



My View

HELPING BY DOING LITTLE

Recently, I read a statement by a TIP Volunteer about her TIP experience: “*Sometimes it is best to do as little as possible while doing what needs to be done.*” I love this quote because it sums up in one sentence TIP’s philosophy of helping.

The second part of the quote “*doing all that needs to be done*” ...is central to helping others in crisis. As we say in TIP: “*Meet the needs of your client.*” This approach is straightforward and is readily understood and accepted by our volunteers.

However, the first part of the quote... “*sometimes it is best to do as LITTLE as possible*” ...is counterintuitive and can leave us scratching our heads. After all, isn’t the way to help others to do as MUCH as possible for them?

In fact, our 30 years of experience helping survivors of tragedy has taught us that “*doing little*” is an essential aspect of being effective helpers. I think that the biggest belief our TIP Volunteers and all helpers need to unlearn...over and over again...is the misconception that we need to do as much as we possibly can for the people we want to help. And the biggest tendency helpers need to keep in check is the tendency to “over care”.

We began learning the lesson about “*doing little*” in the early days of TIP when we started reading “thank you” letters from clients. In almost all of these letters, what clients said they appreciated was our “*being there*”. Rarely would clients express their appreciation about what volunteers did. Also, in client letters we have received over the years another phrase stands out: “*Your volunteer was helpful, but not intrusive.*” It is clear from these letters that our clients want us to be with them but don’t want us to take over their lives, as damaged as their lives may seem at the time.

What does “*doing little*” when helping others mean concretely? It means that helpers need to ...

- Do more listening than talking.
- Be Silent.
- Let clients do as much for themselves as they can.
- Give clients privacy and not intrude.

.... Not impose the helper's own ideas, values and beliefs on clients.

While “*doing as little as possible*” when helping survivors of tragedy may seem easy, it's very difficult to practice. We live in a culture where we are bombarded with a “more is better” message: earn more, achieve more, buy more...

In short, our major challenge when we are called upon to help those in crisis is to resist our desire to do everything we can to make things better, and to simply be there and do as little as possible.

Wayne would like to hear your thoughts.
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