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E-Comm 9-1-1 Modernizing Training – Our Workforce Has Changed, Has Your Training?

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In the fast-paced, ever-evolving landscape of emergency communications workforce, the ways in which we engage and educate employees have transformed drastically. What worked in the past may no longer be relevant to today's learners, and that's especially true when it comes to developing and delivering our training programs. The question that organizations must ask is: Has training kept pace with the expectations of our learners? The answer, for many, is not yet. This editorial delves into why modernizing training is no longer a luxury but a necessity, and how embracing new technologies and methodology can enhance engagement, retention, and performance.

The Changing Face of the Workforce

Let's begin by considering the differences in today's workforce compared to just a few decades ago. When I entered the workforce in the late 90s, after completing my Public Safety Communications certificate, I faced the familiar barriers of youth and inexperience. Back then, employers had a significant pool of candidates to

choose from, and their decisions were often influenced by strict regulations designed to limit the applicant pool.

Fast forward to today, and the workforce landscape has undergone a radical shift. Not only have we witnessed a demographic shift, with multiple generations coexisting in the workplace, but the expectations of these generations regarding training and development have evolved significantly.

Our workforce now spans several generations: from the Traditionalists born in the 1920s to the 1940s, to Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the rising Generation Z. The modern worker, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, have largely been immersed in a digital world from an early age. As a result, they expect training experiences that reflect their tech-savvy, on-demand, and interactive lifestyles. With over 60% of today's workforce falling into these digital-native generations, it's essential for organizations to rethink their approach to training and development.

Meeting the Learner Where They Are

To truly modernize training, it's vital to understand the expectations and learning preferences of these different generations. Today's adult learners want training that is:

- **Interactive and Immersive:** No more dull, lecture-heavy sessions. The learners of today demand engaging, hands-on learning experiences that actively engage them.
- **Digitally-Enabled and Accessible:** With the rise of remote work and flexible schedules, training must be accessible across various platforms and devices, ensuring that learners can access resources anytime and anywhere.
- **Transparent and Supportive:** Employees expect transparency in their learning journey, with clear goals, ongoing support, and easy access to current resources.
- **Fast-Moving:** Today's learners are accustomed to quick, digestible content. Long, drawn-out training sessions are a thing of the past.

Organizations must now provide a training experience that aligns with these expectations. This requires embracing modern adult learning principles and techniques, while also leveraging technology to create flexible, adaptive, and engaging learning.

The Shift to Modern Learning

Traditional training models, which often consisted of one-size-fits-all, in-person sessions, are increasingly being replaced by blended learning environments. This modern approach blends in-person training with online courses, simulations, and interactive modules. At E-Comm 9-1-1, for example, we have moved from traditional, in-person emergency call-taking classes that took three weeks, to a more flexible two-week program that includes a combination of eLearning, classroom training, and on-the-job coaching. This shift not only makes training more accessible, but also allows employees

to start applying their knowledge sooner, leading to better engagement and retention.

Moreover, training programs are being designed to be **sustainable**—so that they grow with the organization. This means investing in technologies and methodologies that are scalable, ensuring that the training system can adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise. Whether it's using virtual simulations, creating digital social learning spaces, or developing interactive content, modern learning ensures that employees are equipped with the tools to succeed in real-world environments.

Leveraging Technology for Better Training

One of the most significant changes in modernizing training is the adoption of technology. It's no longer just about delivering content through a computer screen—it's about creating **engaging, authentic, and efficient learning experiences**. By leveraging technology, we can:

- **Reduce In-Person Training Time:** Virtual environments allow learners to engage with material before attending in-person sessions, reducing time spent in the classroom.
- **Decrease Trainer Load:** Technology-driven courses and learning platforms can handle much of the training delivery, freeing up facilitators to focus on coaching, problem-solving and additional support.
- **Enhance Engagement and Collaboration:** Online platforms provide opportunities for learners to collaborate, ask questions, and share knowledge, fostering a more social learning environment.
- **Improve Accessibility and Flexibility:** Learners can engage with training modules at their own pace, revisiting content when necessary, and fitting learning into the busy emergency services schedules.
- **Simulate Real-World Scenarios:** Technology can create authentic learning environments that mirror real job situations, allowing learners to

practice and refine their skills before applying them in the field.

