



July 31, 2009

Using More Technology-Driven Experiential Exercises

By Jay B. Bowden

As we forge more and more into eLearning, I find myself jumping to the other side of the pendulum. For years, I have lobbied for eLearning components which can do so much to improve retention, interest, and performance mastery in many learning opportunities.

At the same time, I recommended *blended* experiences so that we do not, as my mother used to say, "Throw the baby out with the bath water". Converting what exclusively was in the classroom to exclusively eLearning is not always an equal tradeoff, particularly when the eLearning was "rapid development" and minimally experiential.

So now as organizations charge head-long into eLearning because of its huge cost savings, the illusion of inexpensive development and the ease of delivery, I've had to race to the other side of the pendulum. eLearning curriculum misses just as many learning opportunities as an all in-class curriculum...just different ones!

eLearning and live classes share one thing in common - content. After that, there is very little similarity. eLearning is self-instructional and in-class is a facilitated group. eLearning permits structured and consistent feedback, and facilitated classes permit unstructured and sometimes challenging tangents. You know the drill...a really good eLearning program is a wonderful thing – and so is a really good facilitated learning experience. So, let's *combine* the two when possible.

The problem is that the decision to develop more and more eLearning generally was NOT a Training Department initiative. It has often been a budget response to delivery costs and issues. Many departments were forced into eLearning because of branch requirements, logistics, distance, and a myriad of reasons that make online training better sense. So, the once experiential exercise-laden classrooms have been replaced with economical online programs that are sometimes seen as a nuisance, an interruption in the day, and about as popular as chewing tin foil! Even if you acquire highly interactive and experiential online

[...training you can bank on](#)

programs, such as those TRC Interactive develops, you still will be missing the experiential opportunities that once were available in classrooms.

What many Instructional Designers are forgetting is that the blended solution need not include a traditional classroom experience. I have participated in, or developed dozens of programs where it is *blended*, but uses *electronic* facilitation.

Be creative! Use webinars, phone conferences, video messages, mobile text chats, instant message chat exchanges, and if you cannot do it synchronously, then set up blogs. With today's technology, it is often simple and inexpensive. The key is to have the learners participating, sharing, and experiencing, just as they might have in a live, well-developed facilitated experience.

You can create discussion groups, role-plays, solution searches, team challenges, and many experiential learning opportunities using the technologies available to you. You will increase retention, interest, feedback, and job applicability...all without anyone leaving their desk! Remember a *blended* experience does not only mean blending a live course with technology – it also can mean blending multiple technologies!