

Training

Environmental Consciousness

By Christopher Cornell/Training Columnist



Computer-based instruction is the most popular way to train employees, and while it's certainly efficient, there can be pitfalls and drawbacks.

Don Slivensky, founder and CEO of Chicago-based MicroTek Computer Labs, has been providing computer-based workforce training for more than two decades, and has picked up a number of great tips for creating the type of learning environment that makes instructors and students happy.

Some of his tips include:

- **Be up-to-date.** We've all been in this ironic situation: You're learning a new system, but you're learning it on computers or systems that are outdated. "These days," Slivensky says, "students taking software classes want rooms equipped with multiple T-1 lines, wireless Internet and high-speed e-mail workstations."

- **Comfort is king.** That training session can be a long day in an uncomfortable folding chair, or even a fairly decent chair from the local office-supply store. Slivensky says chairs are actually rated by the number of hours they are comfortable, and he recommends buying the best.

- **Be colorful.** Slivensky figured when he first started designing computer classrooms that neutral colors would be the best. He now recommends using purple, blue and even pumpkin to keep students from becoming lethargic.

- **Anticipate the afternoon sag.** In the middle of the afternoon, students start to sag. Slivensky has instituted a new policy at his training centers: They bake fresh chocolate-chip cookies every afternoon. He says the aroma perks up students, and the sugar gives them a jolt of energy that takes them through the rest of the day.

- **Feedback = Innovation.**

Slivensky's team is constantly surveying its instructors for ways to improve the training environment. One of the recent changes an instructor suggested was to have more white board space in the classroom for notes and drawings. The result: His classrooms are "wallpapered" with white paper so every bare surface is a white board.

According to Slivensky, "Experience has taught us that the classroom setting has a tremendous effect on the overall learning experience. The technology needs to be fast and reliable, the rooms need to be comfortable and little extras really do make a difference."

