

# Engaging the Dispersed Workforce:

Delivering Virtual Training with Impact

by Camille Preston, PhD, PCC



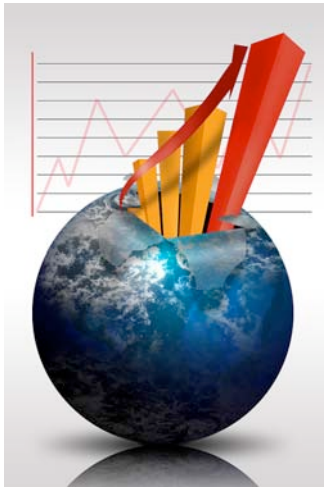
© 2010 by AIM Leadership, LLC Copyright holder is licensing this under the Creative Commons License, Attribution 3.0.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/us>

**The game is changing.** Business is now more distributed; it is time that employee engagement catches up.

Dispersed workforces are influencing:

- how we do business;
- how we communicate;
- how we seek out information;
- how we process knowledge; and
- how we define competition.



**Virtual collaboration is on the rise.**

- The number of virtual workers has increased by 800% within the last 5 years<sup>1</sup>.
- By 2011, it is estimated that 73% of the US workforce will be mobile-workers<sup>2</sup>.
- Tech Cast, The Virtual Think Tank at George Washington University estimates:
  - By 2019, 30% of employees in all industrial nations will telework 2-3 days a week<sup>3</sup>.
  - The market for related products and services will be \$400 billion/year.

**Virtual collaborations presents new challenges.**

As employees become more distributed, as teams and learners become more virtual, and as organizations grow globally - engaging, aligning and training become even more critical.

- 37% of leaders say that it is very or extremely challenging leading a virtual team.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly half (48.2%) of the managers identified their most pressing challenges to be learning new strategies for managing geographically distributed team<sup>5</sup>.

**A survey by Kelton Research found that training plays a critical role in employee morale and productivity.** And yet, attending in-person trainings becomes more challenging the more distributed workplaces are. Thirty-four percent say that frequent business travel prevents many from getting involved in training, while 32% cite remote working as an obstacle<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Gareiss, Robin. (2005) Branch office IT strategies are vital. Nemertes Research. <http://www.nemertes.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Drake, Stephen et al. International Data Corporation. (2008) Worldwide Mobile Worker Population 2007-2011 Forecast.

<sup>3</sup> Techcast.org - Virtual Think Tank at George Washington University

<sup>4</sup> Blessingwhite 2006

<sup>5</sup> Internal survey of an AIM client (one of America's top 10 privately held US businesses).

<sup>6</sup> Training Survey, Sept 2009 Kelton Research

## Training plays a critical role in building capacity and engagement.

As business evolves, organizations need new strategies for engaging employees, developing capacity and ensuring that individuals are productive - despite any distances between them.

### Impactful employee online learning is now mission critical.

Align Forward: To ensure internal organizational alignment, businesses are facing increasing need for open communication and “just-in-time training.”

- Products are iterating quicker.
- Market segments are splitting.
- Business strategies are shifting.
- Competition is fiercer than ever before.

Engage Excellence: To attract talent, businesses must update technologies and adapt to changes. For example, leaders must learn to manage from a distance for their organizations to remain competitive.

- 90% of telecommuters say they are happier with the balance in their lives because of working from home.<sup>7</sup>

Compete in a Global Marketplace: To stay competitive, organizations must adapt how they do business and how they educate their workforce.

- Employees who telecommute can be up to 50% more productive suggest studies conducted by IBM.<sup>8</sup>

