

Customizing Training Materials

Customized training materials make a significant contribution to the value of the training offered. It is easy to do and produces materials that are engaging for the participants. Beyond motivating participant interest, it paves the way for needed conversations in that setting.

Using information gained from the pre-decision interview, as well as from the flip charts created during the “Where is There Conflict Among Us?” exercise during the three-hour introductory session, construct exercises that deal with the conflicts occurring in that setting. It may be helpful to have a few people review draft exercises to ensure their appropriateness. Word of mouth from your reviewers about the reality-based exercises often heightens interest in the training.

Possible places to customize the materials include:

- active listening practice
- assertive speech practice
- emotion management practice
- positions vs. interest practice
- reframing the problem in terms of interests
- clarifying the problem statement
- brainstorming solutions
- evaluating options
- determining the best solution
- putting it all together role plays and practice scenarios

In short, any aspect of the training can be made relevant to the group by using their own conflicts as the basis of the exercises. When using a highly sensitive scenario or conflict, invite people to play a role or take a perspective that is not their own, in reality. This facilitates empathy for others and keeps the emotional temperature in the room at a safe level.

On the following pages are a few examples of customized exercises. They are offered here to illustrate the concept.

I-messages

1. The meeting chair is your supervisor. You raised an issue with her before the meeting on which you hold very different views. You asked if you could have some time on the agenda to open a discussion on the matter with the entire group. She agrees. An hour passes. Your issue has not been raised. She looks around the group and says “Seems like we’re finished here. See you next time!”

IMAGINE: That YOU are the person requesting time on the agenda...

THINK: How are you feeling?

THINK:What behavior causes that feeling?

THINK:Why does that behavior cause that feeling?

SPEAK: Develop an I-message that explains your point of view in a way that the listener can understand.

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_____”

REFRAMING PROBLEMS

Teacher's Position

"I want my administrator to back me up with parents. I should be able to trust that my administrator is defending me to parents and assuring them that I am a professional doing a good job."

Administrator's Position

"I want to be fair and objective when a parent comes to me with a complaint about a teacher. I want parents to know that I care, I listen and I am willing to get involved to see a problem solved."

Identify Each Party's Position

Teacher's P.O.V.: "So, you want to know that your administrator has confidence in you and will defend you to parents."

Administrator's P.O.V.: "You want parents to see you as concerned, willing to hear all sides and helpful."

Clarify and Probe to Understand the Interests/Needs of All Parties

- Can you tell me more about why that is so important to you?
- How would you envision the ideal situation in response to a parent complaint?
- What is appealing about that vision?
- Can you help me to understand your objections to the _____'s vision of how parent complaints should be handled?

Reframe and Launder Information to focus on Interests/Needs

Teacher's P.O.V.: "I understand that it is important to you to have your administrator respond to parent complaints in a way that signals his confidence and trust in you. You also don't want to feel that you have to defend yourself to every parent complaint. Finally, you don't want parents and students to feel reinforced for being demanding or unreasonable, and dignifying every request or complaint encourages more of the same behavior. Did I accurately capture your interests in this?"

Administrator's P.O.V.: "You feel strongly about being accountable to parents and responsive to their needs and their children's needs. You don't want to be accused of 'closing ranks' when a problem is brought to you. Being fair is an important value to you and to be fair you need all the relevant information, so asking both parents and the teacher their side of the story is essential. Did I miss anything important?"

Restate Interests as a Joint Problem in the Form of a Question(s)

- How do we respond genuinely to parent concerns while communicating confidence and trust in our teachers?

Refocusing And Reframing Practice

Scenario #1

John is a high school drama teacher. He has one month to prepare this year's school play. He wants to have students released from academic classes for rehearsals. He has always been in charge of the production. Many students and teachers count on him to put on a quality performance each year.

Susan is a math teacher at the same high school. She does not want students to be pulled from her class for play rehearsals. At the end of the month her students have a big exam to take. She is under pressure to increase test scores. She feels that students need to review to do well on the test.

Step 1: underline each party's position.

Step 2: circle each party's interests

Step 3: Write a problem statement below that captures both parties' interests.

Scenario #2

Ms. Kaplan is the vice-principal at Grove Middle School. She has spent her entire professional life in this school. She has finally been given the go-ahead to build a private office for herself in the rear portion of a large classroom currently housing the computer lab. This will be the first private space she has ever had during her long career. She has already chosen a color scheme, picked out furniture and wall decorations.

Mr. Hernandez is the computer teacher and since his arrival three years ago, the program has received two prestigious awards in the district for innovation. He is very dedicated and protects his students interests. He does not want Ms. Kaplan to use the space in the rear of the room to construct a private office. He is worried that it will crowd the room, raise the temperature of the room from heat generated by the computers and make the room uncomfortable for the students. He's worried that students may not enjoy the lab as much if the space is cramped and as a result, the program will falter.

Step 1: underline each party's position.

Step 2: circle each party's interests

Step 3: Write a problem statement below that captures both parties' interests.
