HR News

Training and Professional Development
Virtual Reality Training Can Lead Organizations Forward in the New Normal

By Nick Day

Investing in employee training and learning opportunities is an effective way for organizations to improve outcomes, and it continues to grow more popular. For instance, engagement with LinkedIn Learning content jumped 130 percent from January and February 2020 to March and April of last year. A LinkedIn survey of executives also revealed that 70 percent of respondents actively champion learning and development for employees.

Both findings raise the question of how organizations can keep employees engaged in training when being at the workplace in person is not an option. Enter virtual reality.

What is VR Training?

With the pandemic forcing employees to work remotely, organizations must adapt their training methods. VR is a scalable, accessible and highly interactive solution. A VR training system creates an artificial environment in which employees encounter true-to-life scenarios without facing real-world risks. The VR tech allows users to look around, walk up to computer-generated objects and interact with items and other people.

Different organizations face various training challenges, and VR can help address a broad array of learning and development needs in the areas of technical skills, onboarding and safety training. Whether an organization is looking to reduce employee turnover, lessen the number of workers’ compensation claims or increase knowledge retention for better performance results, VR is a viable learning solution.

VR training has become more prevalent for several reasons.

- **It creates a safe learning environment.** VR precisely replicates a training environment such as an office or police station, which makes it possible for employees to practice high-risk processes and respond to emergency situations without suffering real-life consequences from making mistakes.

- **It enables consistent scaling across remote locations.** VR training modules can be made available online and accessed from remote locations. This allows managers to assign sessions and track employees’ completion from anywhere.

- **It can increase learning and information retention.** A Jan. 25, 2018, article in Training magazine reports, “According to Dr. Narendra Kini, CEO at Miami Children’s Health System, the retention level a year after a VR training session can be as much as 80 percent, compared to 20 percent retention after a week with traditional training.”

- **It provides unique metrics and key performance indicators.** A VR system collects metrics that would be unavailable when employees complete traditional learning exercises. For example, the headset can record eye movements to indicate focus and body positioning to indicate engagement with virtual objects and people. More broadly, replays of scenarios are counted. The system can also be customized to record data that managers consider valuable. Analyzing the data helps organizations assess the effectiveness of VR training sessions while also pinpointing specific aspects that require modification.

Be sure to select a versatile learning platform that meets your needs and is compatible with most popular VR headsets.
3 Ways to Deploy VR Training Effectively

Reboarding
As the pandemic persisted, more organizations found it necessary to furlough and lay off employees. Those same organizations may now need to decide how to bring employees back and refamiliarize them with their roles.

VR can be an interactive and fascinating way to retrain employees on critical job functions, COVID-19 protocols and current workplace culture. Distributing headsets will allow employees to complete VR training sessions from anywhere before reporting for their first day back.

VR training allows learners to practice essential job tasks without risking incident or injury.

Upskilling
Employees’ skill sets need to evolve and stay relevant as technology continuously advances. VR training can be particularly helpful when employees must be upskilled to use new machinery safely and with confidence.

As an example, an aviation agency may have a tenured employee who needs to be trained on a new piece of aircraft equipment. Having the employee perform a VR simulation allows the person to identify individual components of the equipment, learn unfamiliar procedures and operate the machinery properly from the comfort of their own home while feeling as though they are in the actual workplace. The simulated environment is also a safe space for making mistakes and learning how to correct them without suffering injuries or damaging the equipment.

Developing Soft Skills
Today, soft skills are in high demand for managers and employees alike. In particular, leaders need to be able to communicate, listen, navigate change and manage stress effectively. VR training can be a helpful tool for preparing leaders and managers for difficult conversations.

A learner practices navigating a difficult conversation in a virtual session by selecting responses based on the woman’s behavior. The situation is resolved once the learner successfully addresses the woman’s concerns by choosing the appropriate responses.

For example, an organization may need to train its leaders on how to properly coach employees. After putting on a VR headset, a leader is transported to an office environment where they must navigate a difficult conversation with an employee. To complete the program successfully, the leader must select correct responses and bring the conversation to a resolution the virtual employee finds acceptable.

As we all adapt to the new normal, VR represents an interactive learning technology that engages employees regardless of their location. Considering how deploying it can take employees’ performance to new heights and boost the organization’s bottom line is a must.

Nick Day is VP of client solutions at Roundtable Learning, where he oversees the sales team’s development and growth while also working with learning and development leaders from Fortune 500 companies to solve their business challenges. You can contact Day at nday@roundtablelearning.com. — NC