*Effective trainings are more than “information sharing.”*

**KNOWLEDGE → application → *integration***



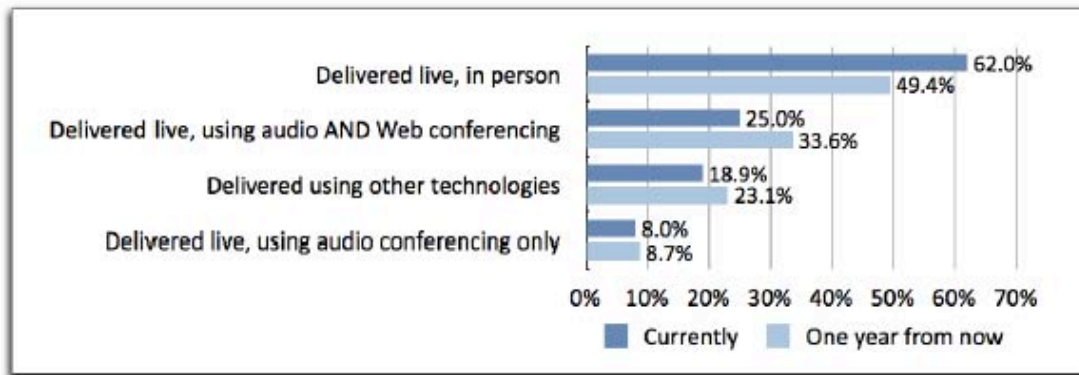
<sup>7</sup> How Employers and Workers Can Strike a Balance, University of Connecticut and Rutgers University, Center for Survey Research and Analysis and John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development; Work and Family. 1999

<sup>8</sup> Innovisions Canada

## Virtual Employee Training Offers New Opportunities<sup>9</sup>

### Web conferencing: the fastest growing alternative to in-person training

Survey respondents were asked to compare how their organizations deliver training today versus what they anticipate one year from now. Overall, in-person training is expected to decrease from 62% of all training delivered today to 50%, while the expected use of all alternatives increased.



How does your organization deliver training courses CURRENTLY vs. ONE YEAR FROM NOW?  
(Comparison of 2009 data with respondents' 2010 estimates)

Online training is a gateway to engaging associates, increasing alignment and addressing challenges in near-time learning.

### Common mistakes in virtual training

Over the years, many people have held the misguided idea that online trainings are ineffective. People think that online trainings:

- Fail to start on time.
- Focus too much time on Oscar-esque thank-yous or irrelevant introductions.
- Are slow to deliver value.
- Confuse upsells with learning opportunities.



<sup>9</sup> Web Conferencing Training Trends 2010: North America. 1080 Group, 2010.

## Benefits of Online Training

Managing Information Overload: As information is shared more freely and more abundantly, knowledge is no longer power. The ability to filter and be agile is key. It is estimated that the digital universe doubles every 18 months.<sup>10</sup> As we move from the information age to the wisdom age, power comes from distilling information, applying it to pressing challenges and innovating new solutions.



Reducing turnover: In years past, associates changed jobs because of poor managers. More recently, associates are shifting jobs for better learning opportunities and more engaging work environments. Online training offers cost-effective strategies for creating more workplace learning opportunities, more economically. In addition, providing learning opportunities to associates both improves service delivery and saves significant costs associated with staff turnover.

- Finding, on-boarding and training replacements is expensive. The costs of replacing a worker including direct costs and lost productivity are estimated to be 150% of a worker's salary and between 200-250% of a manager's/salesperson's salary.<sup>11</sup>
- The more skilled associates are, the higher the price of training replacements.
- The more virtual an associate's position, the more cost savings online training offers.

**Online trainings offer effective, efficient and economical strategies for sharing wisdom.**

Doing More with Less: As the value of learning increases, organizations, leaders and employees are all looking to do more with less. For each locked door there are hundreds of keys to open it. Efficiency is knowing which key to use to open the door. Learning offers new strategies for leveraging resources. We all want measurable results with a minimal investment of time and resources. Virtual education offers the opportunity to deliver near-time focused learning.<sup>12</sup>

Engaging at the Pace of Business: Just as the business game is changing, how trainings are delivered is changing. Long gone are the days of sending employees to month-long training course. For many companies even offsite trainings are becoming too costly. Travel, accommodations, not to mention lost productivity, can be prohibitive. Compounding these challenges is the escalating need for training.

<sup>10</sup> <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Infotech/Digital-info-set-to-grow-five-times-by-2012/articleshow/4555388.cms>

<sup>11</sup> Bliss & Associates (this is from Mars Virtual Effectiveness document, need to confirm source)

<sup>12</sup> In person training offers greater opportunities for real-time learning (trainers observe participants in action and providing same-time feedback). Near-time feedback - is the ability to customize trainings to quickly respond to every changing marketplace shifts.



