

# Using Virtual Classrooms as a Catalyst for Change

More than one survey suggest that most people multitask during webinars. Since as trainers our mission is to impart knowledge and skills, change hearts and minds, and improve actions and results, we've got a challenge.

In this webinar I took ideas from many of my favorite books on the subject of change and 'connected the dots' between their suggestions and what we can do pragmatically in a virtual classroom.

This handout summarizes the key ideas in the webinar, kindly sponsored by Citrix GoToTraining and TrainingIndustry.com. It is not a word-for-word recap...since we were demonstrating an interactive experience, no document would do that justice. Watching the recording is *highly* recommend for that.

Finally, since one of the things we're keen on at 1080 Group is being 'evidence-based,' we're always looking for ways to turn research into actionable insight. If you'd be kind enough to participate, the following surveys are 1) anonymous, 2) short and 3) will let you see the results at the end.

Why do attendees leave webinars? <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WhyLeaveWebinars>

When should you hold a webinar? <https://www.research.net/s/WhenToHoldWebinars>

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**Create a sense of presence**

Unfortunately many learners will have experienced webinars with almost no engagement, and they often show up to virtual classrooms expecting to not participate. Worse, they're sitting at their desk with little sense of the 'shared experience'...unless we do something about it.

- Open up your tools. It's hard to have a realtime conversation if you have to go hunting for questions or raised hands
- Paint a vision verbally. Remind them they're part of a group...if not a large group
- Demonstrate 1:1 connections. Use the attendee list to call on learners by name (some tools like GoToTraining actually have an 'attentiveness meter'...use it to 'keep an eye' on the room :)
- Facilitate common connection. Today's webinar was a large one, so we had public chat turned off to protect privacy (and used Twitter for those who wanted to chat). Often, however, you may turn on group chat for open written discussion among learners (or even on *and* off in the same session as called for by the exercises you design)

### **Use what you *don't* say to get attention**

As John Medina points out in *Brain Rules*, it's important (even in a physical classroom) to break things up frequently. In the virtual classroom there are a *lot* of ways to do this, but one that's often overlooked is to 'break state' and draw attention by not saying something.

- Ask a question that requires looking at the slide to answer
- Let a slide be how you finish a sentence. In other words, you might say, "Here's the challenge, which leaves us feeling like... <slide change>"
- Tip: don't use any one tactic too much or it'll start to be a bit gimmicky

### **Connect the dots to the purpose**

In Dan Pink's *Drive* he notes that when it comes to motivation, there's a gap between what science knows and what business does. Instead, he argues we're motivated by autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

In the webinar I then shared a story about a factory worker who knew clearly how he added value to the whole company with his broom. We then, as a group, worked through a hypothetical scenario (which was a lot of fun with 900 of you!).

- Make the why bigger than the how. We're all motivated to change in certain contexts, and often it's for a purpose we understand
- Remember, it's rarely just the content that causes change. It's what is experienced as a benefit from putting the new knowledge or skills into action

### **Personalize with a picture; reiterate instructions visually**

Here we cut to some middle-of-the-session Q&A.

- Personalize with a picture. Yes, you can use a web cam, but for many it's not available or practical. A picture of yourself doesn't have to be a portrait...just be you!
- Reiterate instructions visually. Someone may or may not have caught your directions in the beginning (late? multitasking?). It's easy to put up a picture that says "do this" to better engage all, especially those who are more attuned visually than verbally

### **Ask your audience what or when is best**

This example was one showing the results of a poll (from a previous webinar) that asked learners their preferences on time of day and day of week. Key: this doesn't have to be a poll...tests, registration pages, all kinds of tools can help. But the 'autonomy' motivator doesn't always have to mean "do everything myself" (not always practical), but we tap into it when we give our learners a voice in the outcome.

