

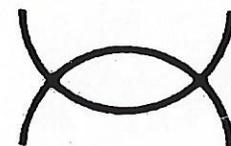
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# PSYCHODRAMA TRAINING TIPS

by

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## STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES

The Magic Shop. This useful warm-up technique or self presentation is an impromptu fantasy projection developed by Weiner. It is often used with slow groups because it seems to be a lot of fun. It is actually a valuable diagnostic projective tool. A shop keeper is selected. Since being a shop keeper takes considerable therapeutic skill he is often one of the trained therapeutic assistants or one of the directors. The person selected to be shop keeper uses ingenuity and creativeness in setting up the shop and giving it a place. He tells the group that his shop does not deal with tangible items but his shelves are stocked with dreams, desires, and values that can be exchanged for intangible traits possessed by the shopper. The customers will come seeking such things as courage, peace of mind, and the ability to contact feelings. Since the shop keeper needs to replenish his stock his customers are asked to give something in return for each item received.

The shop keeper must be an illusionist who can keep the fantasy going, maintain the action, and keep the customer involved. If he has a good grasp of trait systems and personality dynamics, so much the better. He wants to keep the scene interesting as well as informative. He can be helpful and suggestive but must create a real problem situation for the protagonist. He will be dealing with all kinds of customers and wants them to leave feeling not only that they have really received something, but that it was a fair bargain. Clients who are particularly dysphoric may not be able to come up with anything that is good about themselves to exchange for something they want. And some of the more depressed types might not even permit themselves to desire anything. If the protagonist is known by members of the group, the shop keeper can go to

them for some suggestions as to what the protagonist can exchange. The shop keeper must bear in mind that the trade or value given in exchange will become part of his merchandise. He will therefore only accept something that he can later use to barter. But bear in mind that what might be a liability for one person could be an asset for somebody else. Thus an over aggressive person, that is, someone whose aggression has become self defeating, may very well give some of his aggressions to the shop keeper in exchange for something more suitable to his own personal growth. For the fun of it, and to make the experience more vivid, some shop keepers put the abstract traits or value in concrete form. For example, "This calmness that I am giving you is in the form of a hand cream; anytime you are in a situation where you feel you ought to be more calm than usual just rub a little of this on your hands or wrist." If the shop keeper is able to engage his customer intensely so that he becomes completely absorbed in the activity of bartering, there will be a "willing suspension of disbelief" that is hypnotic. The protagonist will leave the acting area fully convinced that he possesses his new trait or value. The experience should have been so vivid that he will not soon forget what he has acquired.

The training that our therapeutic assistants receive in improvisational theatre and method acting gives them the kind of skills necessary to play a convincing role as the shop keeper. Before the customer is allowed to leave the shop, the transaction should be reviewed with them by the shop keeper so that both he and the audience know exactly what he has received and what he has given in return. Some shop keepers will have a member of the group come up to be a pair of scales. The person playing the scales extends his arms out horizontally with his hands out palms up. He becomes judge of the relative weights of the commodities

being exchanged. Thus, if the shop keeper swaps a six months supply of gymnastic talent (in the form of something that is rubbed into the skin like ben-gay) for 5% of the customers wisdom, than the shop keeper would put each of the commodities on one or the other sides of the scale. If they balance out, the exchange can be made. If not, something must be added to one or the other sides of the scale.

The exercise can be extended by having the protagonist role play a situation in which he will put to use what he has acquired. This could be done by the shop keeper explaining that they are doing a study in quality control with their merchandise and want to see that it really works. Or the customer can be met coming out of the shop by another auxiliary who engages the customer in a dialogue that leads him into a role playing scene. For example if a customer has received "the ability to be comfortable in groups" he might be directed in setting up a future projection where he finds himself in a kind of group that he would most likely encounter in his real life experiences. Without even mentioning it the point is made that a talent or traded value is more exciting when it is used than when it only lies dormant.

Gift Exchange. This exercise gives each member an opportunity to give other members of the group a gift. The gifts are to symbolize intangibles. The gifts take any shape the imagination can form. It is amazing and gratifying how perceptive and helpful a group can be in knowing the important needs of its members. Receiving the gift can be a profound emotional experience. The recipient may be pleased that some one could read him so well and find gratification at the acknowledgment of his needs. He may appreciate the creativity and appropriateness that has gone into making the gift. The gift may be a simple acknowledgment such as

"This is a bottle of thick, sweet smelling lotion; when you spread it anywhere on your body it will help you to continue to be able to receive love just as you have been able to do this weekend." The thought behind the gift can go from the ridiculous to the sublime. Sometimes the gift can be a not too subtle hint for the recipient to change his style, as for example the time when a lady who had given her husband breakfast in bed for 25 years was herself given a breakfast tray with the suggestion that she might try a "role reversal" from time to time. The gift exchange is fitting for a close-out or re-entry session at the end of a personal growth or training weekend. It helps to tie some of the loose ends together and guarantees that some of the needs that have been expressed directly or indirectly can be at least acknowledged if not entirely fulfilled. It underscores the notion that many of life's transactions have to do with giving and receiving. The gift metaphors are easily recalled and serve as a lasting reminder of the group experience and of the unfinished business of personal growth. As with all creative transactions it does as much for those who give as for those who receive.