

Hand Me the Remote - Ensuring a Successful Remote Learning Session

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The convergence of three trends - high-speed internet access, new technical education requirements, and time and budget restrictions - make Remote Learning an attractive item on anyone's on-going education budget.

But, does Remote Learning truly mean a remote, 'hands-off' training session? This article will describe ways that both students and training coordinators can involve themselves in the process to ensure a successful result.

Remote Learning, especially on-line courses that are available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, offers tremendous benefits to students, even ones with highly variable, complex schedules. At the same time, however, for those of us who fall squarely into the Procrastinator category, it also defines our worst challenge - picking up the mouse and clicking on the login screen.

Based on nearly a decade of experience in developing and administering on-line ITIL certification courses, I have assembled the following tips that will help individual students, as well as their sponsoring organizations, to achieve maximum benefit out of their on-line educational investment.

Students: Make it Easy on Yourself

We all know who we are; we spend more brain cycles and time analyzing (i.e., worrying) about when to actually take the course than we do within the course itself. Just because the course does not require your presence at a prescribed date and time at a prescribed location, does not mean that you should not adopt a structured approach to taking the course.

Follow these simple steps to create a learning plan that fits with your schedule and that you can follow:

1. **Set up your login profile and log into the course as soon as you receive your user name and password.** This gives you an immediate preview of the course structure, gets the URL into your browser history and ensures your login information is correct. Unless you have a meticulous email filing system, waiting just a few days almost certainly guarantees a lengthy search of your archives for that elusive information - or a call to the training provider's Service Desk.
2. **Set up a schedule for yourself to study the course.** It does not have to be detailed or complex. Most courses easily chunk down into segments that can be covered in 30-45 minutes. Set aside the same time each day to go through the modules one-by-one. If the course allows unlimited logins, you can always pick up where you left off if you have to exit a learning session prematurely. Make a list of the modules and your schedule, and check off each module when you have completed it.
3. **Take advantage of the practice exercises.** The practice exercises that accompany most courses provide excellent checkpoints to make sure you understand the course material to the required level. If the course offers the ability to retake these exercises, retake them as often as you can to chart your learning progress. No cheating, please. Do not write down the correct answers. Approach each session as though you are seeing the exercise for the first time.
4. **Study with your colleagues.** One of the things I learned in graduate school was the benefits of a study group in understanding study material and relating it to your present environment. Form a 'Brown-Bag-for-Lunch Group' and meet with other students to discuss the course and the practice exercises. This 'more heads are better than one' approach often provides insight into concepts that are new and different to some members and quite familiar to others, and vice-versa.
5. **Learning is a life-long endeavor.** As the technological world evolves, all of us are learning many new things that

did not even exist a decade or generation ago. Relax, and enjoy opening your mind to new horizons. There promise to be many more horizons in the future.

Training Administrators: Get the Results You Want

Training administrators must put some skin in the game also. Herewith are the facts of life for effectively administering on-line training in the corporate environment.

1. **Communicate with the students.** When it comes to assembling lists of attendees for an online course, be sure to include the students. In the press to get names and email addresses to the course provider, administrators must remember to address the students as well so they know who has enrolled them. If possible, ask the Course Registrar for a sample of the course registration email, so that students can set their spam filters to expect this critical communication.
2. **Test your firewalls.** Before undertaking a large-scale deployment of remote learning, work with someone in your network security area to test the course in your security situation. Modern browsers work on almost any modern machine, but corporate security firewalls may inhibit certain configurations. Your security team can help determine whether 'trusted site' security access should be set up for a particular course.
3. **Set student expectations.** See the above tip for setting schedules. Let students know what is expected of them. If they must complete a course by a particular date, make sure they know what it is. If students have any questions about why they are taking the course, give them an in-house contact. If they will be taking a certification exam, give them the parameters - when, where, how, etc.
4. **Monitor student progress.** Work with the Course Registrar to determine how you can monitor the students' progress through the course. However, all the progress reports and email notifications in the world may not be sufficient to get the procrastinators among us in gear. Be prepared to 'remind' students of their commitment to finish the course by the established time.
5. **Clarify when to study.** Again, see above tip for setting schedules. Let the students know the policy for taking an online course. Can they take it on company time, or are they expected to take it only during their personal time? If they are taking it on company time, be prepared to juggle schedules a bit to allow sufficient uninterrupted study time; e.g., it is not realistic to expect forward-facing staff such as the Service Desk to do any meaningful study in the 5 minutes of downtime between calls. This is your call, vis-à-vis company policy.
6. **Identify a Mentor.** Anyone who has ever had a Mentor take them under their wing appreciates how a Mentor 'connects the dots' to tie general and theoretical concepts to the real world that surrounds us. This type of learning does not count its success in test scores and lessons completed, but rather in defining results in the operating environment. ITIL training, likewise, can benefit from a mentor who can tie the learning objects of the training modules to the corporate initiatives in place. You may find ITIL mentors within your own environment, or you may work with outside ITIL subject matter experts to provide this service.

Summary

Remote on-line learning courses offer great ways to efficiently and economically bring training to where it is needed. However, some fundamental rules still apply. Follow them and receive true value for your training investment!