What is better, online training or in-person training? This is a question I receive often from managers, supervisors and staff. The answer is simple: It depends.

When planning training in an evolving technology-driven, fast-paced, need-it-now world, there are a number of factors to consider:

• Cost. Online courses tend to be less expensive than in-person courses, especially when factoring in travel or overnight expenses.

• Convenience. Online courses can be taken at any time beginning immediately, whereas in-person courses require more planning. An additional challenge can be trying to get staff members together at the same time.

• Quality. The quality of both online and in-person training can vary considerably. Most people have experienced poor training materials or instructors in either setting. To avoid poor quality training, get referrals from colleagues.

• Practical application. Hands-on training is generally better for learning a new task. Many people learn best by doing. Online courses often fall short in preparing people for physical tasks, but the industry has seen improvement in some interactive tools.

• Requirements. OSHA or other organizations often have specific requirements. For example, OSHA requires at least 8 hours of hands-on training in HazWOPER.

• Networking. In-person courses offer networking and support for the business. People can learn a lot from their peers. When issues arise, course participants can be leveraged to help in addition to the training company.

In researching which type of training is best, the authors found and were intrigued by John Wayne’s approach as exemplified in a video clip from the classic western Hondo. Clearly, Wayne’s character believes the best approach is hands-on training in which the trainee learns by doing.

When considering all of the factors presented here, the authors agree with Wayne, and where possible, recommend a hands-on approach to training in which learning is accomplished by doing.

DISCLAIMER: This article discusses the value of hands-on training. The authors are most definitely not suggesting, recommending or endorsing techniques such as, for example, throwing someone in a 10 ft unprotected trench in Type C soil to teach the principles of trench safety. That would be inappropriate, illegal and unethical.

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