

One of the best signs of a well-functioning and managed team is its ability to adapt to sudden change.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced most TWC employees to rapidly convert to teleworking. For departments whose work relies heavily on face-to-face interaction with other employees, the new reality turned their work model upside down.

Training and Development (T&D) faced such a daunting and immediate task – how to rapidly and effectively move their in-person courses to on-line only presentations.

So, led by Rhonda Skillern, the T&D team went to work.

Between March 2020 and Aug. 31, 2021, T&D converted 73 of 92 courses, from half-day instruction to week-long Vocational Rehabilitation training. They rapidly mastered using Teams and Zoom for the presentations, quickly ironing out the bugs that come with using newer technologies, including putting their students new to the technologies at ease. T&D staff produced desk aids on using those interfaces and shared them with other departments.

During that time the classes included 9,684 participants, including new training needed for the 868 employees who volunteered to help with Unemployment Insurance, which was facing a sudden and massive increase in unemployment.

One of the less obvious challenges was constructing classes that would keep employees engaged through a screen and limit “Zoom fatigue” and contend with the distractions of employees juggling remote work while taking care of children who were learning remotely.

The platforms were sometimes unreliable and oft changing, forcing employees to be able to adjust and adapt on the fly. Developing classes that normally depended on interactive lab work was also a big challenge.

T&D was not only faced with moving its classes, but in developing new ones to educate employees on new procedures, including COVID 19, Managing

Remotely, Microsoft Teams, Mentoring in VR, New Managers' Road Map, NEO CBT, Resilience, and the Succession Planning Tool kit.

They did all this while balancing their abilities and limitations with the changing needs of their stakeholders through a pandemic that often had no end in sight.

As Rhonda Skillern describes it, "It was like running with the ground crumbling beneath us while we canceled and rescheduled classes, learned two virtual platforms that were themselves morphing, and converted our courses to fit the limitations of those platforms. We had to quickly figure out a whole new way to conduct business."

To say T&D checked every box on the list of what qualifies for a Star Award would be faint praise. Rhonda and her team did a thorough, masterful job at showing the entire agency how to react to such disruption and not only continue, but to improve and excel.

I am delighted to nominate the following T&D staff for the Star Award:

Daniel Castronovo

Luke Stollings

Pamela Brochhausen

Elisa Spry

Dana Flynn

Alicia McDonald

Jacki Everhart-Thompson

Tynna Dixon

Gordon Robison

Diane Saenz

Lynnell Welden

Tracey Barrientes

Diana Garza-Louis

Daniella Bocanegra

Jill Van Howe

Deb Aker

Monique Robertson

Matt Williams

Tracy Shaw

Rhonda Skillern

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Jerry White

Director of Human Resources