## Low Cost Training ≠ Low Quality Training

With more choices, more distractions and more incoming information, facilitators must adapt their approach to virtual learning. To be effective, virtual trainers must be compelling in:

- what they teach;
- how they deliver information;
- why learning is critical; and
- most importantly, who they are in the engagement.

Virtual learning necessitates trainers “arrive” prepared to deliver with excellence. Instruction must be more precise, timely, and relevant.

They must focus learning: This entails targeting the right individuals, designing impactful content, and delivering with clarity. Online training necessitates greater attention to establishing the right speed, with the right value and with clear relevance. And this necessitates the facilitator be game ready.

We will further explain the four reasons why new business challenges are leading to new training challenges.

**Speed**

**Focus**

**Filter**

**Value**



### *What Differentiates an “A-Game Facilitator?”*

Several months back, I logged into a virtual training 7 minutes late. Instantly, I knew this trainer was different. I had come to assume trainings rarely started on time. Quickly, I realized my faux pas.

The facilitator was personable and precise. The training was executed with exceptional focus. He delivered high-value information that was appropriately targeted for the audience in relevance, pace and detail. He thoroughly addressed the key curriculum ideas without belaboring points. He offered tailored examples that highlighted the learning points.

I found myself too engaged to be distracted. My email inbox was overflowing, my stomach growling and my fiancé texting me, and I was still captivated. High value, high impact, high relevance. My inner nerd was experiencing nirvana.

And then came the icing on this intellectual cake. The training ended precisely 30 minutes after beginning. No hooks, no sales pitch, no credit cards required. Pick your sports analogy - it was a triple play; a 3 pointer - all air, no rim; a hole in one; a perfect 10.

And, there was more. The presenter concluded with a genuine no-strings-attached offer. In the final 1.5 minutes, the presenter offered listeners a free assessment. Again, no hooks, no sales pitch, no credit card required. Pure value.

## New Business Challenges → New Training Challenges



**Speed:** Everywhere we turn, throughout organizations, we hear individuals, teams and leaders lamenting the speed of business: too much, too fast, too many demands, too many expectations. Multi-tasking has become our modus operandi - the default strategy to stay competitive, to manage the demands and to avoid being overwhelmed. With overloaded “to do lists,” online trainings must communicate value - proactively. Participants need to know training benefits before committing to attending the session.

**Focus:** Amid the fast pace of business, our attention is constantly being diverted. We are connected 24/7. Out of the office no longer means away from work. Email, cell phone and text messaging follow us everywhere. Accomplishing anything necessitates that we exercise a new ability to focus. Online training must target specific relevant issues so that participants delete distractions, turn off chat sessions and give their full attention to learning at hand.

**Filter:** We are constantly bombarded with new information; developing new strategies for deleting are essential. With almost unlimited access to information, we face new challenges of sorting through the volumes, differentiating the value and integrating insights into our over-full lives. With low costs of entry, anyone can post on the web and offer “expert” training. Effective online trainings will distill critical insights, offer appropriate references and save participants the headache of sorting through references.

**Value:** Amid the speed, pace, and overload of business, true value comes with the capacity to offer high value and high impact learning with low costs of time and resources. Through online training, organizations can offer more touches, more frequently, and with more responsiveness to changing market demands.

## Tennis vs Racquetball

### Old vs New Business

### Classroom vs Virtual Training

#### Tennis vs Racquetball

With a long regal history, tennis is an exquisite combination of elegance, foresight and athleticism. Skill and precision can tame youth and fitness. Youthful athleticism does not necessarily trump skill.

To be successful in tennis (and old-school business), you need game smarts, skillful strokes and focused attention. Your opponent is kept at a distance, across the net. If you stay on your toes, look straight ahead and keep your head in the game, you can beat your opponents. . Business used to be like tennis.

Racquetball offers an intensity that parallels business today. Enclosed within a small space, speed, agility, and response time can make or break a game. To be victorious, one must be always on, always moving, always strategizing, and always thinking one step ahead.

Dancing within the confined space, you are constantly assessing and repositioning yourself in relation to your opponent. Where to position the shot for the greatest impact? Where to physically position yourself within the court to optimize response? Where to direct the next offense attack? Which of the 4 walls should the attack come from?

