

The events of 9.11 changed employee attitudes and priorities, and vastly accelerated the popularity of all forms of learning technology.

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# Training in the Post-Terrorism Era

By Shari Caudron

On September 11, most Americans listened on their way to work as the horror unfolded of the worst terrorist attack ever to occur on U.S. soil. The assaults on the World Trade Center and Pentagon resulted in thousands of lost lives, the shutdown of air travel, and worldwide concern about more terrorist attacks, possible bioterrorism, personal safety, and emergency preparedness.

Almost immediately, thousands of emergency workers and countless corporate employees needed to be educated on topics they'd never thought much about: anthrax contamination, building evacuation, and anti-terrorism. The challenge wasn't only how to train people quickly to understand those new issues, but also how to address ongoing learning

concerns—both of which were complicated by a widespread fear of air travel and a lack of ready cash due to economic uncertainty. For many organizations, the solution to the training dilemma lay in the increased use of technology.

As in-person conferences and seminars were cancelled in record number following the attacks, training delivered via technical means continued without disruption. More important, technology enabled many organizations to deliver post-9.11 content immediately to employees who were scrambling to understand the new environment.

For example, firefighters and emergency workers along the east coast and elsewhere turned to secure satellite broadcasts delivered by Primedia Workplace Learning to obtain information on such topics as bioterrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and first-responder emergency preparedness. Operating at a high state of alert, there wasn't time to assemble emergency workers in a classroom and teach them everything they needed to know.

Primedia's satellite broadcasts, which organizations subscribe to much like an individual subscribes to home cable, let emergency workers receive

# Changes in Employee

The increased interest in training technology doesn't mean stand-up training is going away, especially for soft-skills development. But the events of 9.11 have changed the context in which employees receive training.

"Business has changed in terms of the subtleties, pressures, and attitudes of American workers," says Ed Reilly, president and CEO of the American Manage-

ment Association, based in New York. The implication is that to design and deliver effective courses, trainers need to understand what's now in the hearts and minds of their workers.

Here are some findings from the report "United States @ Work," conducted by Chicago-based Aon Consulting:

**Employees are showing the highest level of**

**workforce commitment in five years.** David L. Stum, president of Aon Consulting's Loyalty Institute, cautions that such feelings might be temporary and the result of external factors. Still, the fact is that employees have moved from the lowest to the highest level of workforce commitment since Aon began conducting its research in 1987. Now, 54 percent of workers

say they would remain with their organizations even if offered a similar job with slightly higher pay elsewhere.

**Despite the high level of commitment, 23 percent of employees don't believe their organizations are going to be able to recruit and retain the best talent, 30 percent don't have faith in their organization's ability to reduce costs, and**

vital information 24 hours a day at their own places of business. The satellite-delivered content was in such demand that Primedia went to live broadcast in the days and weeks following 9.11.

“We had cops and firefighters as our reporters and producers,” says Josh Klarin, Primedia’s president and CEO. “They were talking about decontamination and things that were important for emergency workers to know about this kind of situation.” Because of the reach and immediacy of satellite broadcasts, Primedia was able to deliver focused content instantly to a specific audience in a geographically dispersed area. Subscriptions to the company’s fire, emergency, and law enforcement learning networks shot up 35 percent.

Similar increases were experienced by companies involved in all kinds of training technology, including e-learning, videoconferencing, CD-ROMs, and content-management systems. Overnight, or so it seemed, the pumpkin of technology was transformed into a gleaming chariot ready to deliver companies to new cost-effective heights of learning efficiency. Of course, technology-based training has been idling at the curb for a long time, and usage in

all forms has been steadily accelerating. But the events of 9.11 may have demonstrated to naysayers once and for all how reliable, cost-effective, and efficient the right training technology can be. Consequently, when it comes to corporate learning, the post-9.11 world will indeed never be the same.

### Broad changes

Before taking a closer look at the impact of 9.11 on the use of training technologies, let’s make note of several broad effects on corporate training. The most immediate, as everyone knows, was the widespread cancellation of training events due to fear of air travel. The American Management Association, which offers more than 200 courses in management, project planning, and other topics, experienced an immediate 30 percent drop in enrollment.

According to a study of 225 ASTD members, however, most learning professionals—72 percent—have felt little or no change in their job responsibilities. “As a trainer myself, I can tell you that while September was a down month, November and December were two of the busiest months I’ve had,” says Steve Waterhouse, president of the Waterhouse

# Attitudes

**35 percent don’t believe their organizations will be able to improve the compensation or benefits package in 2002.** “An employee’s intention to remain without being productive and having pride can lead to what Aon calls false loyalty,” says Stum. “Organizations may be experiencing a halo effect, with employees giving them the benefit of the doubt on decisions given the

suddenness and sweep of changes in the world. Those employees can be easily lured away when the external environment changes.” For more



**More than four in five workers have re-examined their priorities and decided they need to spend more time and energy on personal, family, and com-**

**munity activities and less time on their jobs.**

**Twenty-seven percent of American workers say their organizations don’t understand the tremendous need for work-life balance.** The value of vacation time rose from number 10 on an employees’ list of key benefits to number 2. People wonder whether they have enough time to do a

good job at work but also do a good job at life.

