

Solving “Technology Immunity” Through Blended Learning

By Frank Sarr

I recently spoke with a field sales person from an organization that has all the learning technology imaginable, especially given the number of people within the company who were devoted to elearning. This person said that what they really needed to do is go back to when people were forced to attend a class and demonstrate that they learned what they needed to learn. The person described this training need as “forced engagement.”

Forced Engagement (<i>noun</i>) – compulsory involvement in the learning process

The reason given for this observation was that even though so much learning technology was available to their employees, the employees were not even looking at it. From a supervisory standpoint, it had gotten to the point where field management had grown frustrated with the fact that the employees were not taking advantage of what was available. The conclusion was to put trainees into a situation where they will take advantage of what is available. A return to “forced engagement” - even if that meant going back to classroom training.

A similar conversation explored the idea of people becoming immune to webcasts. In this case, the person we were talking with said there were so many webcasts being conducted in their company that people – even when participating – were not paying attention to what was being presented. Actually, she felt that the webcasts were becoming more informational and less educational. Participants had their telephones on mute and they were reading and responding to emails while the webcast was going on.

A true blended learning experience addresses both – forced engagement and webcast immunity. To hang your hat on self paced elearning as the source of learning is a risk that you may not want to take any longer. The click and certify approach does not correlate to one’s ability to apply what was supposed to be learned. Without an expectation to show up, on time and prepared, the learning is not a priority and it moves down the ‘to do’ list as other things move up the list. So it is critical that the learner know that (1) there is a time frame in which the learning is to take place and (2) there is a time and place where they will have to show up to demonstrate what they have learned.

As far as being immune to webcasts, reinforcing concepts by using elearning technology to present back what the learner should already have learned is a waste of everyone’s time. First of all, the learning being repurposed through the webcast is regurgitating information that should have already been digested by the learner and (2) as long as the webcast is repeating information learners are going to forget about elearning and just show up for the webcast. The “webcast” associated with a blended learning experience should be the time when all the participants will be given 5- 10 minutes of voice time to demonstrate their ability to apply the new information and techniques they have just covered. It is said that “if it is not clear in our minds, it will sound worse when we speak it.” This is the time and place where we listen to the participants “speak it” rather than trainers telling class participants what they should say when they speak it.

Our team routinely integrates forced engagement and active participation in facilitation sessions administered by conference call. We recently asked a group of account executives and account managers how this experience differs from other training experiences and here were their answers:

It was different because it required me to take the information and utilize it during the training.

The concept of preparedness, i.e., the need to be ready each Monday and for a final exam, and ready to respond verbally

Made you actively participate with accountability in checkpoint discussions.

I have never done a phone type of training, usually face to face with a group. But I do feel that it was an effective way to train when tasked with such a large group that is essentially all over the country.

This training program was different from others in which I participated in because it forced you to internalize a lot of the material and make it your own. With the oral assessment each week, it helped me try and build my presentation skills, rather than just sitting through an online training program like I have done in the past.

This training program was different because it was extremely interactive. Each learner had a part to play and all were given equal time and positive reinforcement.

The weekly session which tested your knowledge of the training module was unique. I really thought it was helpful in mastering the content.

This training program was more structured than others in which I have participated. Set materials and times helped me schedule my "homework." The checkpoint meetings held us accountable for learning the materials, and I liked that.

Technology was never mentioned even though we know that these people prepared anywhere from 1 – 2 hours per facilitation session. All the responses reflect that the technology was a means to an end not the end, and learning was the differentiator.

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