HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF ONLINE TRAINING
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INTRODUCTION

The training industry has seen huge opportunities for growth and change with the spread of online learning platforms in recent years. Compared to the traditional classroom model, and the costs and limitations that come with it, online training offers revolutionary scale, flexibility, and efficiency to both individuals and organizations.

Of course, as with any disruptive technological advances, there are some drawbacks that need to be carefully addressed. With self-directed online training the biggest perceived weaknesses tend to be what are seen as lacking when compared to classroom education, whether it is the social interaction or enforced time allocation.

However, as this ebook will demonstrate, these apparent drawbacks don’t need to negatively impact training efforts, and can in fact be turned into positives!

As you read this guide, ask yourself what your IT training needs really are. This guide will show you how to empower yourself to make the most out of your online training experience.
PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned concern about online training is that the very flexibility people enjoy about self-directed learning can also make it difficult to keep up with the work over a period of time. After all, no one is standing behind you watching to make sure that you are logging in and watching the lessons, doing the exercises, and practicing the skills. For some, the discipline that it takes to keep coming back and making time in a busy life seems like too much.

We certainly know that it can be tough, but we also know that the rewards are too great to ignore. By taking the following steps, you’ll find that staying engaged is not so hard after all, and you’ll set yourself up for success.

IT’S ALL ABOUT ATTITUDE
Keep in mind what you’re training for. You’re not just learning something, you’re improving yourself and working to give yourself a better life. No one is going to make you do the work, but you are the one who is going to reap the rewards, from feeling more confident, to taking on a new role you enjoy, to making more money. Learning something new is a great feeling, and if the skill you learn can help you achieve your personal goals, so much the better.

When you don’t feel like watching a video or practicing a virtual lab, remember that time you spend training will make a real difference in your life.

SET RPM GOALS
So you want to get a certification... great! But WHY do you want it? Before you start training, take a minute to think about why you’re about to spend time, money, and effort on this. Consider which field you want to be an expert in, or a position you’d like to pursue. Not doing this can lead to frustration and disaster, and perhaps even abandonment of the goal after much fruitless brain power. A great exercise to help you think through and create goals is to ask yourself the three questions at the basis of Tony Robbins’ RPM system:

What do I Really want?
What is my Purpose in achieving it?
What is my Massive action plan to get there?

FUN FACT:
The average IT pro in America makes $87k, 64% more than the average per capita income.
SET DEADLINES FOR YOURSELF
In almost any classroom setting, whether it’s a one-week boot camp or a college semester, there are assignments with hard deadlines. Just because you’re only working with your timeline doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t do things in a timely fashion.

If you’re training with a specific certification in mind, schedule the exam at the beginning of your studies, so that you have extra motivation to stay on track. Not planning to get a specific cert? Give yourself a deadline to finish a particular training course, then take a practice exam to see how much you learned. If you need new skills to complete a work project, incorporate that timeline into your study plans. Just make sure your deadlines are realistic.

SET ASIDE TIME TO TRAIN
It can be difficult to find the time to train, whether you’re making it a part of your workday, or trying to fit it into those precious waking hours you have at home. However, chances are that if you plan to train “when you have a minute,” you may discover that you don’t have “a minute” very often at all! One of the most important things you can do in your training process is schedule specific times to learn.

Here is a couple of suggestions to help you create and stick to a training schedule:

- **Train in the morning.** Wake up a little early, and take advantage of the part of the day that’s most likely to give you peace and quiet. Grab a cup of coffee (or tea), and start the day off right!

- **Train at work.** Your boss will benefit from your training almost as much as you will, so see if you can get the OK to carve out some time in the office for training.

BE ACCOUNTABLE
One of the hard parts of any kind of self-directed learning is the lack of accountability. But you can build a support system to keep you honest with your progress.

- **Don’t be shy.** Tell anyone and everyone about what you’re studying, what you hope to learn, and when you want to accomplish your goals. Announce your upcoming exam or share what you’re learning on social media. Sharing your goals can be motivating, and it adds a little pressure (the good kind)!

