

Government employees can now skip class, or at least the classroom, to train. With technology, lessons may be as mobile as the jet-setting executive.

Take-It-With-You Training

by Donald F. Berbary and Alan A. Malinchak

Technology gives employees latitude in determining what, how, when, and from whom they learn. Online and mobile learning programs allow users to increase their choices and degree of control over learning and professional development.

Learning Surges with Online Tools

The availability of online courses greatly expands the array of learning opportunities that any given employee may tap into. These courses also expand the flexibility to study when it's most convenient. In addition, many online courses foster rich communication among learners and between learners and instructor.

Through chat rooms, message boards, and other synchronous and asynchronous discussions, participants not only share knowledge but get to know one another. Everyone has the opportunity to hear from and respond to everyone else, and learning—formal and informal—surges as a result. Online learning also can engage learners by taking a game-based approach.

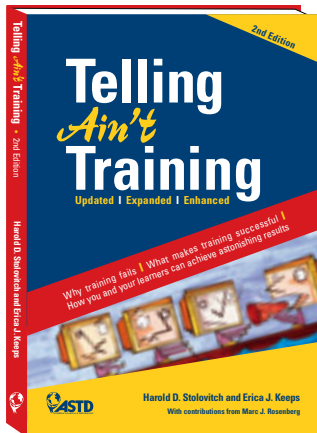
Learning Choices at the Commerce Department

The Department of Commerce's Chief Learning Officer Fred Lang was a member of the internal team that helped develop an e-course on why and how to safeguard personal identifying information. Lang influenced the decision to use vivid graphics, 3D technology, personal avatars, and a points-accumulation scenario. The training has been well-received by both younger and older Commerce employees, and the department is making it available to agencies throughout the federal government.

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—Fred Lang

Chief Learning Officer, U.S. Department of Commerce

Lang encourages employees to choose the learning activities that will best suit their professional needs. The department’s learning management system enables them to manage their own training, accessing thousands of online courses as well as registering for classroom training and other learning sessions.

A new experimental executive education program draws on this cafeteria approach and adds a mobile learning dimension to allow executives to learn on the run.

“Most of our executives had smart phones, netbooks, laptops, iPods, and other mobile devices,” Lang says. “Why not let our busy executives use the technologies they’re already using? That way, they can take their education program with them as they commute, travel, or have some downtime at home or at the office.”

Just-What-I-Need Learning— Without Limits

“People don’t learn by reading entire books or completing entire training courses,” Lang says. “From any learning opportunity, they get what they need at the time and then move on.”

With that recognition, learning professionals can use technology to tremendous advantage to afford employees nearly unlimited learning resources to dip into as the need arises—and then go from there. For

one employee, that might mean downloading a business school case on leading change and following its links and citations to countless other sources.

For another, it could mean identifying a likely resource person and shooting off a message. For yet another, it could be posting a pressing question to an online community to see who responds.

It is the organization’s responsibility to actively support such continuous, open-ended, technology-supported opportunities for learning. Highly engaged employees will take it from there!

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