As competition increases, as the speed of business increases, as distributed workforces increase, business is becoming more like racquetball.





## Old vs New Business

Business was tennis. Business is now racquetball.

Speed, agility, and response time are essential. The game is faster, more confined, more physically demanding. Game changing “balls” can come from any direction. The mental and physical demands to stay competitive are exponential. Competition can come from any direction. Strategies are constantly adapting based on changing context.

Complexity abounds: Racquetball has more rules. The ball can be hit off more surfaces. The competitive advantage, or bounce, can be lost more quickly. The costs of standing still or being “hit” can have greater impact. (Ask anyone who’s been hit by both a racquetball and tennis ball).

Trying to play racquetball with a tennis ball can feel like a wild goose chase. ***Too much, too fast.*** To compete at racquetball, you need to be focused, adapting and adjusting quickly.

Applying racquetball skills to business, you must develop speed, agility and focus. Those people who are still playing tennis with their business or who are presenting their virtual presentations with a fuzzy ball will not achieve the direction or accuracy that their *racquetball-playing counterparts* exhibit.

Jump into the game now.



## Classroom vs Virtual Training

What we used to do on the tennis courts is similar to how we trained in the classroom. Attention was focused in one direction. Trainers had captive audiences, greater visual cues, longer periods of response time and thus, greater ability to adapt and respond to participants. Direct contact and in-person trainings are very humanizing, offering more opportunities to recover from challenges. Dissatisfied participants must disrupt their peers if they decide to opt out of the learning environment, for example, by leaving or by checking email. Social/peer pressure keeps them in the room and offers the facilitator the option of re-engaging them.

**Virtual training is like racquetball.** Participants have numerous distractions, coming from all angles, the majority of which the facilitator cannot see (or imagine/anticipate). The majority of participants are distracted and in perpetual motion - checking email, eating lunch, cleaning their desk or thinking through their after work plans. There is less social peer pressure to stay engaged. Once a participant “checks out” it is nearly impossible to re-engage them.



Facilitators with the right preparation, with the proper agility, with the essential focus, and the precise intensity can deliver outstanding learning in less time and with greater impact online.

Just like a game of racquetball demands greater intensity, more precision and greater agility, virtual trainings can offer significantly more bang for the buck - if the facilitator is “in shape.”

***High value, high impact, high relevance,  
and lower cost than anticipated.***

Delivering instruction effectively from a distance necessitates facilitators be “in better training shape,” perfecting both their inner game of *how* to deliver and their outer or external game of *what* to deliver, long before game day.

Virtual trainings must offer higher value content that consistently engages participants. With greater competition for participants’ attention, more precision is needed in what, why, how and who delivers.

## The Need for More Engaging Training

The “training game” is changing. Gone are the days of dry intellectual theory. Gone are the days of degrees equating to expertise. Education has morphed into “Edutainment.” Content must be more compelling, focused, impactful and relevant. Ideas must be packaged as sound bites.

Learning must be engaging, should leverage diverse learning modalities, and ideally offer multimedia - all while simultaneously offering even more value, more quickly. With numerous demands, infinite distractions and shortening attention spans, delivering effective messages necessitates greater precision.



***“Pop-cultural attention span” seeks  
“globally differentiating business wisdom.”***

Although “anyone can teach,” delivering impactful, high value learning precisely is an art form. Successful virtual training demands a new game strategy and necessitates higher standards.

**What:** With more information available, content must be both more focused and impactful.

**Why:** With more demands for attention, relevance and applicability must be communicated clearly.

**How:** With more distraction, delivery must be precise and engaging.

**Who:** With more accountability, authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness are more essential.

*In the past, knowledge was power.  
Today, knowledge is free.  
Value drives power.*

## Secrets to Delivering Effective Virtual Trainings

### What You Deliver Matters:

#### Know your material:

Participants vote by giving their attention to what matters most to them. Increased connectivity means decreased response time. Similar to the racquetball game, if you have to think about how to hit the ball, your attention is diverted from the competition.