- **Make consequences.** Put something at stake if you really want to achieve your goals. Just like a swear jar can help you break a habit of cursing, coming up with a deterrent for skipping training sessions can be the push you need for those times that you are on the fence.
Join forces. If you’re part of a team at your job, or have friends in the same line of work, create a study group. Ask your boss to work with you on a timeline for your learning, or even give him/her a copy of the timeline you create for yourself.

COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS
Don’t feel like you need to train in a vacuum. While an online learning platform is an excellent training option, you are surrounded by other resources that can supplement your learning. One of the most commonly cited drawbacks to online training is the lack of responsive personal instructors, but chances are you can get your questions answered by the broader tech community. Check out these options if you get stuck:

- **Talk to other learners.** Most platforms will have some method of communication for the users, whether it is a text entry option alongside the content for discussion, or a more built-out community message board. Remember, as thousands of other people watch the same videos as you do, odds are someone has had the same question.

- **Check an online forum/answer site.** If the other users of your particular training platform aren’t able to answer your question, consider looking to a broader community, such as a question-and-answer site like StackOverflow.com, or the technology related sub-forums on Reddit.com, where you can call on the collective wisdom of the internet.

- **Ask colleagues.** If you are a professional in the IT industry, then you probably know someone else who is as well. Do you have co-workers who use the same technology that you are studying? A mentor or friend who could have relevant experience? Remember, just because your training is personal and self-directed doesn’t mean that you have to go it alone.
USING THE ENTIRE TOOL BOX

People learn in different ways, and for many students, relying solely on videos isn’t enough to pass certification exams. To get the most out of online training, use supplemental resources such as textbooks and virtual labs. Here are some top IT training resources:

BOOKS
A tried-and-true method, books can provide very comprehensive and technical information, which is ideal for getting the basics down. Many IT vendors, such as Cisco, rely on top IT instructors to write books about their technologies, meaning there’s a lot of great content. The downside of books is that they can be dry, costly, and – let’s be honest – a pain to lug around.

VIRTUAL LABS
Virtual labs are an excellent way to supplement online training. Labs provide “hands-on” practice in virtual environment. Remember, it’s one thing to understand what you’ve been learning, it’s another thing to be able to apply that knowledge to real-world situations. As a result, virtual labs are a reinforcement tool because they enable you to test your skills, and learn what you do well or need to improve.

HOME LABS
Home labs are another way to test how well you can apply what you’ve been studying to real-world situations. What better way to practice routing and switching than by setting up your own network? Again, being able to put your knowledge and skills to work in professional situations can be the difference between landing that IT position you covet and being just another applicant.

BLOGS
There are a ton of IT blogs out there. Searching for in-depth, highly technical articles? Or maybe you want something more quick-hitting and fun? It’s easy to find a blog that you like and relates to the topic you’re studying. Another benefit of blogs: If you’re pressed for time, blog posts are a good alternative to reading entire chapters of a book.
SHORT VIDEOS
Who says you have to watch hours of video training at a time? Short, “mini-lesson” videos are less likely to overwhelm you, making it easier to retain information. We’re also looking out for your well-being here. If you’ve been watching videos for hours at a time, give your brain (and your eyes) a break.

TIP:
Write it down! Put your training time on your calendar, stick it on a sticky note on your monitor, put a copy on your fridge. The more visible reminders that you have, the harder it will be to ignore them.

OFFLINE TRAINING
Being able to access training when you need it is vital to your success, especially when you’re in the zone. But sometimes that can be tricky if you don’t have great internet connectivity. Seek out offline training options whenever possible. Don’t let shoddy internet access keep you from achieving your training goals.

Offline training lets you take advantage of what would otherwise be downtime. Do you have a subway ride that you have to take every day to commute to and from work? That’s a perfect time to train! Do you fly a lot for business? Instead of an in-flight movie, knock out a few video lessons. There are a lot of minutes in the day you can use for training if you aren’t relying on an internet connection.

FORUMS
You can learn a lot from your peers. One of the best ways to connect with other IT students is through forums such as Spiceworks or TechExams. Ask a question about a concept that’s stumping you, or form a virtual study group. Also, interacting with other people who are training can help motivate you more with your own studies.