**One in five Americans is concerned about the ability of employers to help during a time of national and company stress.**

**Eighteen percent of workers feel their job environment isn’t safe psychologically or free from intimidation, fear, and harassment.**

# ASTD Survey Results: The Effect of Terrorism on Training

A survey of ASTD members and Website visitors was conducted in November to determine the impact of 9.11 on their professional lives; 226 training professionals responded. Their input: Fifty-three percent have seen no change in job responsibilities, but 12 percent say their work has been altered significantly.

People working with e-learning or for suppliers saw the biggest change in job responsibilities. Trainers involved with diversity management, performance improvement, or management development saw the smallest change in responsibilities. Fifteen percent said the use of technology to hold virtual

meetings and classes increased; 9 percent said it became an urgent priority.

The most commonly mentioned changes following the 9.11 attack were

- a shift to distance technologies and e-learning
- travel either stopped or significantly reduced (for trainers and trainees)

- different training topics rising to the forefront, including diversity, security, stress management, and change management
- budget restrictions, business slowdowns, and layoffs
- development of security and evacuation plans
- assistance to victims and families.

Group, an organization that specializes in on-site team sales training for such companies as Lucent and Xerox. "From discussions with my clients, they feel that the effect on their training plans will be zero."

Some respondents to the ASTD survey reported an increased interest in courses on cultural diversity, safety issues, and crisis planning. Specialty training organizations such as the Colorado-based Boulder Outdoor Survival School, which teaches companies how wilderness survival relates to business survival, have also experienced a dramatic increase in training requests following 9.11. But overall, it appears that after the initial panic and anxiety subsided, it was back to normal for most learning professionals.

One notable exception: About 12 percent of respondents to the ASTD survey (more than one of eight learning professionals surveyed) have experienced significant changes to their job responsibilities that involve searching for cheaper and faster ways to deliver training via technology. One survey participant sums it up: "Since September 11, there's suddenly a great interest in video- or Webconferencing, e-learning, blended learning, and other ways to lower travel costs (and risks), reduce training time,

and improve the effectiveness of our training product through the use of new technology."

Last July, International Data Corporation conducted a survey that showed cost and lack of management buy-in as the biggest barriers to the use of e-learning in organizations. The events of 9.11 may have broken down both barriers as e-learning providers report a dramatic upswing in business.

At Knowledge Anywhere, a Bellevue, Washington-based provider of e-learning solutions, hits to its Website more than doubled right after 9.11. "These were unique visits from people shopping around using the keywords *online learning*, *distance learning*, and *Web-based training*," says Charles Gillette, CEO. "In addition, all of our current customers are showing an interest in more programs, and inquiries from new customers have increased three-fold. The interest hasn't dropped back down since September, which indicates to me that this isn't simply related to an event but a change in mindset."

Similar surges in business are reported by such providers as ULiveandLearn and e-LearningCenter. "I've definitely seen an increased interest in online training since the attacks," says Scott Sampson,

president of eLearningCenter. "It's not so much fear of further attacks as an interest in just flat-out reducing training costs by finding less-expensive training online and by not having to send employees away from the office." Companies are beginning to realize that e-learning initiatives don't just cost money but can also save money and provide more flexibility.

Nick Payne, director of training, North America, for Dade Behring, is a recent convert to e-learning. His company makes diagnostic laboratory instruments used in hospital labs. The instruments are so sophisticated that customers are typically required to spend a week at a Dade Behring training center learning how to use them. Payne says Dade Behring had to cancel several of its training courses following 9.11. But even when customer fears calmed, there was a lingering reluctance to travel, and they began asking for online product orientations. Although the company had one external online training module, it was used only as a way to shorten onsite training by providing product knowledge to customers before they arrived at the training site.

"The events of 9.11 forced us to rethink what our courseware objectives are going to be," says Payne. "Because clients are more amenable to online learning, we now have three online learning products under development that will actually replace the onsite training we used to do."

The melting resistance to e-learning is likely to boost the industry past its adolescence toward maturity and greater acceptance. In fact, IDC forecasts that the e-learning market will grow from \$2.3 billion in 2000 to \$14.7 billion by 2004—and that research was conducted before 9.11.

### Gains in popularity

No other technology was put into play more after 9.11 than technology-based conferencing that uses video, audio, or the Internet to link people. That's because the temporary ban on air travel forced companies to find new ways to hold meetings with distant colleagues, associates, and clients.

