, it was the first “normal” work activity since the COVID-19 outbreak began, and they welcomed the opportunity to learn. It also helped a large group of professionals spanning thousands of miles acquire the community education credits needed for a licensure year.

Ways to Engage Learners

As Bryan and colleagues noted about adult learning principles (2009), training is improved by considering how people learn. When considering virtual learning, it is important to note the strategies that can be used to reinforce learning principles.

People need to know why they are learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin and end with pre-posted learning objectives that will frame learner expectations and demonstrate that you accomplished your goals. State your objectives in ways that can be measured.• Example: Accomplishing the objective “Participants will be able to list three ways they would...” can be measured by whether or not participants are able to list three ways on the evaluation.
People are motivated to learn by the need to solve problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage learners with virtual activities where they can apply the information you want them to know. This helps cement learning and makes it more interesting.• Many learners also like to solve problems in small groups or pairs, which can be done via virtual breakout rooms using case studies, learning games, or discussion activities.

<p>People’s previous experience must be respected and built upon.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-surveys are one way to know your audience and tailor content to current abilities. • During the training, tie your content to what’s happening in the chat or to ideas shared by participants. This establishes respect for their experiences and helps everyone in the training make those connections. • Actively thank learners for sharing experiences.
<p>The content should match people’s background and diversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present content in multiple ways to accommodate diverse learning styles. • Example: Simple PowerPoint slides with your main points and pictures can help get your messages across in different ways. • Use short videos and personal stories that will mirror the experiences of your audience and help them connect.
<p>People need to be actively involved in the learning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with participants, ask for their opinions, and invite them to share relevant experiences or challenges they have faced related to the content. • Build in a good amount of time to allow for audience participation and response. Aim for more engagement, and less lecture. • Have them problem solve and apply content to their own situations using the training content. • Use the versatility of distance learning to engage learners in different ways: via writing in the chat, speaking on camera, or working in small groups. • Many platforms offer real time polling as another way to get feedback and engage learners.

Activity: Which of the following describes how you would like to learn a new skill? (Select all that are true for you)

- Having a brief lesson followed by a chance to solve a problem using that information.
- Watching a video of an expert talk about the topic for an hour.
- Listening to a funny story that also teaches about the skill.
- Discussing a case study about the skill with a group of colleagues.

Participant Engagement

In virtual trainings, especially if you are training a group that will receive multiple trainings, the participants need to know each other and have a sense of who is participating. However, if there are over 10 people in the virtual training, normal introductions can take too long. In these instances, the trainer may ask each participant for a sentence or two about themselves and provide their responses in a list of participants that can be offered to everyone in advance (e.g., *Lynn Smithers is a child welfare worker from Smithville*). The other option is to take the descriptions from participants and group them, giving some but not all names. For example, “We have 45 people from northern communities on this call. We have too many people for individual introductions, but I want you to know that on the call, we have 30 out of 45 people who are working directly with children and families, like Manual in Juneau, who is a residential services aide! The other 15 are supervisors like Reba in Nome, who supervises 8 CPS workers!”

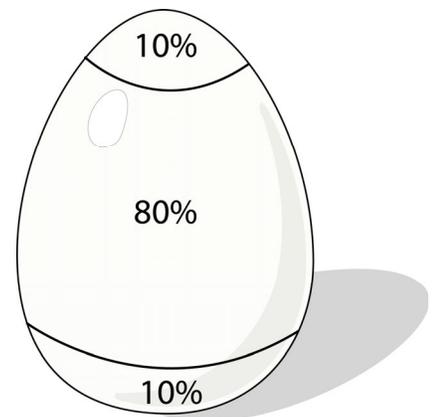
Activity: Interacting with Participants

Which of the following answers is **not** an effective way to engage with training participants?

- A. Use their names as you call on people or respond to questions from the chat box.
- B. Ask questions that participants can answer in the chat box.
- C. Save all questions until the end of the training.
- D. Make your responses to questions brief and to the point.

Repetition Learning

Our friend Patricia Miles developed a visualization tool called the “Learning Egg” In the egg, 10% of learners almost instantly understand a point being trained. They get it! The next 80% need some level of repetition of the learning point. The final 10% may never learn what is being taught. Most learners learn through hearing points expressed in different ways. The average person being trained needs four repetitions of a learning point to retain it in longer term memory. As you develop your training, decide which learning points may need to be taught in different ways or require brief activities. More complex ideas may need videos or activities that offer ways to apply the learning.



Body Language of Trainer/Facilitator

There is no substitute for an interesting, engaged, and happy trainer. How many times have you seen a presentation where the trainer/facilitator makes you think, “I would like to know that person!” Smile, ask questions, listen intently, laugh, and use humor. Move your hands and arms; become an expressive, reciprocal trainer. Talking heads are boring. When you are addressing the participants, try to look directly at your camera as much as you can, even if it feels artificial. For your participants, it will appear that you are looking at them and talking to them with eye contact, which gives a sense of connection. If you are new to this technology, you might be self-conscious looking at your own face on the screen. It is possible to mute your view of your face while allowing other to see you. With practice, you will learn to ignore your own image and focus on others.