***Online facilitators must know their content cold; their focus must be on engaging and connecting with participants.***

- *Time is money:* Add value quickly and constantly. This starts before you begin.
- *Agility is essential:* Know your material so deeply that you can teach the same concept 4 different ways to 4 different types of learners.
- *Expect curve balls:* Online training allows you to reach more individuals from more diverse settings, who will have more diverse needs and more diverse questions.
- *Differentiate yourself:* Electronic communication has nearly erased the cost of entering the training world. More training is offered by individuals with limited expertise. Over-deliver, before, during and after the program.

***With virtual trainings, we have brought teams together, conquered conflicts (some over 20 years old) and implemented new systems globally.***

***With visual aids and clear information, the team achieved their goals within a few months.***

#### Know your market and F.A.D.:

Exceptional trainers leverage research to know their market with precision. Segment and know your market so that you become a trusted, go-to advisor. With more demands, more information, more communication, as a culture we are more stimulated, more distracted, more overextended than ever before.



- *Filter to Focus:* Know what matters to them and deliver content that is on target, on topic, on time.
- *Attention is the new scarce resource:* Respect your participants and treat their attention carefully. With more to do than there is time in the day, cherish your participants' attention by delivering.
- *Differentiate yourself:* With more competition and more distraction, deliver high value, quickly. Separate nice to know from need to know.

**Again, What You Deliver Matters:****Know your audience (S.H.O.W. them):**

Too many people feel talked at rather than engaged in a dialogue.

- Less than 1/3 of employees are fully engaged at work.
- Disengaged employees cost US companies up to \$350 billion annually.<sup>13</sup>

Know what attending this training is costing them in opportunity costs. Know what pains them. Know what keeps them awake at night.

Identify and deliver options.

- *Solve problems in advance:* Add massive value by anticipating and solving their problems, before they become a reality. Too often “online training” spends 20 minutes rubbing salt in their wounds, looking for the up-sell. Deliver value and you will be in demand.
- *Honor their requests:* Listen to what they want and need.
- *Observe (stand in their shoes):* Understand, articulate and speak to their needs better than they can. Put into words what they are feeling and then quickly offer them solutions.
- *Wow them:* Understand what excites, frustrates inspires and captivates them... and deliver it. This necessitates more preparation than talking about the Red Sox when in Boston

**How You Show Up Matters:****Know your delivery:**

As information expands, trusted advisors become increasingly valuable. We turn to people we respect, value and trust.

- *Must be in rapport to influence:* This begins by connecting personally with your audience. Bring yourself to the engagement first, then bring in your wisdom and expertise.
- *Care to connect:* Understand who you are speaking with, what their gifts are and what matters to them.
  - Only 66% of employees feel that their manager encourages them to use their talents as much as possible.
- *Diversify:* Variety is the spice of life and the key to learning. Engage participants in learning through different modalities; thinking in new ways; and engaging different parts of their brain.
- *Pace and Pause:* Deliver content at speeds that engage participants fully and stretch them slightly. Again, variety is the spice of life.




---

<sup>13</sup> Blessingwhite. (2008) The State of Employee Engagement 2008 North American Overview.

**Who You Are Impacts Whom Your Influence:****Know yourself:**

- *Establish credibility:* Give value before participants even engage in the training. They will come curious, knowing you are competent and their time will be well spent.
- *Who you are matters.* Effective trainers are genuine, transparent and authentic. They engender trust. With fewer visual cues, participants want to know who you are and what makes you qualified to “take” their precious time.
- *Connect to communicate:* Bring yourself to the table. Be genuine, vulnerable and curious.
- *Constantly deepen trust:* A critical and increasingly scarce commodity, trust is built throughout by giving it.
  - 53% of employees do not trust upper management.<sup>14</sup>
- *Engage authentically:* The more removed you are from the participant, the more genuine you must be.
- *Live out-loud who you are:* The more aligned your actions, your content and your beliefs are, the more compelling you will be.
- *Be genuine:* First with yourself, then with your strengths and ultimately with your participants. They will feel it, you will know it.

**Why Should They Care:**

As the speed of business increases, there is less time for contemplation. Trainings that deliver learning with ideas for integration and application will have greater impact on your organization.

