

MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



U OF TIP

I sometimes refer to our organization as the University of TIP to make a point... we are in the knowledge business. Our value to the community is based on the knowledge we have about survivors of tragedy, about how to communicate with them and about community resources that can help them. Unlike many organizations our mission is not to make, sell and improve products but to seek and utilize the best the knowledge available to help our clients. Knowledge is our primary tool for fulfilling our mission. We are only as good as the knowledge we possess and utilize.

Obtaining knowledge to fulfill our mission is an ongoing process. We never “arrive.” We can always learn more about the helping relationship based on our experiences in the field, and we constantly need to update our knowledge of community resources. So, the questions for us as individual TIP members and as leaders is: *“How do we continually increase our knowledge so that we become better and better volunteers and leaders?”* *“How do we ensure that we have the latest knowledge about survivors of tragedy and how to help them?”* Following are my ideas about how we can fulfill our obligation to be a center of learning... to be the U of TIP.

The responsibility for ongoing learning is both the responsibility of individual TIP volunteers as well as the responsibility of the leaders of our organization. The responsibility of individual TIP volunteers is threefold...

1. To learn from every TIP call by asking... *“What did I learn?”* ... *“What worked?”* ... *“What didn’t work?”*
2. To attend the continuing education meetings to learn from the experience of others.
3. To share their learning and mistakes with others in the organization at every opportunity.

The responsibility of TIP Leaders is to put a process in place which encourages volunteers to learn from their experience, from their mistakes and from each other. I suggest affiliates consider the following 3 components of an ongoing learning system...

1. **DEVELOP A LEARNING CULTURE:** TIP leaders must have a strong belief in the importance of continuous learning. That strong belief needs to be communicated to volunteers on a regular basis. Following are examples of messages leaders can communicate to volunteers to foster a learning culture include...
 - If we are not learning, we are not serving.

- The continuing education meeting is mandatory because that's where valuable TIP learning about helping our clients takes place.
- We all make mistakes. We need to learn from our mistakes and share this learning with others.
- Being a volunteer is one big learning experience.
- You can learn something from every TIP call.
- Your growth as a TIP volunteer is an ongoing process and doesn't end with graduation from the volunteer academy.

TIP Leaders can also develop a learning culture by prompting volunteers to report learning on TIP Call reports and by training debriefers to focus each volunteer's attention on *"What did you learn?"* Volunteers should come to expect that they will be asked after every TIP call by a TIP leader and/or a debriefer... *"What did you learn?"*

2. **SHARE:** Knowledge that is not shared has limited value to an organization. Affiliates need a process which enables learning obtained by individual volunteers to be shared with all volunteers. Also TIP National needs a process which enables lessons learned by individual leaders to be shared with all leaders. This sharing process might include...

- Call sharing at the continuing education meeting focused on learning (vs storytelling).
- TIP Refresher Courses.
- Periodic "Learning Updates" sent from leaders to all volunteers.
- Mentor programs where veteran volunteers share their knowledge with new volunteers.
- An Annual Meeting where leaders share "What works" with each other.

3. **DOCUMENT:** Lessons learned come from a variety of sources in an affiliate... call reports, debriefings, and call sharing at continuing education meetings. A system for managing this information should be established. Perhaps leaders can assign one person in their affiliate to be responsible for identifying "new learning" and then documenting that learning for future use.

There is a danger in a busy volunteer organization for volunteers and their leaders to fall into the DO... DO... DO... trap. In TIP's case, the DO... DO... DO... trap involves volunteers responding to one call after another, and leaders tracking these calls with no documentation of lessons learned. This "doing and tracking" is very important and it's one metric of an affiliate's success. But it's not enough. On a regular basis volunteers and leaders need to ask not only *"What did we DO this month/year?"* but also... *"What did we LEARN this month/year?"*

In short, we are all working to make TIP an excellent organization. To become excellent, we need a team of knowledgeable volunteers who utilize the many lessons that they and their peers learn in the field, and we need a team of leaders who learn best leadership practices from each other. Developing knowledgeable volunteers and leaders doesn't "just happen." We need a robust system which promotes a culture of learning; which encourages the sharing of knowledge within and across affiliates; and which captures and preserves this learning so it can be passed on to future volunteers and leaders.