

United States Tennis Association Adapts People Skills to Web Classes

Fred Allemann, National Learning Manager for the United States Tennis Association, was certified in People Skills in 2010. In 2011, nearly all 354 employees of the USTA went through a 3 ½ hour adaptation of the class entitled Understanding Behavior Styles. "With help from the Effectiveness Institute, we reduced it to the essentials of the two-day class," says Fred. "Then when that was so successful – it got the highest ratings of any workshop we had ever offered – Dave Ritter, a fellow USTA learning professional and I adapted it to two 90-minute web-based workshops for all new hires. "

With four main offices and seventeen section offices across the country, being able to convert Understanding Behavior Styles to an Adobe Connect format with interactive chats, polls, whiteboards, and breakout groups is expected to result in higher workshop participation. Some of the activities turned into assignments outside of the class. For example, each workshop participant identifies an individual they want to improve their relationship with, the "case study" for the class. Using this case study, participants identify style characteristics and determine how best to interact with them. The USTA Learning and Leadership Development staff follows up to ensure learning transfer. Each participant is first required to have a conversation with their supervisor to discuss what they hope to gain from taking the class. "This helps them put a stake in the ground and claim some responsibility for the outcome," Fred says.

Besides the usual post-class evaluations, a survey is distributed three weeks after the class that uses a Likert scale and anecdotes to determine the effects of the class on their relationships with their case study, team mates, and other colleagues. Nearly 70% of participants experienced an improvement in their relationships which they cited as resulting from the information they learned in Understanding Behavior Styles. "Rolling out Understanding Behavior Styles across the organization all at the same time created a common language and a buzz. People started recognizing that maybe that difficult colleague was just a different style, and not necessarily difficult."

That said, the next Effectiveness Institute workshop to be adapted at the USTA was Integrating Conflict. When employees rated themselves on a list of competencies and determined what they most wanted to work on, managing conflict came up as number one. Once again, the USTA and Effectiveness Institute combined talents to customize the one-day Integrating Conflict workshop to three hours. They are in the process of delivering instructor-led workshops and if that is successful, will also adapt the workshop to a web-based format.

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