VitalSmarts research shows the Live Online Classroom performs equally as well as the traditional classroom when it comes to participant engagement, skill retention and mastery, behavior change, and organizational results.
Virtual training promises to eliminate travel, classroom expenses, and scheduling obstacles. But can it also deliver results?

**The Challenge**

With the rise of remote teams, technology integration, and demanding work schedules, many organizations have looked to virtual training as a flexible substitute for the traditional classroom.

Virtual training has proven itself in domains where knowledge, rather than performance, is key. For example, online courses in accounting, employment law, safety procedures, and organizational policies produce the same results in terms of knowledge retention as the traditional classroom.

But the situation changes when performance, as well as knowledge, is required. Don’t expect to see swim classes online anytime soon, because performance requires realistic practice.

Most online courses limit participants’ responses to keystrokes. If you taught an online swim class for example, you could answer multiple-choice questions about the butterfly kick. You could even write an essay about the Australian crawl. But you couldn’t demonstrate your skills in a pool or get meaningful feedback from a swim instructor.

The virtual performance barrier prevents performance-based training courses from being successful—kind of a no-brainer.

Historically, this performance barrier made it seem impossible for VitalSmarts to use virtual training. Learning Crucial Conversations skills is less like learning accounting codes and more like learning how to swim. More than a third of the classroom time is spent in practice and rehearsals, with feedback and coaching from the facilitator and classmates.

**The Solution**

Today, new synchronous-learning technologies have brought meaningful practice and rehearsals to online learning. The technology is called the “virtual synchronous classroom.” The classroom still exists; the facilitator and your classmates still exist; but you’re together online rather than in a traditional classroom.

Imagine you work on a virtual team. Your manager is in California; you’re in London; and you have teammates in Singapore, Delhi, and New York. Since these are the people you have crucial conversations with, it makes sense that you participate in the training together. And, since you work virtually, it makes sense that the training be virtual as well. VitalSmarts Live Online Classroom makes it easy to not only connect, but also practice the skills together.

Our virtual versions of Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, and Influencer Training create every bit as much interaction, practice, rehearsal, and feedback as our traditional classroom courses. The technology allows us to create breakouts, where teams of two or three participants work together to practice word choice, tone of voice, and other key elements of the skills. The facilitator can join these breakouts to provide coaching and feedback.

In addition, we use polls and quizzes to drive engagement and test learning and skill retention. Of course, we also use our award-winning videos to build skills, show mistakes, and model correct behaviors.

One difference from our Live Classroom is how quickly we change learning modalities. In a Live classroom, we change modalities every fifteen minutes, but through rigorous beta testing, we found that attention spans are briefer online. In our Live Online Classroom, we change learning modalities every three to five minutes to keep people’s attention and ensure maximum engagement.

Our Live Online Classroom is a lively, interactive, and immersive experience for those in attendance. It’s not a place where people can check out, surf the web, or catch up on e-mail. In fact, multiple participants have commented that even though they tried to multitask while participating in the course they found it impossible—it’s that demanding!

To ensure scheduling flexibility and prevent fatigue, we’ve segmented the training into two-hour sessions that are taught over a handful of days.

“Going virtual helped me stay focused because I was in a comfortable environment—breaks were placed just right, and I didn’t have to commute anywhere.”

Jennifer Pecor, MSMOB, Organizational Learning Consultant, Advocate Health Care

The VitalSmarts Live Online Classroom
The Results

To measure the effectiveness of the VitalSmarts Live Online Classroom, we compared the virtual experience to our live classroom courses. In this study, we used Kirkpatrick’s levels of evaluation to track participants’ reactions, learning, behavior, and organizational results. Here’s what we found:

Reactions: We measured participants’ satisfaction with the training. Eighty-six percent of participants rated the training “just as engaging as” or “more engaging than” live classroom training. Two-thirds rated it as “much more engaging” than other virtual training they had taken. Overall, people were engaged and happy with their experience. In fact, 100 percent of participants indicated they would recommend the VitalSmarts Live Online Classroom to others.

Learning: We used a cognitive test to measure participants’ mastery of the skills. Participants averaged scores of 90 percent, which is one percentage point higher than cognitive scores in the live classrooms.

Behavior: Behavior change was immediate, with no difference between the Live Online and the live classroom participants. Both groups used one or more of the skills “very frequently.”

We also measured the long-term maintenance of these behavior changes. We surveyed participants after several months and asked them how confident they were in using the skills at home and at work. Both groups reported that they were “very confident” in using the skills, though we saw a 2-point difference between the groups. The live classroom group reported slightly more confidence.

Organizational Results: Live Online Classroom participants used their skills to:

- Discuss sensitive issues (Virtual = 82%, Traditional = 84%)
- Resolve disagreements (Virtual = 76%, Traditional = 56%)
- Hold peers accountable (Virtual = 65%, Traditional = 60%)

When participants used the skills in these situations, they had profound impacts. Participants:

- Improved employee engagement within a team. (Virtual = 59%, Traditional = 44%)
- Improved teamwork. (Virtual = 65%, Traditional = 76%)
- Improved collaboration, cooperation, and support across teams. (Virtual = 65%, Traditional = 47%)

The Conclusion

Our study shows that VitalSmarts training delivers dramatic, hard-hitting results whether people attend in a live classroom or in the virtual world.

Eighty-six percent of participants rated the training “just as engaging as” or “more engaging than” traditional classroom training.

So the answer is: Yes. Virtual training eliminates travel, classroom expenses, and scheduling obstacles, but most importantly, it also delivers results.

About the VitalSmarts Live Online Classroom

VitalSmarts classroom courses are available online via live, synchronous learning taught by our team of Master Trainers. Our Live Online Classroom courses provide the same award-winning content and skills as our live, in-person classroom courses. They’re ideal for learners who have limited travel budgets, work in remote locations, or who simply want the flexibility in training location and session duration.

If your organization could benefit from the skills taught in our Live Online Classroom courses, contact us today to learn more.

Call 1-800-449-5989 or visit us at vitalsmarts.com.
Named one of the Top 20 Leadership Training Companies, VitalSmarts, a TwentyEighty, Inc. company, is home to the award-winning Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, and Influencer Training and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles. When used in combination, these courses enable organizations to achieve new levels of performance by changing employee behavior. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than 2 million people worldwide. [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)