

Assess Online

Reviewed by Cindy Huggett

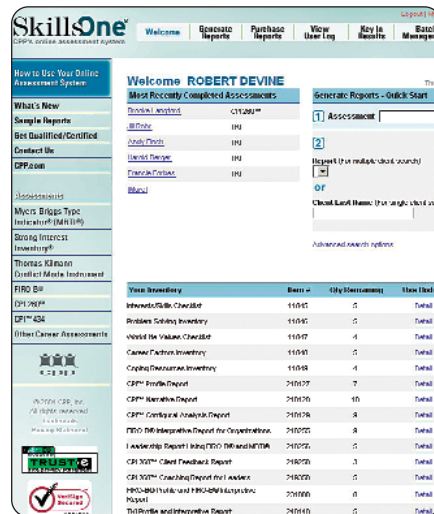
MORE THAN A YEAR AGO, I reviewed the Spectrum CPI (California Psychological Inventory) 260 assessment tool from CPP (formerly Consulting Psychologists Press). Since that time, the CPP SkillsOne delivery website has undergone a significant transformation and update. So, I was invited to take another look.

This time, I tried other assessments available through CPP: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the newly revised Strong Interest Inventory. I've used paper versions of these assessments in the past, and I found the online versions to be very similar. The value-add of CPP's delivery solution is the personalized reports and individual coaching available to interpret the results.

My first impressions of the new website were that it's sleek, simple, and professional. It was extremely easy to understand; almost anyone should have an easy

time logging in and getting started.

Each assessment begins with demographic questions and then moves into the online questionnaire. The directions are simple and easy to follow. My only complaint about the survey is the inability to "freeze" the win-



dow pane so that I could see the top line labels as I scrolled down through the questions. I found myself having to scroll up and down the window while answering. My favorite part of the online assessment was the pop-up window telling me when I reached the halfway mark.

What I like most about this new delivery mechanism is its simplicity. In a world of multiple streams of information (for example, television programs that add scrolling text), it's refreshing to have a clean, simple screen.

As in my previous experience, my individual coaching session was insightful. The reports were informative and adaptable for many uses.

This time I got to peek behind the scenes and view the administrative side of the CPP SkillsOne site. As a test administrator, I was able to view user logs, run reports, and manage assessment delivery options. The administrative site is similar to the user website in its simplicity and ease of use. Across the top of the page are the navigation links (welcome, reports, user log, results, batch management), and along the left side are additional navigation buttons (what's new, sample reports, get qualified/certified, contact us).

Training and help

The documentation provides answers to questions about using the administrative tools. In fact, the site is so intuitive that even novice administrators should have no problems deploying a program or running reports.

When you initially set up a SkillsOne site, technical support will walk you through the process. The company also offers webinars to assist customers; topics include how to create an account and how to set up a client assessment site. The cost for technical support is included in the annual maintenance fee.

CPP SkillsOne product rating

Interface	****
Ease of use	****
Production quality	****
Documentation	****
Value of purpose	****
Value for the money	****
Overall rating	****

Cindy Huggett is an independent learning and performance consultant specializing in classroom facilitation. Her past roles include serving as a one-person training department for an international mechanical contractor and as director of training for a software training company. She's based in Raleigh, North Carolina; chuggett@nc.rr.com.

Total Photoshop

Reviewed by Samantha Calden

TOTAL TRAINING offers software training on DVDs that feature video instruction and files for projects that you will work on during the course. The Photoshop training is the company's flagship course.

Getting started

Installation is relatively effortless—an interface window leads you through the process. The vendor lists these simple requirements to run the program:

- Windows XP, Windows 2000, or Mac OS X
- CD-ROM drive
- Adobe Photoshop CS2 software.

Deke, the host, may initially seem a little dull, but he is an incredibly knowledgeable and thorough instructor. He kept my attention from the beginning to the end of each lesson.

Content to the max

Overall, the content maintains a reason-

We liked...

- the simplicity and ease of use for both end users and training administrators
- the extensive technical support.

Could be better...

- Top line labels were not visible while completing the assessment, requiring excessive scrolling.

CPP SkillsOne

Online, 2004

SkillsOne

www.skillsone.com

800.969.8901

\$300 plus additional fees

Recommendation

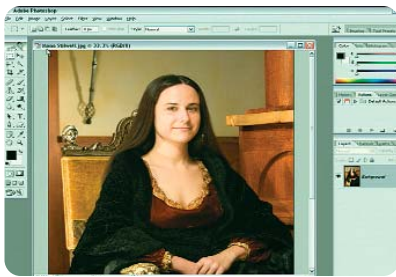
For organizations wishing to roll out the CPP assessments, the SkillsOne website offers a very good solution. It isn't fancy, but that's the point. It's simple for both training administrators and end users.

We like...

- the ease of installation
- the extensive content
- the ability to proceed at your own pace and repeat content as necessary.

Could be better...

- The instructor seems a little dull at times.



able pace from the introduction to the advanced lessons, and Deke keeps users interested with the use of project files that enable you to work simultaneously with him.

