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Converting to a Distance Learning Format

Judy Mason has been frustrated with the quality of communication among trainees in her face-to-face training sessions and wants to try something new. She plans to convert all current training modules to a blended learning format, which would provide trainees and trainers the opportunity to interact with each other and learn the material in both a face-to-face and online environment. In addition, she wants to put all her training materials on a server so that the trainees have access to resources and assignments at all times. Judy feels that the blending of technology and face-to-face instruction will give her training more depth with a new variety of educational possibilities (Mortera-Gutiérrez, 2006). She wants trainees excited and participating once again.

Of course planning this conversion will be key. Judy knows a successful program requires meticulous planning to ensure the courses are well received and successful. The success of this program is critical since it the company's first venture into online learning. Judy researched best practices for blended learning courses. She created a list of pertinent tips to help guide her through the process. First, she wants to keep the synchronous sessions short (45 – 60 minutes in length). She knows her audience but she wants to make sure she addresses the needs that are missed in the face to face courses (Gendelman, 2013). The current course materials can be repurposed but must be tailored to the online environment. “Shovelware” should be avoided at all costs (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 114). The course will require good organization with a clear syllabus listing dates and times for both online and face-to-face sessions (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015).

The course content has to be chunked to accommodate the shorter online sessions. The face-to-face sections need to be edited to remove content covered in online sessions. However, both online and face-to-face content have to blend into a logical flow. Since synchronous

sessions will incorporate live chat and shared whiteboard everyone will need to know how to use the technology. Judy wants to limit class size for synchronous sessions to foster community. She also wants to pair students with each other for ongoing support during the course and on the job. Finally she wants to determine a way to measure the success of the new course with some sort of application of the concepts (Feldman, n.d.).

Since distance learning is new to the company, Judy will create an online orientation that will help participants become familiar with the methods and tools used (Mortera-Gutiérrez, 2006). She wants both instructors and participants to complete the orientation so they are educated on the technology. Plus, if she puts the course materials the server, both trainees and instructors should know where to find and how to use those materials.

Judy also knows that she will have to train her instructors in the art of teaching online since most of them have never done so before. She wants to conduct a Train the Trainer session to help the instructors transition to the online environment (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015). The session will ensure instructors know how to use the web conferencing software used for the synchronous sessions and provide tips for creating an engaging online environment and conducting an effective course. It will also address some of the best practices for online instructors including the tips to be accessible to students, use an informal tone to foster accessibility, communicate frequently, and address students by name (Feldman, n.d.). This should encourage trainees to communicate online.

Prior to class Judy wants to send a welcome email to all participants to set expectations for the course, invite questions, and establish contact prior to the course. She wants to draft the email so that all instructors will use a similar version when teaching. Another necessity is to ensure course materials are sent to all sites prior to the day of the class. She'll incorporate these

types of instructions into the facilitator guide so all instructors follow the same protocol when teaching the course.

At this point Judy feels she has a good handle on the things she needs to do. She wants to have her supervisor review her plan. Although there is much to do, her list of best practices will go a long way to ensure success.

References

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