

MIT Sloan Executive Education Blog

MIT Sloan Executive Education goes live online: A firsthand account from James Goodnow



James Goodnow is the CEO of Fennemore Craig, a leading Mountain West regional law firm of nearly 300 attorneys and professionals. Several months ago, James and his family planned a trip to Boston, so that he could attend two back-to-back MIT Sloan Executive Education programs on campus. Shortly thereafter, COVID-19 struck and, like everyone else, James found his plans rapidly changing.

"As the outbreak worsened and the dates drew closer, I received a notification from MIT that both courses I had enrolled in were pivoting to a live online format," says James. "The school asked participants if we would be

interested in attending live, online versions of the programs, utilizing Zoom. I was all in."

James had enrolled in [Communication and Persuasion in the Digital Age](#) and [Platform Strategy: Building and Thriving in a Vibrant Ecosystem](#). "Law firms are under-pressure from different types of companies, many of which use platforms to connect people," explains James. "With deregulation accelerating the pace of this change, I want to get out in front of it."

Despite working 18-hour days as he and his colleagues navigated the current crisis, James wanted to find time to continue his professional development, choosing essential courses that would ready him for the new world we're in. But with the new format, he wasn't sure that to expect.

"I was excited. Maybe a little skeptical. But I was more than happy to give it a shot." Upon entering his first Zoom classroom, he was pleasantly surprised.

"Communication and Persuasion in the Digital Age was first up, and it was actually the very first MIT Sloan Executive Education course to presented in this format, so several members of the MIT staff were on the line, observing. Honestly, I thought it was great! Much better than expected." James said the Zoom platform replicated the classroom experience well, providing ample give and take and enabling breakout sessions, where participants were divided into small groups for closer interaction.

"In some ways, the online experience was perhaps better than an in-person experience, in particular for this communication course, which I enrolled in specifically to become a better communicator online. I wanted to learn how to be more effective through, tech, Slack, email, and video conferencing. Having the course conducted online forced that issue and made the learning highly relevant."

James also noted other aspects of the format that worked particularly well. "For example, you can see everyone's face. You're able to read the room very effectively. We had immediate access to documents and materials that faculty could send through the chat box."

"Even in Platform Strategy, a substantively meaty program, equations were demonstrated using the blackboard feature, which worked great. On day two, one of the case studies we read involved an Excel calculation related to a pricing issues, and we were able to all go into Google Sheet, punch it in, see it live ... so even with more mathematical requirements the online platform worked well. Despite my initial skepticism, many of these features aided the collaboration significantly."

James said he enjoyed getting to know his program peers, and the online platform made that feasible. "On the second day of Platform Strategy, we all went around and talked about who we are and what we do, and we picked those threads back up in the breakout sessions. We bonded around the virus situation. The format was conducive to networking in ways I never thought possible."

As one might expect, there were some amusing events that added levity to the situation as well. "I moved around in my house depending what was going on. I probably changed settings at least three times in a day. Occasionally my son's head would pop into the screen. Everyone was in the same boat, because we're all at home with different people. Those sorts of interruptions are more acceptable now, in this new normal. I think the culture of the business world will forever be changed by this."

MIT Sloan Executive Education is currently working on transitioning several of our June program sessions to similar live, online formats. While we all very much look forward to getting to the other side of this crisis, there is a lot to learn and to be gained in the meantime. We're thrilled that participants like James were able to enjoy the Zoom format and make the most of that experience. We look forward to sharing more stories as we forge a new path for our participants and faculty. You can follow updates [here](#).

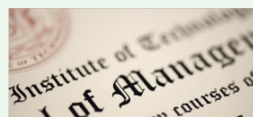
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