Chapter VI
Are You Having Fun Yet?

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ABSTRACT

In K-12 videoconferencing, we can sometimes allow the pressures and challenges of our jobs to interfere with being able to enjoy our work. In this chapter, I have recounted some of my own personal experiences that show that it is quite possible to love your job and to find humor and enjoyment in each day. By making your enthusiasm obvious, combining a variety of different disciplines into programming and making the most out of "technical difficulties," you can become a more effective and believable content provider and learn to take real pleasure in creating a positive and unique experience for students through technology.

INTRODUCTION

In K-12 videoconferencing, we can sometimes allow the pressures and challenges of our jobs to interfere with being able to enjoy our work. In this chapter, I have recounted some of my own personal experiences that show that it is quite possible to love your job and to find humor and enjoyment in each day.

By making your enthusiasm obvious, combining a variety of different disciplines into programming, and making the most out of "technical difficulties", you can become a more effective and believable content provider, and learn to take real pleasure in creating a positive and unique experience for students through technology.

One morning, I was sitting in my supervisor's office, helping him to interview a candidate for a seasonal position within our education department. That person would be expected to help out with the variety of programs that we offer, from overnights to summer camp to distance learning. Most people who are coming in for interviews have never heard of distance learning, so they usually smile and nod as I describe the program, just like I did in my own interview seven years ago.

As is typical during most interviews that we conduct, we asked this woman why she thought she would enjoy working at the zoo, what her expectations were, and what she perceived her strengths to be. At the end of these conversations, my supervisor always gives the interviewee

an opportunity to ask any questions they might have of us. More often than not, the questions they pose to us have to do with pay scale (we are a non-profit organization) and what hours they would be working.

Today, however, our potential future colleague turned the tables and asked my supervisor and I why *we* do what we do, and what it is about our jobs that make us enjoy them so much. What a good question! Do you ever ask yourself that same question? Why *do* you like being involved in distance learning?

Is work fun for you? If people can watch you work and readily see that you are enjoying yourself, you are doing something right. Making your excitement obvious is a great way to transcend the technology and to remove the barrier of physical distance from your programs.

Though this observation is not groundbreaking news, sometimes we need a little reminder every once in a while as to why we are in our chosen profession. The best way to be good at what you do is to enjoy doing it, even when faced with the many challenges that life will undoubtedly throw at you. This is the story of one distance learning coordinator (me), and how I get through all the stress of my job and still manage to enjoy the work that I do.

MAIN THRUST OF CHAPTER

So, Why Do I Enjoy Distance Learning?

If you are at all like me, as a content provider you have probably been asked, "How much money do you make?" by an eager student, curious to know about career choices, understand the real world, or just be nosey about your personal life. Chances are that you have answered with the same response as I give: "I do this because I love it. I am not in it for the money." But what is there to love?

Most of us are involved in some form or fashion with education. We have committed ourselves to nurturing and enriching the lives of students of all ages, and we are dedicated to providing them with the life skills, experiences, and opportunities that they need to grow, thrive, and develop into our future. Yes, all of that…and we want them to have fun, too.

It is a scary thought for me, when I think about all that responsibility in terms of my work and me. I cannot possibly have such an impact on a student's life; I am just one person, I make mistakes, and I do not know everything. And yet, all of those fallibilities aside, it *is* possible to make a change, spark an interest, and guide these students, *even while being a total goofball*! It can be done. I am living proof.

One of the beautiful things about those of us who work with videoconferencing is that we have very few boundaries. What a gift, to work outside the confines of a classroom, and to have such a bounty of resources at our fingertips, just an ISDN call or an IP address away! You have merely to turn on your equipment and—voila! An expert on anything is right there, talking to your students, at the press of a button (and the occaisonal frantic phonce call to the help desk).

What makes those of us who brave the trenches of technology so unique is that we can reach out and extend our impact across state lines, across oceans, and across the world. We are forerunners in education, pioneers in the field, and savvy enough to find a successful blend of traditional and contemporary teaching methods.

As we continue to forge ahead in this technology-driven world, students are one-upping their instructors with their understanding of computers, machines, and gadgets. But we, as technology specialists, are speaking their language. I have received numerous comments from teachers who are thrilled that, because of a single videoconference, their students "finally get" an idea or a concept that had been previously covered in the classroom. Could it be that it is the technology

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