



My View

HOW TIP VOLUNTEERS CAN DO WHAT THEY DO

A common question TIP speakers are asked when they are presenting TIP is *"How does TIP take care of it's volunteers after they respond to horrific situations?"* Another question that friends and family members of TIP volunteers frequently ask the TIP volunteers they know: *"How in the world do you do it?"* Behind these questions is an appreciation of the awful events TIP Volunteers respond to and a concern for their psychological health.

While it is true that responding to tragic situations has the potential of adversely affecting TIP Volunteers, it is rare for a volunteer to experience adverse affects after a TIP call for any length of time. Why is this? How can volunteers go into emotionally fiery situations and come out unscathed?

The fact is that regardless of how tragic the situation, TIP calls usually have a positive impact on the TIP Volunteers who respond to them. These positive experiences are real and powerful, and they protect volunteers from suffering permanent psychological harm.

These positive experiences are expressed by volunteers in a variety of ways including: *"It was a privilege being there with that family"; "I learned a lot"; "I feel like I made a difference"; "The strength showed by the family was incredible"; "I'll never forget how people helped each other"; " I have a heightened appreciation of life and for those in my life".*

While tragic situations are indeed dark and filled with sadness and grief, they often contain moments of human resilience, love, graciousness and wisdom. TIP Volunteers experience both the pain AND the strength contained in these situations.

While I think we need to recognize the toll that responding to tragedy can have on TIP Volunteers, I believe we also need to recognize and communicate to others the positive impact that responding to help survivors of tragedy has on our volunteers.

We can recognize and communicate these positive impacts in the following four ways....

- During debriefings and call sharing we can encourage volunteers to share aspects of their calls that were uplifting and when they were touched by the strength of those they helped.
- We can encourage TIP Volunteers (especially veterans) to share what has given them the strength to respond to TIP calls again and again.
- When we are asked the questions like the ones mentioned above (*"How do TIP volunteers do it?"*) we should be ready and capable of communicating the positive impacts TIP calls have on TIP Volunteers.
- When trying to recruit local residents to be TIP Volunteers, we should communicate very clearly the positive effect helping survivors of tragedy has on TIP Volunteers.

Most people looking from the outside at TIP and what TIP Volunteers do see only the horrific situations they go into and conclude *"I can't do that."* It is our responsibility to communicate how TIP Volunteers get more out of helping survivors than they give.

Wayne would like to hear your thoughts.
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