

What We Learned About Hybrid Learning from the Secret Society of Success

In the first season of the Secret Society of Success, our SVP of Strategic Accounts Tom Moriarty interviewed corporate learning changemakers about hybrid learning. Our goal was to find out how the industry defines hybrid learning and to share the secrets to using it successfully.

Tom sat down with five industry leaders: Ann Rollins from the Ken Blanchard Companies, Brian Washburn from Endurance Learning, JD Dillon from Axonify, author and expert Cindy Huggett, and Mary Glowacka from Preply. Each guest was invited based on their expertise in designing, facilitating, delivering, and managing learning and development.

While each episode focuses on a different angle of hybrid learning - when to use it, how to do it well, success stories, and why it is so prevalent now - there are a few universal themes that emerged from the season.

A rose by any other name...

Tom begins each episode asking the guest to define hybrid learning. It turns out that everyone uses the term a little bit differently.

For a few guests, hybrid learning is a catch-all term for any type of learning program that uses multiple delivery channels, such as in-person classes with elearning and microlearning elements. Others use “blended learning” for this type of learning. For these guests, “hybrid learning”



specifically means instructor-led training events that include both in-person and remote learners at the same time.

For the purposes of this blog post, we're going to use hybrid learning in the broadest sense, so read it as a synonym of blended learning.

Despite the changing terminology, all our guests spoke about blended and hybrid learning from the same

Context matters

In the chaos of 2020, almost every learning organization had to adapt hybrid learning or stop providing programs altogether. Both Ann Rollins and Mary Glowacka share stories of quickly converting learning programs as the pandemic forced learners to stay home. Now that most organizations have returned to in-person offices (or offered the option to their employees), corporate trainers have to decide what kind of delivery is right for their learning programs.



Brian Washburn breaks down a number of considerations for when to use a hybrid approach. One compelling reason is to make the most of your program budget. For example, he recommends using an instructor-led element to lead discussions on more complex topics that include gray area. Then, you can include simpler (and therefore, less costly) elearning modules to go over basic concepts.

Mary Glowacka shares the story of transforming her training program with virtual delivery in March 2020. One unsurprising outcome was that she could scale her content so much faster to an entire global audience of hundreds of thousands of employees. On top of that, using a hybrid delivery to in-person and remote learners at once allows more participants to get the same training from certified facilitators.

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Learners come first

Continuing on the theme of choosing when to use hybrid learning, our guests suggest that you keep the learner's experience front and center. For example, JD Dillon shares how Axonify uses hybrid learning to enable and retain frontline employees (anyone who is customer-facing, from retail workers to delivery drivers to nurses). Leveraging microlearning bursts instead of, or in addition to, traditional classroom training means that employees can fit learning into their daily routine, making it a faster and more seamless experience.

Ann Rollins shares how her team develops learner personas for each project before designing any training. By defining who the learners are, you can plan your training around when they show up at work, how much discretion they have over their own schedules, and what motivates them to engage with learning topics.

On a more granular level, Cindy Huggett advocates for prioritizing the remote learner's experience in a hybrid classroom. It is more natural for facilitators to speak to the in-person learners, yet making sure that the remote learner can see everyone, hear everything, and answer questions first helps keep them engaged throughout the experience.

Change requires change

All five of our guests have been in adult learning and development for at least a decade, which means they have seen plenty of changes within the industry. They agree that the shift to hybrid learning requires new skills for the facilitators leading training programs.

When Mary Glowacka's program required a fast-change to virtual delivery instead of in-person, she prioritized reskilling her facilitators to manage live, virtual classrooms. That is because they were trained to be subject matter experts, not to engage learners on a web-conferencing platform.

Cindy Huggett goes so far as to recommend prioritizing your budget for training your trainers. In her view, if your facilitators are comfortable with the technology and with techniques to manage learners, then they can figure out the rest of the hybrid learning puzzle.

Now is the time



Finally, our guests agree that the shift to hybrid work has opened up a unique opportunity for L&D transformation. The concept of blended or hybrid learning has been around for years, as has virtual training practices. In fact, Cindy Huggett shared that she has been consulting on virtual training design and delivery for twenty years. When workplaces were forced to go remote, however, it was the first time large-scale change was necessary.

From JD Dillon's perspective enabling training for organizations with large frontline employee populations, the first shift came when corporations realized they needed stronger communication channels to each and every employee. That means that more employees than ever have access to devices that enable digital training delivery like microlearning, elearning modules, or even resources like podcasts and videos.

Beyond that, many learning and development teams had to adapt or die. That goes for internal learning teams like Mary Glowacka's as well as learning providers like the Ken Blanchard Companies. While virtual training has been a topic at industry conferences for years, in 2020, nearly every training team was forced to transform.

That means that now is the time to make that transformation more impactful. Our guests agree that when leveraged well, hybrid learning creates better corporate training experiences. Now is the time to show your organization what you were able to do in the wake of 2020 and make an argument for long-term transformations that build on your achievements.

Listen to the podcast

Dive into hybrid learning with our five-episode season of the Secret Society of Success! The full season covers these key takeaways and more, including how to set up a DIY hybrid classroom, tips for virtual facilitation, and more ideas for what successful hybrid learning looks like. Listen online or on your favorite podcast distributor. <https://www.mimeo.com/secret-society-of-success-podcast/>

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