Activity: What Makes Trainers Great (or Not)?

Grab a piece of paper and list three or more qualities of the best trainer you have seen, then list at least three qualities of the worst trainer.

Using Humor

The first rule about using humor: Don’t use it if you are not funny! John spent many years training across North America. He was privileged to train in Saskatchewan, Canada, which is an enormous province. Because travel is prohibitive, the Provincial mental health authorities used distance learning and taught each presenter key skills about training remotely. John would sit in a TV studio in Regina and train dozens of sites at a time. In one training, John’s co-trainer was someone who dressed all in pink. His shoes, pants, shirt, socks—all bright pink. Apparently, this is how he always dressed. When John started his lecture, he said to the camera “Could you put the camera on Bill? I just want to express how totally drab he makes me feel!” John told a story or two and kept using humor and learned later that many participants rated the training as one of the best they had watched.



Additional Tips for Using Zoom or Other Video Conferencing Platforms

If you are leading a small training, it may be that you will perform all of the following roles. If you will have more than 20 people in your training, consider getting help to maximize the engagement, positive experience, and impact of your training.

Have a skilled facilitator who:

- Greets people as they log on and performs a quick sound check with each person.
- Makes sure each person knows how to mute their mic.
- Keeps track of time and begins as close to the start time as possible.
- Leads the training while keeping an eye on the chat box to respond verbally to comments and questions from participants.
- Supports presenters by helping them stay within their timeframe, as well as helps manage participant comments and questions for the presenter(s).

Use tech support. For a larger training (over 22), it is best to have 1–2 dedicated tech support people who have clear roles during the training. This coordination allows a smooth experience for everyone. For learners new to the technology, it is good to require that they log into the call 20–30 minutes before the training starts. Some platforms offer practice logins for learners who are nervous about the training (for example, Zoom users can use the link <https://zoom.us/test>).

Role of tech person 1:	Role of tech person 2:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists people who are having a hard time logging on or having issues with equipment. • Responds to tech questions via text (not voice calls—get a second person to assist those who need a call.) • Monitors the chat and responds to tech questions. If the facilitator has missed an important content comment, they let the facilitator know. • On trainings with more than 25 participants, they can routinely scroll through the multiple pages of faces and do a visual check on participants. • If there are breakout rooms in the training, they can help get participants in and out for activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors the chat and assists participants if tech person 1 is overwhelmed. • This person can provide phone assistance for those needing a call instead of text. • If attendance needs to be taken, this person can take screen shots of the pages of participants and check them off of the registration sheet.

Security Considerations

It is important to maximize the security of your virtual training:

- **Use a password when setting up your meeting** to prevent unwanted visitors from taking over the host controls (called “Zoombombing”).
- **If you plan to record the session, you must notify participants and let them know how it will be used.** It is possible to only record the speaker portion so that participants joining by video are not shown in the recording.
- **If your training will include identifiable medically sensitive information, be sure you are using a platform that meets HIPAA standards for compliance.** Zoom has appropriate encryption measures in place and will sign a Business Associate Agreement with organizations to ensure HIPAA compliance.

Equipment

Depending on the organization, participants may not have access to desktops or laptops. In a recent virtual training of parents of youth with complex emotional needs, John found that 25% of the trainees did not have cameras on their desktops or laptops. However, everyone involved had a smart phone and was able to be coached into participating through their phones or tablets.

For those without cameras, a camera that clips onto the laptop or desktop screen can now be purchased for \$25 or less. Overall, participants who are seated in front of a computer can more easily be seen by others, avoiding distracting views as a result of participating on a smart phone. Headsets are also strongly recommended to make it easier for the participant to hear and be heard, as well as to reduce distracting background noise when they are unmuted. Headsets for use on video calls can be purchased for \$25 or less.

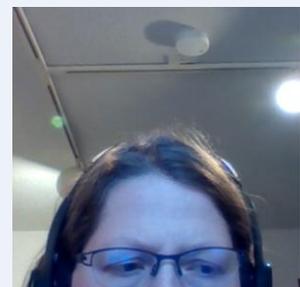
Activity: Which Presenter View is Best?



A



B



C

Conclusion

Delivering strong training is a challenge in any time. The good news is that numerous technological advances have made virtual training a viable option. In rural communities, especially those in large geographical areas, virtual training modes will become the accepted way to deliver training, even outside the current crisis. It is more important than ever to have proficient skills in providing virtual training.

Authors

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John E. VanDenBerg, Ph.D. John is one of the founders of the Wraparound Process. For more than 30 years, he traveled the world training in Wraparound. During those years, he conducted on-site training with over a million people. He retired from the road in 2005 and lives in a beautiful mountain valley in Western Colorado. He is currently a volunteer for the Open Table, a national anti-poverty movement similar to Wraparound, and is writing about training on maximizing the use of social and relational capital in supporting people with complex needs. His recent article [Virtual Technologies Work! Team-Based Supports and Planning](#) (April 2020) has been widely disseminated.

References

Bryan, R.L., Kreuter, M.W., & Brownson, R.C. (2009) Integrating adult learning principles into training for public health practice. *Health promotion practice*, 10(4), 557-563.

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