

A Different Approach to Learning

PACT Shows Drama-Based Training

BY LISA MARTIN

Pact Training has made drama a part of the training process and it was an experience I won't forget! They demonstrated drama-based training at ASTD's November meeting where the topic was, "Casting a Lifeline: Crisis Intervention in the Workplace." Rather than asking participants to listen to a lecture and see a PowerPoint presentation, the presenters simply began, literally, with an act.

I doubt there is a better way to drive home a point, than to challenge a person to apply something they just learned in terms of interpersonal communication skills to an actual workplace situation. Joyce St. George, Pact Training's Co-Director, did just that. Once the actor-trainers acted out the scenario, Joyce allowed the audience (ASTD members and guests) to give feedback on how the situation might have been handled differently. She allowed me to put in my two cents worth, and promptly challenged me to apply what I had just said by putting me in the forefront of their scenario, and let me tell you, they are good. I had to call upon skills I had not used in several months, and really apply what I knew as though this was a real situation. I never got the feeling that this was a role-play. Frank Canavan, the actor/trainer with whom I interacted, and Pact's other Co-Director, did an excellent job playing the role of a bereaved worker who was having difficulty coping in the workplace.

The roles played were; a recently-widowed office worker, who was clearly in crisis; a somewhat sympathetic supervisor, and a manager who didn't know what to do, or say, other than her job of establishing that the widower had missed a training seminar, and still needed to complete it. There were a lot of really good suggestions made by those in the audience, but I guess I was the one with "sucker" printed on my forehead (just kidding), as I was asked to join the scenario, and apply what I thought was appropriate for the situation. I had suggested that they could have acknowledged that the person was in crisis, to put one's self at an equal position (standing, sitting), and not to share war stories. A term used when someone tells about their crisis, or loss, in an effort to make the other person feel better, when in fact, that is not what is needed.

The goal of this program was to teach us "Crisis Intervention Skills" including; engage, establish calmness, empower, listen, focus and validate. All of these are important parts of crisis intervention, because when applied correctly, the person in crisis will likely become more

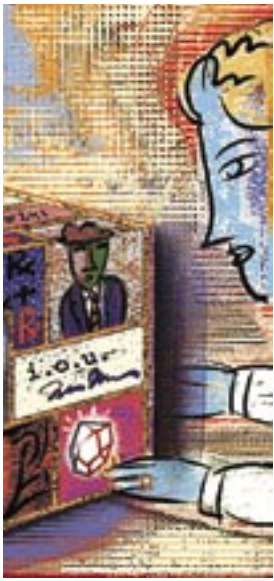
About Pact Training:

For over twenty years, Pact Training has combined the use of drama and facilitation techniques to



create a unique "living laboratory" for effective human dynamics training. Pact Training now conducts training programs in crisis and conflict management, leadership development, and train the trainer, to name a few. Pact's work has been featured in Training magazine and Training and Development Journal, as well as on National Public Radio's All Things Considered and CBS Radio's The Osgood Files.





grounded to the present, giving the person trying to help a chance to truly be of assistance to the one who is hurting. This is true whether the individual has experienced the death of a loved one, been the victim of a violent crime or been witness to other traumatic events (even the loss of a job can be quite traumatic as many in the audience had experienced). These type of experiences cause a greater than usual level of stress and often create strong reactions like uncontrolled crying, anger outbursts, headaches, changes in sleep patterns, dizziness, feeling like the victim has lost control, changes in eating habits, loss of interest in normal activities, to name just a few. If the helper can develop crisis intervention skills they can be of great service.

Many people don't know what to say to a person in crisis, so they say nothing. Sometimes that is all that is needed. You acknowledge that the person has a right to feel the way they do, and allow them to talk, without interruption. People in crisis often are not looking for others to fix things, or for others to provide the answers. Rather, they just want and need the opportunity to unload what has been building up, without being judged for how they feel. It is truly a gift to the person in crisis, and they may not even know it, but trust me, their renewed ability to function will be noticeable, and may even bring them to a new level of understanding their own experience.

When it comes to training, I am a huge advocate for teaching crisis intervention to anyone willing to develop a better understanding of not only their own experiences, but of how to help others as well. Creating a drama based training program on this, or any other interpersonal communication topic, is clearly an effective way to teach in today's busy world, where keeping one's attention on any single topic can be difficult to do. By allowing participants to have realistic, hands-on practice in utilizing the new skills they are learning, the outcome can only be good. Pact Training has done that. Pact's unique drama-based training approach immerses you into a life-like simulation that reflects real workplace challenges. Transcending typical role-playing techniques, Pact's unconventional training programs center around their structured improvisation training exercises. These exercises, staged by a team of skilled trainers, offer opportunities to practice real skills in a safe and controlled learning setting. Pact offers a variety of topics for their drama based training programs, including: fundamentals of leadership, managing conflict, leading a diverse workforce, customer service, change management, violence prevention, and, of course, crisis intervention. For more information about these programs, or about Pact Training, check out their website: www.pacttraining.com



Joyce St. George is founder and Co-Director of Pact Training. Ms. St. George was the first female anti-corruption Investigator for the NYS Special Prosecutor's Office.



Frank Canavan is founder and Co-Director of Pact Training. Mr. Canavan is Meyers-Briggs-certified and Board-certified by the American Society of Experts in Traumatic Stress.