- Use realtime poll or test results to adjust and personalize to your class
- Build understanding over time to better plan and deliver in a way that resonates with them

The next section used Dan and Chip Heath's fabulous book *Switch as the basis* (interesting review here: [http://www.usatoday.com/money/books/reviews/2010-05-17-switch17\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/books/reviews/2010-05-17-switch17_ST_N.htm)).

### **"Direct the rider" with a complete idea in the slide title**

One study found that complete ideas in slide titles improved content retention. A benefit for us in the virtual classroom...if we know we have pressured attention spans, it's a great way to help your key idea land with someone who may only glance at what you're showing.

- Use a complete thought. Commonly slide titles end up being categories or unspecific descriptors. Bonus idea: keep things moving by changing up how many slides you use...one idea to a slide (not more content or time, just more slides covering the same content)
- Pay (new) attention to your font size. A longer sentence might not look as good in some templates and you'll need to adjust

### **"Motivate the elephant" with chunking**

As the Heath brothers point out, sometimes what looks like laziness is exhaustion. One way to deal with this is to "shrink the change." Further, we know that "spaced repetition" is a valuable way to reinforce (remember...it's better to practice piano a little every day than cramming on Saturday).

- Break longer sessions into shorter ones. Virtual classrooms make it a lot easier to break up longer training sessions into shorter chunks (that are now easier to attend in busy schedules)
- Consider blending in-person and virtual instructor led segments as one way of accomplishing this

### **Turn tools on and off**

More sophisticated web conferencing tools don't just expose a feature to you (e.g., "hand up"), but make it possible to turn those on and off on the fly. As you advance in your instructional design skills, you'll find this useful (trust me :). We used this short interlude to point out that we were nearly done, that we were turning on the hand-up feature, and reminded the audience we'd take live audio questions at the end.

Tip: I do this because often people put their hand up and leave it up...only to not be ready when taken off mute.

### **"Shape the path" with blending**

In *Switch* the authors note that what looks like a people problem is often a situation problem...and a tweak the environment might yield great results (well, they argue it will).

- Mix and match experiences. GoToTraining lets you send materials (like a video or participant guide) in advance, during the class, etc. For you, maybe you “assign homework” between classes like “watch this 3 minute video and be prepared to discuss”
- Move some “lecture” to recordings. To be fair, sometimes you just have to slog through some stuff. Take the pressure of your live classroom (perhaps giving you some breathing room for some interactivity) by recording part of the curriculum and blending it into the overall learning experience

### **Adapt an exercise**

Not everything moves online, granted. But most does, with a little creativity...and then you get to some good stuff.

- Identify, or bring to consciousness all the elements of your exercise (some of which might be so natural you haven't broken them down before)
- Map your interactions and exercises to the tools at hand (definitely useful to have a more robust web conferencing solution here)
- Discover “online only” elements. While not everything translates from one medium to another, each medium has unique benefits, too. You'll find you can do some things *better* in a virtual classroom.

### **Isolate, measure, monetize**

Determining the impact of your training program is, quite frankly, hard. Too, many things you do *in* the classroom can only be partially tested in the classroom...some have impact down the line.

- Isolate the desired point of impact. Specificity helps
- Measure that both before and after your session
- Monetize by quantifying in terms of money or time

Tip: while technically anything can be measured and monetized, the reality is that it's just not always practical. Agree on a measure and build out your assumptions in a spreadsheet (e.g., we did this, the impact was reducing <this thing> by 4 hours per month, and at an average labor rate of X multiplied times the 43 people, our impact was Y). Here's the key...if someone really wants to, they can challenge your assumptions and do their own homework, but *you will highlight the impact nonetheless*. Even if everyone just agrees “it's better than it was,” you likely win. :)

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### **Book Roger to speak or train**

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### **About 1080 Group, LLC**

Roger Courville is author of *The Virtual Presenter's Handbook* and *Successful Webinars with GoToWebinar*, an expert in the human factors of web conferencing, and an internationally sought-after speaker on the use of webinars to deliver business results.

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