

## Training in a Classroom during Covid

I thought I had read it wrong. The email said North Las Vegas as the location, but I assumed it would be an online course. It was May and they wanted the training at the end of June. This was a little way out, but still most likely not enough time to understand all the dynamics of the pandemic.

I have been a trainer for over 15 years. I have trained public and private classes on management/supervisory skills, communication & leadership skills, both in the classroom and online. I have dealt with many situations that could be considered challenging, and made most, if not all those workshops, a meaningful experience for the attendees.

But how would we do this in these days of Covid?

Despite my assumption that I would not be teaching in a classroom for a long time (I rationalized that the workshop I did in early March, which ended with one of the participants giving me a hug, was a fitting way to go on hiatus with classroom training), here I was being presented with this opportunity.

I saw it as an offer I could not refuse. Who knows when this opportunity would be offered again? Someone needs to be first, why not me?!

Let me experience teaching with these challenges and see how it goes.

For me, a major component to successful workshops are logistics: where the meeting will be held (at the company or off-site), what's the plan for lunch, start and end times, etc.

But now logistics took on an entirely new meaning.

This company wanted live training because they wanted something "normal." I get this: while online training can be highly effective, there is nothing like face to face. As human beings, classroom training is the most real, we are in the moment, with others in the same situation, whether it's comfortable or not, and change & awareness, which is vital for the courses I teach, happen more naturally when you are present in a room with everyone else. I am not saying this doesn't happen online, but it's more apt to happen in a classroom.

How are we to do this with a pandemic going on?

Wisely, we all were going to have to wear masks. All day. Both days. We would need to keep as distant as possible from each other.

At the time of the training, Nevada, didn't have strict measures as we have in California. This was a bit of a shock to me, for example, to see people walking around outside without a mask in public. Restaurants were open, and while I had decided I was not

eating in a restaurant, I did get takeout, and was uncomfortable when I was the only one wearing a mask while waiting for my food.

So, I knew the participants were not used to wearing masks. Even with stricter measures where I live, I also was not used to wearing a mask all day.

This uncomfortableness was there the entire course (at least for me), but it was important because it wasn't natural, and it put all safety precautions to the forefront so I could focus on moving the class along.

These precautions included:

- Trying to maintain as much physical distancing as possible, so I didn't move around the classroom as I used to
- Not moving people to different seats on day two
- Keeping people in their same breakouts for the whole course (which was usually with the people sitting near them)
- Using hand sanitizer at least 15 times each day!

Despite these precautions, learning thrived for those who participated! I state at the beginning of all my classes that the material we will learn can help you work less and get more results. This course was no exception. Conversations and the learning still happened despite the new normal.

Does personal risk make worth teaching in a classroom worthwhile? I can only answer that for myself, and I certainly look forward to teaching in a classroom again. The "safety logistics" are vital and if I wasn't comfortable with the set up, I wouldn't do it. Then again, prior to covid, there were circumstances where I wouldn't teach a class (such as long travel time it would take to get to an on-site), so, to me, this is another set of circumstances.

Will people want to be taught in person and take the risk? I imagine the answers will vary. I am guessing, for the moment, many might be hesitant. But I think the desire for learning amongst peers will get people to look at how they can be safe and still thrive in a classroom.

The training manager for this on-site said something to me as I was leaving. He said training companies and those who value classroom training, will have to look at classroom training in the same way that other industries need to look at getting folks back to their services (such as gyms, airlines, hotels). Unless, of course, training companies are willing to move to a completely online approach.

And while online is a strong, vital way to learn, I am hopeful that the experience of classroom training will continue to thrive as we learn to live in a brand new normal.

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