

TIPS

Role-Plays

Whether you love or hate role-plays (or both!) here's why it works and some ideas for incorporating this tool into your work.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Role-play exercises can put people on the spot and make some people uncomfortable. Here are some ways to get your team started:

- have senior organizers lead by example. Go first. Be open to feedback;
- start with people role-playing something they are doing well by way of recognition;
- teach others to use role-play exercises as a way to help committee members be successful;
- just do it. Work it in little pieces. It doesn't have to be an agenda item;
- Make it a habit and something that is a part of every day or meeting; and
- use humor to defuse tension.

TACKLE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Identify common questions or difficult situations occurring on the campaign. Use role-plays to work through ideas and test approaches:

- focus only on the scenario or question;
- practice responses in rapid fire, with a time limit to prep;
- solicit feedback on responses; next person builds on the previous one; and
- brainstorm responses and have pairs practice in role-play.



Why it Works

- It's practice. People learning new skills need practice.
- Makes it real—what am I actually going to say?
- It's a safe place to make mistakes and discuss them.
- Gets people to think ahead about others' perspective and how to approach the task.
- Contributes to a campaign culture in which people are expected to practice, be open to feedback and learn from each other.
- Helps people succeed.

HOME VISITS

The No. 1 organizing tool is a good one-on-one conversation about what we care about and how to work together. Doing it well takes practice. Help others learn by:

- role-playing a full visit to practice moving through all the steps of the agenda;
- practicing individual pieces of the visit to improve comfort, correct language and practice natural transitions;
- discussing and practicing an approach to an obstacle as part of feedback;
- being opportunistic: practice in the car to warm up or to work on approaches; and
- being direct and open about feedback.

DIG DEEPER

To really understand what happened or why it matters, we need to get to the heart of the matter—in a one-on-one conversation or team debriefs. Here are some approaches to skills practice:

- focus narrowly on a topic, issue or dilemma;
- impose rules: cannot leave the topic until result is achieved, or stay on the topic for a defined period of time;
- have more than one person split the role of the organizer to brainstorm ideas; and
- if people have trouble, brainstorm questions to ask first, then let pairs practice pulling it off.

PREPARE FOR A MEETING

Meetings need clear objectives and a process to get people there. Walking through pieces of the agenda helps the team figure out what works:

- have part of the team represent perspectives of people coming to the meeting;
- test the actual questions you want to ask and assess whether they lead to the right conversation;
- role-play how to handle expected questions or problems; and
- do all the pieces fit together in the right order? Do we need more or less time for this part of the agenda?

Mix It Up

- A threesome allows one person to listen.
- Fishbowl gets a larger group involved in listening.
- Get detailed with a real-time role-play.
- In a larger group, use time limits, agenda steps or mistakes to hand off the role-play to others.
- Set a rule, like “you can only ask questions” or “don’t argue.”
- Videotape it for playback to the individual or group.

CHANGING HABITS

Whether it's poor eye contact or interrupting others, exaggeration, repetition and humor can help people succeed:

- practicing with a super loud voice helps soft-spoken people learn to project;
- a role-playing game where people are “punished” for interrupting or arguing can help mitigate those behaviors;
- setting exaggerated rules for a debrief or one-on-one role-play can make a difference: “You can only ask questions”; and
- Belting out a short rap over and over until it's second nature can help tentative members practice asking someone to sign a card.

Hyperbole

Using hyperbole in role-plays can be a fun way to force people out of their comfort zone and help them alter behavior.

Get quiet people to yell, talkative people to be silent and “know-it-alls” to ask questions.