PRACTICE EXAMS
Studying for an IT certification exam can be a nerve-wracking experience. So what better way to get a feel for exam day than using practice exams? In addition to preparing you for what to expect, practice exams are an excellent measure of your readiness. Practice exams can help you determine what concepts/topics you need brush up on before the real exam. It’s a no-brainer resource!
STUDYING

Now that you know how to prepare for success and use the various tools at your disposal, let’s talk about getting down to the business of studying!

CREATE A STUDY PLAN
Once you know where you want to go and why, make a plan to get there. Putting together a “study blueprint” with the exam topics is a great place to start. Look for keywords such as “describe,” “configure,” “verify,” and “troubleshoot” to determine the level of knowledge needed to master each particular topic. Once you have your blueprint, develop a tracking system that works for you. Here’s how trainer Anthony Sequeira evaluates his knowledge of a particular topic:

1. I have never even heard of the technology. I have no idea what it does.
2. I have heard of the technology before and I can provide a brief overview of it.
3. I can describe the technology in great detail and I understand its configuration and verification, but to perform these, I need the assistance of documentation.
4. I can perform an implementation of the technology with ease and without documentation guidance.
5. I can troubleshoot the technology effectively.

Whatever system you use, be honest with yourself about your knowledge. You’re only cheating yourself if you don’t!

MAKE TRAINING A HABIT
While it’s great to designate little bits of time for training (instead of napping), it’s even better to get into the habit of training regularly. A set schedule will help to make your training a part of your daily routine, making you more likely to keep training over time and attain your goals. Scheduling specific training time on the calendar makes it seem non-negotiable. Knowing when you are going to train ahead of time also helps you get into the proper mindset, so that you can stay focused and retain information.
How to Get the Most Out of Online Training

FOLLOW A STUDY DRILL
Consistency is the key to success, and creating a solid routine early on will make it easier to focus when you find your work or personal life creeping into your training time (which it inevitably will!). Here’s a great example of a study drill from trainer Chris Ward:

1. Watch one training video. Take notes. Highlight anything important.
2. Spend 30 minutes reading/reviewing the notes from a previous video.
3. Launch a Transcender practice exam and run through an “Open Test” that chooses just a few questions. If you don’t understand a concept, write it down and study, “Why this is right? Why are the others are wrong?”
4. Break time! (5-10 minutes)
5. Work on other tasks for a few hours.
6. Eat lunch and while watching a training video.
7. Read notes from the morning training video.
8. Complete other tasks.

DON’T MULTI-TASK
This one can be tough, but it’s important. Setting aside time to train doesn’t just mean designating a start time, but also making sure that you spend your training time… training. The world is full of distractions, from co-workers stopping by your desk to family obligations. However, you can try to reduce distractions.

- Isolate yourself. Find a room with a door, get in there and close it. Or, if you can train offline, grab your tablet or laptop and head outside.
- Don’t check your email. It’s tough, but if you’re going to learn you need to focus on the material. Plenty of studies have shown that constantly checking email actually reduces productivity, and that holds as true for training as any other kind of work. If you have to, turn on a 30-minute out-of-office response.
- Turn your phone off. Many online training options are broken up into short modules or videos, anywhere from 5-25 minutes long. You can take a few minutes without answering a call or text. It’s for a good cause: You!

TRACK YOUR TIME
As you begin training, take note of how well you’re sticking to your study drill. Use a time management app like toggl to track how you spend your training time. This can help you see if you’re spending as much time as you would like on each task. In addition, recognize if a study resource is not working well for you. Make changes as needed. You need to hold yourself accountable, and you are the one who decides which resources fit your learning style.
LEARN FROM FAILURE
You will inevitably run into setbacks. Prepare for them by giving yourself more time than you think you need to achieve your goals. Respond to failures in stride and use them as an opportunity to improve.

REWARD YOURSELF!
It’s important to recognize milestones as they occur. Finally got to “level 5” knowledge for a difficult topic? Give yourself a reward! Moving onto the practice exam portion of your study plan? Take a break from training to relax and refresh. Pass an exam? Bring out the big guns and celebrate!

Recognize that it isn’t always easy to make time for training, so treat yourself a little when you do, whether that means enjoying your favorite treat while you work, or a bigger prize.

CONCLUSION

When you achieve one goal, set a new one!
Remember that learning is a journey, not a destination.

What’s next in your journey?
