



Could Online Training Work For Your Mission Trips?

By Josiah Holland, Co-Founder and President of XPCulture.com

Underlying this article is an assumption that you've already bought into the need for training and debriefing to go along with your mission trips – you're just struggling to get it into your process.

The question is two-fold then; will online training work for me? And how do I go about doing it? Online training might be the perfect solution for you if:

- your team is geographically scattered or too far away from you to do training in person
- you're a missionary host that wants your team trained before they arrive
- your leaders don't follow through with training or don't have the skills to do training
- you want to use your in-person time for less information and more group interaction

So, what do you need to know to start utilizing online training?

ONLINE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

An online learning management system (LMS) allows you to use or set up a structured course. Short readings, videos, or even a thought-provoking comic strip can be a good way to get content to people. If you're going to read a full book, this can allow you to spread out the reading so people have time to do it. Traditional training methods included reading a comprehensive manual or giving out books to everyone to read before hand, but leaders rarely knew if participants read them or, if they did read them, what they learned. An LMS allows you to pair content with good questions to foster reflection and posting in a discussion forum. Being able to hold everyone accountable to engage with the curriculum is a big benefit of an LMS.

One objection to online training is that It may be hard to get everybody on board—but that's true regardless of where you live. To counteract this, clearly communicate the training expectations during promotion and consider making training a requirement for traveling with the team. If you don't take training seriously, why would your team?

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MEETINGS

An LMS allows people to cover content on their own time so you can use the group time for facilitated discussion and application – this allows for even greater discipleship to take place. For example, a team member could be taught the difference between an innocence/guilt culture and an honor/shame culture (knowledge) through an online video. He or she may even be able to practice sharing the gospel informed with all of the right words and concepts for an honor/shame paradigm (capability). However, facilitated discussion allows participants to translate the concept of honor/shame to a situation overseas where instead of bringing shame upon the host by complaining about the state of the mattresses, he or she toughs it out for the week and catches up on sleep back at home (behavior application). **Help your team integrate the learning to the point that they demonstrate it through appropriate behaviors at the appropriate times—even during the training!**

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Many leaders are experienced travelers and good leaders, but might not be good teachers or they aren't knowledgeable about the context where they are headed to do ministry. I recommend you at least put together some videos of yourself talking about the local ministry, context, and ground rules. If you trust the leader, but recognize that some of your assistance would go a long way in helping you have better-prepared guests, build it into an online course with some discussion questions.

Remember, you're not only protecting your current work and the nationals you serve alongside; you're also investing in the next generation of long-term missionaries and their discipleship. Just because you can't be there to prepare them in-person or walk alongside them after the trip, doesn't mean your influence should be limited to their time in-country.

ENSURING TRAINING HAPPENS

With an online course, you now have the power to say, "We expect you to do training before showing up as our guest" and know what training they are actually receiving. An LMS allows you to track participation and even take part in the training with them. Additionally, when you need to adjust the training, it's typically easy and free to roll out new content and modifications.

Online training and resources are not a silver bullet, but they can make a significant positive impact. I encourage you to check out free resources available to you while also being open to potential costs. Financially investing in training is wise stewardship as it maximizes the effectiveness of participants and contributes to their spiritual growth as well.



Josiah Holland is co-founder and President of XPCulture.com—an online training and learning management system for short-term mission teams. As a missionary kid, he has been involved in missions all his life. Josiah is finishing his M.Ed. at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College where he has focused on adult learning in the context of training programs and specifically in online learning environments. If you have questions for Josiah or would like to learn more about XPCulture.com, you can contact him at josiah.holland@xpculture.com.