Indian technology firm MindTree Consulting used videoconferencing to link its U.S. workers to worried families in India. About 20 percent of the firm's 450-person workforce is located in the United States, many in Somerset, New Jersey. Many family members in Bangalore didn't know the exact location of the attacks and whether their

loved ones were safe. Videoconferencing helped reassure them everyone was fine.

Videoconferencing became such a popular mode of communication in the three days following the attacks that the number of conferencing minutes consumed by Genesys Conferencing, the world's largest conferencing specialist, went up 40 percent. Raindance Communications, which provides Web- and phone-conferencing services, logged a record 6.8 million communication minutes the week after the attacks—a 35 percent spike. VSpan, which coordinates video-, audio-, and Web-based conferencing services, also saw a 30 to 40 percent increase in usage.

As with e-learning, the post-terrorism boom in conferencing services may prompt companies to use conferencing technology for training purposes more often. In fact, 88 percent of respondents to a survey by the National Business Travel Association say they would increase the use of videoconferencing as an alternative to travel.


Says Andrew Davis, managing partner at Wainhouse Research, a market research and publishing firm specializing in conferencing, "A month after things happen, they go back to normal. But I think this is different. I think this was sufficient in magnitude that it could change people's behavior."

Given the boost in conferencing, U.S. videoconferencing services revenues could grow from \$1.48 billion in 2000 to \$5 billion by 2007, according to a recent report by Frost & Sullivan.

### More LCMSSs

The massive disruption caused by the terrorist attacks proved just how swiftly situations can change. Of course, rapid change isn't new to anyone working in organizations these days, and learning professionals have been struggling for years to find ways to help employees keep up with ongoing change. But the events of 9.11 seem to be a wake-up call for trainers to get even more serious about how to keep employees well informed and well prepared all of the time instead of updating skills periodically. At least that's what Charles Fred, president and CEO of Avaltus, thinks.

Fred's Denver-based company makes learning content management systems that incorporate software so that work and learning become the same process. His firm's technology doesn't automate training events the way a CD-ROM might but makes learning part of the work process, which sig-

nificantly shortens the time it takes to get people up-to-speed. Some of Avaltus's biggest clients are in the call-center industry, where employees have to be conversant on new products, terms, and services every single day. LCMSs, such as those produced by Avaltus, help call-center employees learn at the speed of business because the content is updated on the computer, where they need it, every day. For more about LCMSs  "LCMS Roundup," [WWW.LEARNINGCIRCUITS.org/2001/aug2001/ttools.html](http://WWW.LEARNINGCIRCUITS.org/2001/aug2001/ttools.html).

The terrorist attacks and ensuing need for information about new security procedures, anthrax contamination, and bioterrorism demonstrate why quicker learning methods using technology are so vital now.

"The reason we were all spending four hours standing in line at airport security wasn't because the equipment wasn't working or there weren't enough scanners," says Fred. "It was because the people doing the security checks couldn't get up-to-speed fast enough on all of the new requirements set forth by the FAA. Many of them were in a classroom trying to learn the new regulations, but every person in a classroom meant one less person checking bags."

When companies are in a panic, they tend to run people through courses just like they always have, says Fred. But in a world where priorities change not just overnight, but minute by minute, companies need to find more effective ways of using technology to disperse information to employees when and where they need it.

### Holding steady


Training via CD-ROM and other computer-based methods might have been losing their luster as e-

**25 percent** of U.S. companies have either reduced or frozen salaries for 2002; 66 percent have lowered their planned salary increases

**40 percent** anticipate lowering revenue and profit expectations for 2001 and 2002

Nearly **30 percent** anticipate having to reduce staff over the next 12 months

**21 percent** have eliminated nonessential business travel; **46 percent** have reduced nonessential travel as much as possible

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learning took center stage, but as organizations scrambled to obtain new knowledge in the post-9.11 frenzy, CD-ROMs proved just how efficient they can be.

The Navy School of Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, relied heavily on an interactive set of four CDs meant for doctors, medical technicians, and first responders to a disaster scene. The program, developed by C<sup>2</sup> based in Falls Church, Virginia, guides doctors through a patient evaluation, using a virtual body. It teaches how to distinguish between 40 separate agents that can be used in bio warfare, such as anthrax, smallpox, malaria, and mustard gas. The program also takes doctors through video scenarios in which they're given a patient's symptoms and must determine, by conducting various exams and examining vital signs, which biological agents the patient has been exposed to.

Primedia also used CD-ROMs to help its corporate clients deal with potential terrorist threats. The disks were sent to companies in vulnerable industries such as power and water treatment to help employees learn quickly about emergency preparedness, plant safety, and protecting assets.

In the post-9.11 training world, no single technology will hold sway over another. Technology in all its various forms has taken up a permanent and vastly more influential residence within the training function. Executives who were reluctant to spend money on training technology now realize it's crucial, as do training professionals.

There's no going back. TD

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