At E-Comm 9-1-1, we've seen firsthand how embracing technology enhances the learning experience. By incorporating digital resources into our blended learning paths, we've reduced classroom training time while increasing learner autonomy. For instance, our dispatch training has been reduced from 10 days to six, followed by eLearning modules specific to the learner's assigned agency. This approach not only saves time, but also creates a smoother transition into real-world scenarios.

Practical Application of Modern Learning Theories

The transformation of our training programs at E-Comm 9-1-1 is based on well-established learning theories, notably the **Experiential Learning Theory, Self-Directed Learning and Constructivist Learning Theory**. These frameworks help guide the creation of training objectives that are progressive and competency based. By aligning training to different levels of mastery, we ensure that learners not only gain knowledge but also develop the skills required to apply and evaluate their knowledge in real-world situations.

For example, our training courses are structured similar to college courses—from cognitive understanding (100 level) to basic competence (200 level) and mastering the basics (300 level). Our 400 level courses are focused on leadership. Each level builds upon the last, ensuring that learners are supported through every stage of their journey. This approach reflects modern adult learning principles, where learners are encouraged to actively participate, apply knowledge, and progress through increasingly complex tasks.

The Benefits of Modernized Training

The benefits of modernizing training programs are clear:

- **Increased Engagement:** By incorporating technology, interactivity, and real-world scenarios,

learners are more engaged and invested in the training process.

- **Improved Retention:** Modern, hands-on learning experiences help learners retain information better than traditional lecture-based training.
- **Greater Flexibility:** Digital learning options allow employees to access training materials whenever they need them, facilitating continuous learning.
- **Scalability and Sustainability:** Technology makes it easier to scale training programs, ensuring that we can keep pace with growth and evolving needs.
- **Better Data and Reporting:** Modern training technology provides valuable data on learner progress, engagement, and performance, helping us make informed decisions about future training changes and growth.

By adopting these modern principles and methodologies, organizations not only improve their training outcomes but also ensure they are fostering a more capable, confident, and competent workforce.

Conclusion: The Future of Training Is Now

As the workforce continues to evolve, so too must our training methods. The generations entering the workforce today demand training that is dynamic, flexible, and reflective of the technological landscape they've grown up in. To retain staff and reduce attrition rates, organizations must adapt by modernizing their training programs—leveraging technology, applying research-based learning principles, and offering employees an engaging and continuous learning experience.

At E-Comm 9-1-1, we've taken the first steps toward this transformation, but there's still much to be done. With a committed team including an instructional designer, training specialists, peer coaches and subject matter experts, we are

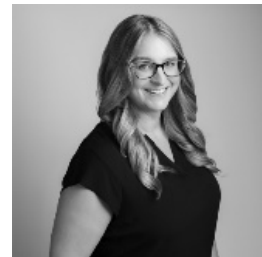
building the future of training—one that meets the needs of today's workforce while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow.

In the end, modernizing training is not just about updating methods or tools. It's about creating a learning culture that empowers employees to continuously grow, adapt, and succeed. The question is no longer whether you should modernize your training, but rather: Can you afford not to?

About the Author

Carrie Chattell is a seasoned professional with extensive experience in emergency communications, asset management, and training development.

Currently serving as the Manager of Learning Design and Delivery at E-Comm 9-1-1 since April 2023, Carrie previously held various roles over 26 years supporting the Surrey RCMP, including Asset Manager, Training and Development Manager and Telecommunications Operator. Carrie's educational background includes a Graduate Certificate in Management and Leadership from Royal Roads University, a Bachelor of Arts in Adult Education from the University of the Fraser Valley, and a Public Safety Communications Certificate from Kwantlen Polytechnic University.



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