**Know your relevance:**

- *Communicate the must:* Participants want to know why they should attend before they even sign up for the training. Know who they are, what their market challenges entail and create solutions.

***Insight without application is the booby prize of life. -Frank Ball***

---

<sup>14</sup> Blessingwhite. (2008) The State of Employee Engagement 2008 North American Overview.



## Master the Inner Game of Virtual Training

Too many trainers are trying to do it all, be it all, without doing the work. To maximize your capacity to influence participants, consider the following key questions.

- *Know your sweet spot:* What are your personal strengths and weaknesses? How do you engage best? How do you communicate most effectively? How do you build rapport?
- *Hone your abilities to connect:* What will you share of yourself? How do you build genuine connections most effectively?
- *Invest in empathy:* How can you know your audience even better? How well can you speak to their pains? How quickly can you identify their opportunities?
- *Master your content:* Do you know your material backwards and forwards? What will offer even more value?
- *Engage authentically:* How can you be more genuine? How can you build greater transparency?

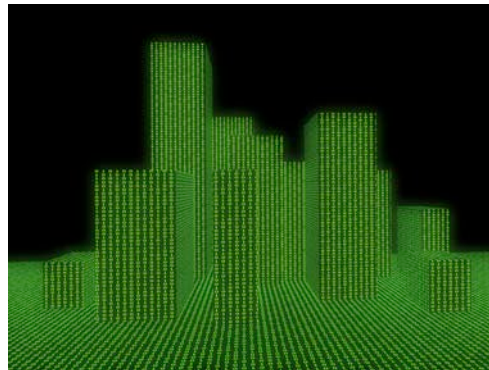
***People don't care how much you know,  
Until they know how much you care.***

***- John Maxwell***

### ***Who you are matters:***

As business happens faster and is ever more pervasive, it is even more essential to create quiet, reflective time. Time to sharpen your saw, to recharge your battery and to reconnect to what matters most.

In the training room, you set the standard. How you care for your health, know yourself, and value scarce resources becomes the norm. The more easily we communicate these, the more effectively we set ourselves up to be successful and for our trainings to be effective.



## The Successfully Engaged Workforce

With business today functioning at a faster, more mobile pace, we are intensifying our virtual communication. As individuals, teams and organizations are more distributed, it becomes even more essential to engage employees.

Effective employee training results in greater knowledge, value and ultimately power. Delivering virtual training is both a reality and a necessity as workforces become more distributed. Just as we wouldn't play a game of racquetball with a tennis ball, we should not expect to deliver trainings online without adapting our equipment, our strategy and our skills. Engage your speed, focus, and filter to ensure that you have effective virtual trainings.

To deliver compelling and impactful online trainings, remember these key steps:

- **Know your objectives**
- **Know your audience**
- **Know your material**
- **Know your technology**
- **Know your delivery**
- **Know your relevance**

Online trainings that resonate and connect employees no matter the distance will result in sustainable and engaged workforces. With effective virtual trainings, dispersed workforces, teams and organizations will be able to strengthen personal and professional relationships by more frequent interactions, develop sustainable business practices through standardized employee trainings, and ultimately achieve and align their business objectives.



## About AIM Leadership, LLC



**Camille L. Preston** is Founder and Principal of AIM Leadership, the coaching and training company focused on improving individual, team and organizational effectiveness by developing leadership capabilities from the inside out. Through writing, speaking, training and effective coaching, AIM provides innovative, real world, and strategic solutions.

Dr. Preston has communicated to leaders and executives around the world, coached individuals, developed curricula, delivered trainings and facilitated strategic retreat sessions for organizations and teams within the corporate, private, government and non-profit sectors. She utilizes her knowledge of human development and psychology to continually create dynamic learning environments that ensure a lasting impact.

An avid learner, Dr. Preston has a doctorate in psychology from the University of Virginia, an executive coaching certificate from Georgetown University, advanced leadership training from Center for Creative Leadership, NLP and Neurostrategies certification from SRI, and is certified to administer numerous assessments.

**Questions, comments, or more information contact Camille directly at [cp@aimleadership.com](mailto:cp@aimleadership.com).**

Please visit <http://www.aimleadership.com/aim-resources/ebooks> and download other ebooks.  
(free code: AIMtolead)