

NEWS YOU CAN USE

The Meet Market

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

Once upon a time, the term *virtual meeting* invoked images of jerky video, out-of-sync audio, sky-high prices, and system crashes. Slowly but steadily, however, technology has been improving and prices falling. Then came the terrible events of September 11. In the months since, technology that links people electronically—for example, shared collaboration spaces, audio- and video-conferencing, and

e-learning—has been gaining popularity, even among people who were critics just a short time ago.

Viewed in light of workers' reluctance to travel, such technology seems like the knight on the charging white steed come to rescue companies from the dilemma of how to continue with business, while understanding people's anxieties. Are we sure technology can rescue

us? First, we must know how to use it effectively.

According to a recent survey by Development Dimensions International, in 2001 only 28 percent of its clients had led a virtual meeting. However, 100 percent said they expected to lead one or more in 2002.

Complexities abound, says DDI. Meeting participants may

- live in different time zones
- speak different languages

Online meetings are here to stay. Are you ready?

- receive materials in different formats (fax, computer file, and so forth)
- use different technologies to access the meeting
- be uncomfortable with virtual interactions.

Facilitators of virtual meetings must perform all of the same tasks required for an effective in-person meeting, but the electronic component heightens the importance of preparation, leadership, and follow-up. DDI offers checklists for each of those stages of virtual

meetings at

◀▶ www.ddiworld.com/inthenews/vmeetings.asp.

For additional information on virtual meetings and collaboration, including tools, articles, books, and other resources, visit ▶▶ http://coworking.com/resources.

Send press releases or short articles on news, trends, and best practices to News You Can Use, T+D, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043. Email nycu@astd.org.

Executive Update

When it comes to senior-level jobs, soft skills make the man or woman, says a recent poll by RHI Management Resources. Twenty-six percent of chief financial officers polled said interpersonal skills are their most important consideration when hiring for senior-level positions. "While strong interpersonal skills are essential at all levels," says RHI executive director Paul McDonald, "they're particularly critical for managers, whose primary job responsibilities include hiring, supervising, mentoring, and retaining employees."

How To Align Performance Management With Corporate Goals

At a time when downsizing, acquisitions, and reorganizations run rampant, how can companies keep employees focused on business results? The key is in effective performance management programs, says Cambria Consulting, a Boston-based firm specializing in people strategies that drive business performance. Cambria offers these tips for successful performance management programs.

Link performance management to business goals. Companies should communicate goals and strategies clearly so that employees can align their performance targets. That will help workers focus on the most important aspects of their jobs, and they'll know that they're making a worthwhile contribution.

Set clear expectations. Each business unit and employee should have clear goals and the necessary skills and

resources to accomplish them.

Managers should help workers bridge gaps if necessary.

Involve employees. Employees should participate in goal setting and feel they have the skills, authority, and resources to reach those goals.

Use multiple information sources. To get a clear picture of performance, feedback should come from employees' peers and staff as well as managers.

Provide continuous feedback. Doing so helps employees adjust if their performance is falling short.

Evaluate employees by how they achieved results. Counter-productive methods don't count.

Keep the process flexible. Encourage business units to adapt the process to their specific needs.

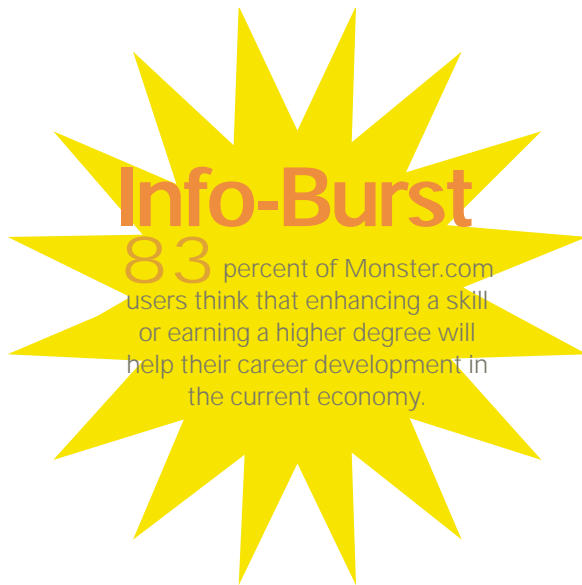
Keep the process simple. Forms should be minimal and available on the Internet or intranet.

Web-enable the process. Link the performance management system to other processes. For example, sales figures can be placed online so that salespeople can see how their performance is affecting revenues.

Standardize performance criteria. Use standard language to define competencies or values across the organization. That way, the performances of various people and business units can be compared.

Measure results. Measure performance against objectives, perhaps using a three-part scale: exceeds targets, meets targets, falls short. Remember to evaluate behaviors in addition to results.

Drive it from the top. For best results, management should take control of the performance management process and use it as a business tool rather than an HR process.



Policy News

A snapshot of U.S. federal

legislation and policy affecting workforce development and the HRD profession.

Bush Signs New Education Bill. Describing it as his top domestic priority, the President signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* into law on January 8. A significant revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the law increases federal funding to schools by US\$3.4 billion, requires states to give all students reading and math testing in grades 3 through 8, and holds schools accountable for test results.

IT Training Bill Would Help Companies, Dislocated Workers.

Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) introduced *The Technology and Education Training Act of 2001* (S 762 and HR 1769, known as TETA) to help address the IT skill shortage. The act would provide a tax credit for 100 percent of an employer's IT training expenses up to \$1,500. Small businesses or individuals in enterprise zones would receive a tax credit for 100 percent of expenses up to \$2,000. People who aren't receiving employee-provided training could use the tax credit in their personal income taxes. Efforts are underway to incorporate this legislation into the Economic Stimulus package or the Trade Promotion Authority bill. ASTD has endorsed both S 762 and HR 1769.

E-News

E-learning supplier SkillSoft has become the first large courseware provider to announce compliance with **Section 508** of the Rehabilitation Act. SkillSoft recently upgraded 373 business-skills courses to be accessible by people with vision, hearing, or motor skill impairments. The company plans to make all current and future English-language courses Section 508-compliant by early 2002. Says Chuck Moran, SkillSoft president and CEO, "The goal of Section 508 is in keeping with the overarching promise of e-learning—to help organizations democratize training and give all employees accessibility to training and development opportunities anywhere, any time."



Are you thinking about getting an M.B.A. or other business degree? Are you trying to figure out how you'll fit classroom time into your already packed schedule? Then check out GetEducated.com's

 www.geteducated.com

free guide to distance learning business and management degree programs.

The 128-page document is downloadable as a free PDF once you've registered on the site. It lists accredited programs and offers an FAQ on accreditation, including how to avoid diploma mills. Look for guides to education and technology programs in the summer of 2002.