When Technology Fails

The participants are gathering and you're still trying to get your equipment working. You smile confidently at people as they enter. As the minutes tick by, you don't have a clue what you're going to do. When it's time to begin, you face the group.

If this image breaks you into a sweat, fear no more. Here are some things you can do to prepare for and handle technical failures. The key is to prepare, decide and adapt.

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Prepare: Expect the unexpected.

- Make a backup
- Of slides on the hard drive, CD, jump drive, back-up computer, even on an (iPod)
- Of transparencies in hard copy for learners
- Print out your notes and any visuals for your self and/or for learners
- Test your equipment immediately prior to your session
- Have extra bulbs, batteries, equipment available
- Disable virusware or spyware before the session so that scans don't lock you up.
- Use a 'clean machine' with minimal software for presentations.
- Create a back-up plan for each phase of your session that relies on technology.
- Practice what you will do if technology fails.

Decide: When technology fails.

- Either allow a short time to fix things and resume, or
- Decide to move forward without the technology
- If the technology is the message (i.e. computer training) consider what back up materials would enable the learning to continue or what other content could be covered while technology is fixed.

Adapt: Demonstrate your professionalism.

- Apologize once then move on
- Rely on your skills as a trainer to adjust the learning method
- Whatever the decision, make it definitively and move forward with confidence
- Remember that much of what people learn they can learn without the use of technology
- Use the malfunction as an opportunity to innovate – try new methods, involve the learners, be creative.

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