

ONLINEBEST2BUYBES

Reviewed by Darin Hartley

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Product Name: Virtual Leader
Product Designers: Clark Aldrich, Pierre-Henri Thiault
Pricing: US\$499 per named user, with group discounts and academic pricing available
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Company Name: SimuLearn
Headquarters: Norwalk, Connecticut
Number of Employees: 12
Years in Business: 2
Target Market: Business and higher-education
Bestseller: Virtual Leader (off-the-shelf version)
In the Works: Call center and solutions sales versions of Virtual Leader
In the Details: The story of the development of Virtual Leader was the core of the book, *Simulations and the Future of Learning*.

The concept behind SimuLearn's Virtual Leader is a fascinating one: Put a leader inside a simulated work environment to practice the tenets of three-to-one leadership. But it's in the implementation of that concept that this program earns its marks. The manner in which Virtual Leader's computer-generated, 3-D employees talk, react, and display their support or disagreement is not only an impressive feat of design, but also an engaging approach to leadership training.

Computer simulations can be intimidating to first-time users, but SimuLearn has provided excellent background materials that bring learners up to speed quickly. There's also a well-written guide that describes the theories behind the content. All in all, Virtual Leader's production quality is superb, as is the value of its content.

With that said, SimuLearn hasn't forgotten to address the importance of proper feedback. After each portion of the simulation, the learner is given a summary of how he or she used the key tenets of three-to-one leadership to manage the expectations of the meeting.



Specific feedback throughout the course should aid in retention. But there's also plenty of indirect feedback through dialogue between characters.

Simulation-based learning will grow in its adoption and sophistication as the tools to produce it become more common. Virtual Leader offers a promising glimpse into this genre, and, if the courseware is used per the recommendations, it should provide the learner with opportunities to practice in a safe and fun environment. Although the offerings

from finalists ExperiencePoint and Harvard Business School Publishing are excellent products, it's SimuLearn's intriguing, innovative approach to leadership training that nudges it to the front of the pack.

SimuLearn's Virtual Leader (v1.2)
Best Online Training Product of 2003

American Society of Training and Development
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