

Role Playing Success

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Role plays have consistently been rated by our volunteers as their favorite and most lucrative component of our training. We have developed numerous techniques to teach, model and isolate specific skill sets as well as evaluate volunteer's attitudes and beliefs through our role play process. In this presentation we will highlight the importance and implementation of these techniques and practices for others to take home and adapt to their own trainings.

Agora trains over 100 people every year with two to four trainings per year. Our trainings must be able to build the skills of a myriad of personalities and backgrounds within a pool of as many as 65 at a time. This is one of the reasons that although our models have the same basic philosophy, they vary in teaching style.

All of our techniques are built upon the idea that isolating a portion of each skill and then modeling and practicing that skill is the best way to learn. In this process all parts will interrelate and eventually become a natural way of speaking to callers on the phone.

Everyday conversation is not immediately adaptable to crisis phone work. In order to present a compassionate and understanding ear in such a way that empowers people to effectively clear their emotional distress and then create viable solutions we must deconstruct and reconstruct the methods with which we speak with clients. At Agora, as within many other centers, we have taken on the philosophy of drastically limiting self-disclosure, eliminating sharing personal experience and avoiding advice, judgment and opinions. When looking at everyday verbal communication one realizes that these techniques comprise the majority of normal contact with friends and family, the people that we are close with. Our models create methods that allow callers to feel tended to emotionally without having an actual relationship with our volunteers. This also provides an ethical standard because our volunteers are not counselors.

After deconstructing our normal conversations, we can begin to offer techniques that become a framework for empowering callers on our phones. Some of these techniques are abstract perspectives that offer a new way of looking at helping people. There are other techniques that we call "Call Mapping" that assist in a thorough comprehension of a person's feelings and history with the current topic and then later utilizing that information as a platform for problem solving and hypothetically testing solutions. Agora has developed scripts that can be performed or recorded so that learners can identify instances of self-disclosure and so forth within conversation and later avoid them. Later, we apply the topic specific role play scenarios that intricately put to the test not only the ability to listen attentively but also challenge the volunteer to avoid applying those now "old" ways of communicating. Our Role-Play Trainer and Mentoring programs allow for a great number of people to be supported and evaluated at every step of the way. Trainees also have a host of mock calls and topic specific instructional calls to have all these techniques further modeled for them.

All of these techniques will be explained or demonstrated in an organized "buffet" style so that they can be implemented individually or together. Plenty of handouts will be available for viewing and later by digital e-mail.