



Did Training Save Lives?

By Jay B. Bowden
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Like most of the world, I was in awe of the skill of Captain Chesley Sullenberger, who landed USAir Flight #1549 in the Hudson River and saved 155 lives. It occurred to me that he knew what to do because he had trained on a simulator and practiced the procedure. His TRAINING saved lives!

Simulation is a training technique we routinely employ for pilots, astronauts, fire and medical personnel, but don't use it as often in our less critical, but not necessarily less important training needs.

Simulations mimic an item, system, or event, so that the learner can understand, experiment, and practice, before having to do it in reality. In our world, true simulations are most often used to "replicate" a system or simulate behavior of a customer in a typical or unusual interaction. They are, for many reasons, a nearly perfect learning medium.

One of the most common uses is in teaching core teller or platform systems. Unfortunately, the only simulations learners sometimes get are the "practice sets" created by Trainers. As simulations, these have severe limitations. First, because of printing costs, the number of practiced opportunities is limited. The bigger problem is that they are typically used in a live training environment, where social pressure, time constraints, and the inability to "explore" all factor in. If you have the ability to develop, or have one developed for you, a true self-managed simulation will increase retention and the amount of transactions learned, and yet significantly decrease the elapsed time of learning and, interestingly, costs!

In many ways, simulation training is better than the real experience. It compresses time and there aren't other extraneous factors. Essentially, the simulation is *optimized* for the learner. From the financial institution's point of view, learning is faster and therefore less costly. Mistakes can be made as a party of the learning...not on the job, where errors have a higher cost.

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Evaluate your organization's training and look for opportunities where creating simulations can benefit both you and the learner. For example, are you going to be getting a new teller or transaction system in the near future where many people will be trained? A simulation is perfect, because not only can you train everyone quickly, but the simulation can then be used by new hires from that point on. Thus, you get more "bang for the buck".

Another prime candidate for simulation training is training your new hires in a classroom environment. The time, facilitator, and travel costs generally break even with a simulation development cost in less than a year.

Simulations are engaging, interactive, and an effective way to train. Just ask the passengers of Flight #1549.

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