The program seems free of any errors or bugs. I had no issues with skipping video or problems with the interface. Navigation is straightforward and easy. In addition, the video, sound, and graphics are excellent. It feels as if you are directly connected to the instructor's computer, but with the ability to stop, step back, or repeat if you miss something. If you do need technical support, you can obtain it from Total Training via phone at no charge.

Deke takes the time to lead you through each step and show you the tool he's using in addition to alternatives that will also achieve the goal of each lesson. The abundance of lessons on each DVD ensures any user's success. I was completely satisfied with the

amount of information provided.

Total Training offers this one-on-one course at a fraction of the cost of a traditional institutional one (which you may not get as much out of). The extensive content in each lesson makes the overall program worth much more than the price. In addition, the best part of having this program in your home or office is that you can not only proceed at your own pace, but also

go back to a lesson and refresh your learning at any time.

Adobe Photoshop CS2 product rating

Ease of installation	***.5
Holds user's interest	***.5
Production quality	****
Value of content	****
Instructional value	****
Value for the money	****
Documentation	** .5
Overall rating	***.5

Samantha Calden is a graphic designer for Hearts On Fire, a branded diamond company in Boston; scalden79@yahoo.com.

Crucial Content

Reviewed by Mireille Massue

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS are "discussions between two or more people in which 1) stakes are high, 2) opinions vary, and 3) emotions run strong." Vital Smarts (in the United States) and The Travers Group (in Canada) offer on-site training and intensive two-day seminars for trainers on this type of communication. I took the train-the-trainer version and talked to people who have implemented the on-site version.

The content has the potential to improve the way people talk to each other at work when the outcome

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High

Seminar, 2005, two days

Vital Smarts

www.vital-smarts.com

800.449.5989

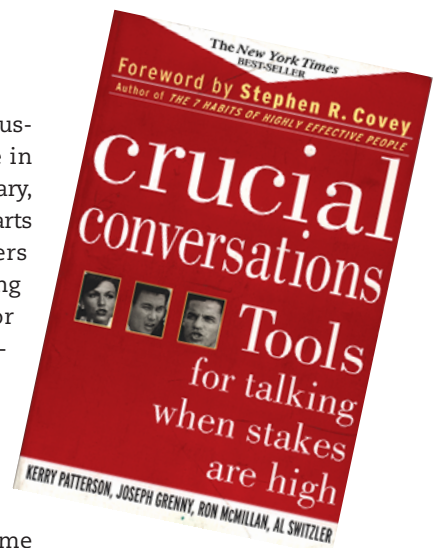
\$895 per person

Recommendation

If anything is to change, we need to have the courage to introduce programs like this that focus on what people typically want to avoid. Crucial conversation training isn't easy or a quick fix, but it works. It can raise the quality of communication in an organization to an entirely new level.

really matters. In addition, it can enhance people's personal relationships, which can themselves affect employees' performance.

Mastering crucial conversations seems to come down to one thing. When faced with risky, controversial, and potentially emotional conversations, skilled people encourage a free flow of information by openly and honestly expressing their opinions and sharing their feelings. They don't resort to silence (withdrawing, avoiding, or masking) or coercion (controlling, labeling, or attacking). They choose to create a safe environment for people to contribute to a "pool of shared meaning." (If you're interested in learning more about these principles,



Adobe Photoshop CS2

Software, 2005

Total Training

www.totaltraining.com

800.561.7138

\$299.99

Recommendation

I recommend this program to any learner or designer to increase general knowledge of Photoshop or update skills. Any user can walk away from this program as a solid Photoshop artist.

We liked...

- the material
- the mandate to involve management
- the potential to improve a company's culture.

Could be better...

- Trying to remember and master 30 steps caused information overload.

check out the *Crucial Conversations* book published by McGraw-Hill.)

The trainers running the two-day trainers' seminar (which I took in Canada) were skilled and personable. This is high-commitment-for-high-results training. In

an era of learning on the fast food model, *Crucial Conversations* belongs in the fine dining category. On-site training is spaced, with a training session followed by a few weeks of practice with learning partners. And management (including senior executives) leads the training, not training specialists or consultants. That means your managers and executives are integral parts of the entire process. They can't just send workers off into the care of someone else.

When you think about it, leaders have to have the same role in training that they do in work. If employees are empowered to say what's on their minds, but leaders aren't prepared to listen and speak with equal candor, the organization might actually be worse off. *Crucial Conversations* participants say that the training can help improve a company's culture, not just its communication, and help realize substantial benefits in the organization's performance.

One drawback: For me, the trainer seminar induced cognitive overload. It ran participants through a total of 30-odd steps in two days, which I found taxing.

Crucial Conversations seminar product rating

Presentation	***.5
Value of content	***.5
Instructional value	**
Value for the money	***.5
Overall rating	***.5

Mireille Massue is a training executive based in Toronto, Canada. She has had years of experience in planning and implementing instruction.

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